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HIGH PRIEST CROWLEY
AND HIS
FORBIDDEN CULT OF THE DAMNED.

According to British and American newspapers, he was "the wickedest man who ever lived." Considering what went on in his secret abbey, that wasn't even the half of it.

The last few threads gave way, and the rope snapped. Suddenly five men, one Britisher and four native porters, were cut off from the rest of the party climbing Kanchenjunga, second highest mountain of the Himalayas, third highest in the world.

A gust of wind tore between the rocks and pressed the five men. The porters dug their toes into the ice-covered slopes and clawed at the sides of the mountain. The Englishman hurled his iceax ahead in a desperate attempt to reach a point he could brace against. Instead of sinking into the mountainside, the ax flew over the edge of the ridge. Just at that moment the wind grew stronger. With his arm outstretched, he was cast over the side, dragging the four porters with him. They tumbled through space, landing on a bed of snow hundreds of feet below.

Meanwhile, on a sheltered ledge, the leader of the expedition, a dark, bearded Englishman, stood surrounded by a cluster of excited Europeans and chattering natives. One of the Europeans cried out, "They've fallen on snow; they may be still alive. We've got to go down and help!"

A smile began to form on the leader's face. Slowly, calmly, he asked, "Do we?"

"By God, man, those are five human beings. We *must* try to save them."

The leader's dark eyes blazed beneath his fur cap.

"Why must we? They might be dead. If we go to help them, we lose valuable time and may never reach the top. And suppose they are alive? What did he do to help me, complain that I hadn't bought proper boots for the porters? I'm leader, and my orders are to go ahead."

They did, although they never made the summit. And the five men they left behind perished.

The leader's name was Aleister Crowley, and the peculiar combination of selfishness and cruelty shown in this episode later earned him the title Wickedest Man in the World.

Even in the m'20s, when everybody and his aunt played at wild, wicked living, Crowley stood out. English and American newspapers accused him of murder, swindling, sex orgies, drug addiction, black magic—and much more. Headlines blazed: "Man We'd Like to Hang," "Cannibal at Large," "King of Depravity," "Do-Whatever-You-Want-Religion Reveals Wicked Rituals Carried on by its High Priest and his Worshipers."

Fighting against these charges in a still-remembered libel trial, Crowley defended himself as the founder of a new religion, Crowleyanity, that aimed to free its followers from domination by the senses. Its creed: "Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law."

It was, he claimed, his misfortune to be surrounded by unfortunates. After meeting him, his male followers lost their money, jobs and lives. Both his wives died in insane asylums. Most of his other women later took to the streets or killed themselves.

Against this awesome picture of broken lives, Crowley's background seemed pale. A Cambridge honor graduate, he had inherited a 40,000-pound fortune which yielded a comfortable income. A poet, his hobbies were rock-climbing and chess.

Crowley's parents, originally Quakers, had joined the fanatical Plymouth Brethren whose strict Puritanism made the Quakers look like abandoned debauchees. Members were urged to search out their minds and hearts for the slightest trace of sin. Being human, they usually found it. Being zealots, they usually found even more in the minds and hearts of others.

Lively-minded Aleister had the misfortune to be the only son of these overpious parents. All the don'ts morally spread out over several children were concentrated on this unusually bright but rebellious lad.

"Stop slumping!"

"Don't eat more than two cakes at tea!"

"Don't you dare play with the Wormly boy!"

And so it went through the day, when he was watched. But some days he was left alone.

One afternoon in the dimly lighted kitchen, nine-year-old Aleister set a saucer of milk on the floor and called softly, "Here, kitty, kitty!"

A slim, ginger-colored cat came out of the shadows, dived for the milk, lapped up a few drops, then gurgled and fell over in a dead heap. Immediately the boy leaped over to the dead cat and, with precocious efficiency, chloroformed it, hanged it above the gas jet, stabbed it, cut its throat, smashed its skull and, when it was thoroughly scorched, drowned it and threw it out the window. He had used nine different methods of killing the cat—one for each of its proverbial nine lives.

After the cat-killing, his Bible-reading mother decided that he was the Beast of Revelation. "You nasty little whelp," she screamed. "You're the Beast come to try me."

Little Aleister chortled happily, "I am. I am." Christian ethics had made him miserable. Why not join forces with the Devil?

As early as possible the Crowleys sent him off to a boarding school run by the Plymouth Brethren. He left only a year later, after being beaten publicly for his "attempt to corrupt another boy."

Next he was sent to two leading public schools, where he was scarcely more acceptable than he had been to the Plymouth Brethren. In the public school tradition, the older, larger boys exacted humiliating services from the younger, smaller students. Meanwhile the normal rules for popularity prevailed; a boy needed humor, friendliness and skill at games. Crowley was sarcastic, aloof and unathletic.

Teased by his elders, shunned by his equals and punished by the authorities, Crowley went to pieces; "his health broke," He was taken out of regular classes and given a tutor, who helped him obtain a remarkable knowledge of languages, mathematics and philosophy. This gentleman, no ivory-tower intellectual, also taught 14-year-old Aleister the delights of cards, cigars, wine and women.

Crowley entered Cambridge in the Gay Nineties. Proper young men from proper families tried to outdo one another in impropriety. Standard stunts included taking bells from the belfry, smuggling an actress into one's rooms, or at least draping a pair of frilly panties among the meerschaums and sherry glasses.

Among these self-conscious do-badders Crowley was a master. Most of his fellow students crammed their timid sexual experiments into week ends and holidays; Crowley made sex part of his daily life. If forced to spend 48 hours without a woman, he couldn't sleep, his appetite flagged.

Although he believed that "women should be brought round to the back door with the milk," he had an extraordinary power

over them. Some lay it all to his sex-appeal ointment, an unsavory mixture of one part ambergris, two parts musk and three parts civet. Others say it was hypnotism. No one knows for sure, but all witnesses agree that women seemed to enjoy his painful Serpent's Kiss. When introduced to a woman he took her hand, bent over and sank his sharpened teeth into her wrist until the blood gushed out.

Crowley's peculiar charm hit women of every class with equal effect. One day, he set out for a stroll in the West End. Pipe in hand, he paused for a second outside London's most exclusive food shop, Fortnum & Mason's. Though he prided himself on being a gourmet, he was attracted not by the mounds of hothouse fruit, but by another shopper. She stood, pencil in hand, ticking off items on a marketing list. Masses of red hair were piled on her head in the current fashion. Her curved, thimble-waisted figure was tightly encased in vivid greed satin. When she looked up, long silky lashes revealed large brown eyes.

She caught site of Crowley dressed like a country gentleman, tweeds, flannels, cane. Years of English training and restraint dropped away in seconds.

"It's so difficult trusting Cook to order everything for the family. I have to take care of the provisions myself."

Crowley fixed his dark eyes on hers, then smiled and swept off his hat. "It's hard to believe that such a young woman has a family to look after."

She colored and smiled. "Thank you. I've quite a family, my husband's a barrister, and we have two wonderful children. Derek is four and Pamela is six."

Her husband was one of London's leading lawyers. Society papers mentioned her name frequently in connection with different charities. Her reputation was above reproach.

"Let me introduce myself: I am Aleister Crowley. You may have seen my poetry. Or heard of my mountaineering. But my real work, madam, my real work, that would appeal to you. I am trying to find a new faith, one that would help us transcend the ordinary, gray, everyday world to a universe of deeper, richer experience."

The redhead's hand reached out and grabbed his. "Oh, tell me, tell me!"

"I'd love to, madam. Will you be my guest at tea?"

And off they went to his hotel, one of the grimmest in England. Once in his rooms, they sat on the sofa and had tea. Fixing his eyes on hers, he talked and talked of his new religion, explaining how giving in to the senses refined the spirit.

He drew constantly closer as he talked and finally grabbed her arms and pulled her soft, satin-clad body to his. He bit her neck, then her mouth before he kissed her. She pulled back and knocked the tea tray off the table. The teapot rolled over the carpet. No one picked it up.

After seven days of almost solid love-making Crowley was sated and, without a word, dressed and left the rooms. They never saw each other again, but he had made an indelible mark on her life. Her husband divorced her. She lost custody of the children, and polite society never heard of her again.

Actually, Crowley's concern was less with women than with sex in its more corrupt forms. Determined to enjoy every kind of experience with man, woman and beast, he fancied himself a hermaphrodite, pointing to his masculine body and feminine hands as proof of his bisexuality.

Perhaps because he saw all things human within himself, he took different names. As a boy he had changed Edward Alexander to Aleister. In 1895 he took a London flat as Count Vladmir Svaroff. Later he became Brother Perdurabo, Prince Chio Khan, Baphomet and Fo-Hi, but none fitted so well as his mother's choice, the Beast. During a freewheeling holiday in Stockholm, 20-year-old Aleister saw that his mother had been right and took the name for himself.

Ambition flowed in other directions besides sex. He developed into a superb chess player. On one occasion he competed in two games while wooing a woman by casting her horoscope. With no apparent effort he won all three.

Like many another Cambridge man, he wrote verse; unlike many others'; his work was published. In 1906 a three-volume anthology appeared. In the preface he said, "In response to a widespread lack of interest in my writings I have consented to publish a small and unrepresentative selection from the same."

Although he had composed 50 poems to the Virgin Mary, the rest of his work was less religious. In fact, it is surprising that many of his verses found their way into print in an England still dominated by Victorian ideas of propriety.

Again like many other students, he was interested in magic. He steeped himself in cabalistic and Rosicrucian lore and studied a Chinese system of divination. He claimed to be able to foretell the day many of his associates would die. He studied the religions of other times and places, and was fascinated by the ancient Greek and Egyptian faiths.

When graduation rolled around, Crowley entered the big world of magic. But the way to the top is always hard—

especially in black magic. Just as Harvard men now build hi-fi sets, Cambridge men in the Nineties dabbled in occult "Science." There was a lot of competition.

Secret societies sprang up like weeds. Members sought to reach the "spirit world." But Crowley was not interested in mere spiritual truth. He sought control over the visible world by invisible means—unlimited power and complete freedom from restrictions.

Crowley served his apprenticeship in the Golden Dawn, a society whose members included the famous poet W. B. Yeats. His teacher, Allan Bennett, introduced him to yoga and drugs before turning to Buddhism himself.

Chafing at being less than top dog, Crowley used the black magic techniques he had learned to found his own society. Years later his eminence in sorcery won a certain recognition; he became British head of the Oriental Templars, an organization that was rumored to have included perverted sex acts among its rites.

Crowley's headquarters for magic activity was his London apartment. Equipped with two "temples," one white and one black, it featured a skeleton Crowley "fed" from time to time with blood, small birds and the like to "give it life." At a low altar in front of the skeleton Crowley chanted prayers to the gods of the East asking for supernatural powers.

Apparently the gods were kind. For, while guests could give only sketchy accounts of the ceremonies, they spread all over town the ominous details of what took place after Crowley put a curse on the premises and moved to Paris.

One of the workmen sent to paint the flat for the next tenant fell off his ladder and broke his arm. Visitors, not informed of the curse on the flat, complained of feeling dizzy and faint even before they entered. A cat that wandered into the place circled around madly three times, streaked out and never regained its former mild disposition.

Shortly after these incidents the Golden Dawn Society took him to court for trying to invade its temple. The legal results were inconclusive, but stories of the suit landed in the newspapers. Crowley had caught the public's eye.

With Europe temporarily too hot for him, Crowley headed for Mexico where he added a new touch to mountaineering by sprinting up Popocatepetl, sustained by such hardy fare as canned fruit and champagne.

Then he decided to settle in Scotland and bought a house in Boleskine. Since the deed included a few acres of land, he as-

sumed the honorary title of laird, added a crest to his stationary and ennobled himself, becoming Sir Aleister Crowley.

Boleskine was a typical Highland village. Cozy two-family houses gave way to a sprinkle of thatched cottages at the outskirts. Townspeople worked in nearby Inverness. When they cycled home at night it was for the joys of hearth and pub. Both were shut down tight at 10:30. Really sober citizens took their last cup of tea an hour earlier.

Crowley recruited housekeeper and coachman from the locals. A tight-lipped 50-year-old spinster, the housekeeper talked only to answer questions. No one had ever seen any incident turn a hair on her tightly coiffed head. The villagers knew the round, burly coachman as the teetotaling father of three.

With trunks in from London and staff in from the village, Crowley set up house. Lights burned in the attic at all hours, and thick curls of smoke poured from the chimneys when decent folk were in bed. Cats wandering around the grounds seemed to disappear and bloodstained rags were taken out with the trash.

One day a strangely dressed woman drew up in a carriage. She was greasy-haired, wore long earrings and heavy make-up. Her luggage bore foreign labels. The housekeeper soon spread the word that she was a clairvoyant Crowley had brought up from London for sorcery, secretarial and sex duties.

The housekeeper had been forbidden to enter the attic, but this naturally aroused her curiosity. She crept up the stairs one afternoon while Crowley and his exhausted companion were sleeping off their duties. No one knows exactly what she found, but the formerly prim, stiffly unruffled lady fled the house, leaving her belongings behind, and begged her sister to take her in.

People did hear that Crowley had set up an enormous laboratory, boasting that he would use modern scientific methods to solve an age-old problem—the creation of life. Specifically he intended to form homunculi (little men), lumps of human flesh with no will of their own which were described by the occultists of the Dark Ages. Their creator supposedly could turn them out with green flesh, three arms or in any form he liked, and they were his slaves to order about.

Shortly after the housekeeper left, the coachman reeled home one day, began a three-day binge and cuffed his surprised wife and children. Eventually his drinking became so heavy that he suffered from delirium tremens (pink-elephant complaint).

Finally Crowley's greasy-haired companion lit out for London, where she took up prostitution, largely because this line of work paid better than clairvoyance and helped to support the drug habit she had picked up from Crowley. By this time he was spending hundreds a week on hashish, veronal and every other narcotic he could get.

Having startled Boleskine out of its proper skin. Crowley forms the Kanchenjunga expedition. Members complained that he beat the porters, but admired his bravery. When the porters refused to cross a frightening glacier with a yawning precipice at the bottom, he stepped forward and said, "Here, everybody wait. I'll show how it's done."

Untying the rope which bound him to the other members of the party, he threw himself down on the glacier and rolled down like a king-sized top, stopping just a foot short of the precipice. The porters, much impressed, carried on.

Then came the incident where five members of the expedition were killed. On his return to Darjeeling, Crowley cabled a long and inaccurate account to the London *Daily Mail*, explaining that with "a properly equipped and disciplines" group he hoped to try again and reach the summit.

Next, Crowley set out for the Arab countries. His traveling companion was the poet Victor Neuberg. Eventually the two hit the desert. Smack in the middle of nowhere, at midnight, Crowley drew three concentric magic circles and announced that a near-miracle would happen. First he sacrificed a few white doves he had handy. Then he commanded the shivering little poet to enter the magic area. At that very moment, Neuberg claimed, Crowley materialized a spirit from the dove's blood. Lively as the old master himself, the spirit grabbed Neuberg by the throat. A struggle broke out and both rolled in the desert sand. Back and forth they went with the spirit's hands pressing harder and harder on Neuberg's throat. Desperately Neuberg reached for the knife Crowley had given him, and in a flash the spirit disappeared. For the rest of his life Neuberg regarded Crowley with a mixture of awe and dread.

Back in Scotland, Crowley embarked on another adventure. At the age of 31, without a trade, home, reputation or the will-power to break the drug habit, Aleister Crowley got married.

The bride was Rose Kelly, sister of the painter Gerald Kelly who later was to become president of the Royal Academy. A cover-girl-type widow, Rose was a shapely brunette with sparkling eyes and sparkling ways. But Crowley married her to get her out of a spot.

While engaged to a South African who had gone home to make his fortune, Rose had become the fiancée of an American who returned to the States to get his father's consent. Now both men were back in England anxious to marry her, What should she do?

Crowley came up with an answer. "Why not marry me?" The logic of this solution apparently impressed Rose, for within a short time the two were married. It was then that Crowley fell in love. Within three weeks he was completely obsessed by her, and she by him.

They honeymooned in Europe and the Near East. When they arrived in Egypt, Crowley persuaded Rose to spend a night in the Great Pyramid.

It was chilly and damp. The silence of the desert was broken only by the sound of lizards scurrying over the ancient tomb. Three stubby candles served as the only light. Aleister Crowley, dressed in flowing robes, raised his arms and invoked the gods of ancient Egypt. His prayers went on most of the night. Impressionable, romantic Rose, caught between terror and admiration, received a sudden flash of inspiration: obviously Crowley was the sun-god Horus.

This kind of insight enchanted Crowley, and during their honeymoon he hardly ever beat her.

To his delight, Rose announced a new Beast was on the way. The happy couple headed back to Scotland to await the delivery. For Crowley this represented an immense possibility. He sat up nights fashioning little voodoo figures so that Rose might produce a monster. His hopes kept on rising until Rose gave birth—to a girl.

Rose was restless during her period of convalescence; the books on hand failed to interest her. For reasons that a husband might know best, Crowley solved the problem by writing "Snowdrops from a Curate's Garden," one of the most ingenious books of pornographic verse ever published—privately, of course.

While the world's libraries kept this book under lock and key, Crowley considered it merely a volume of witty verse. Sex was the principal ingredient in the religious formula he had begun to mix. Any sex act, no matter how weird, represented a religious rite. And he rejoiced in blasphemies against the code that had restricted his childhood. Once, to discredit Christianity, he baptized a frog Jesus of Nazareth, crucified it and then ate its still-throbbing flesh.

His religion still had a long way to go before it took final shape. On the way Crowley took his wife and child to Asia. In Burma he managed to enter a temple forbidden to white men simply by shaving his head, putting on the traditional yellow robes of a Buddhist monk and carrying a begging bowl.

When they arrived in Bombay, the city was famine-ridden. White men were urged to stay off the streets at night, and certainly not to enter the twisting, turning alleys of the native quarter. Yet one night Crowley turned to Rose after dinner and suggested a midnight stroll.

Off they went, without a guide, dressed in their English best. At first the streets were fairly wide and lighted with electricity. The farther they went, the darker and narrower the streets. Suddenly, in one of the most menacing alleys, two natives sprang out of the darkness. The flickering gaslight shone upon their greasy, ragged turbans. A passing breeze flattened their clothes against their hungry, gaunt frames.

"A few rupees, sahib, memsahib. We have not eaten for days."

Crowley tried to push past, but they barred the way. A few seconds later shots rang out, and two natives were lying on the ground, their blood flowing into the gutter.

Next day's Bombay *Times* carried a story of the killing, and the Crowleys sailed out on the next boat.

Next they went for a "walk" through China, losing mounts and guides on the way. Almost immediately Crowley plunged into research in Chinese theories of magic. Anxious to use his discoveries in the Occident, he took a quick boat for England, leaving his wife and daughter behind without money.

Though she managed to return safely to England, Rose, with the almost universal bad luck of Crowley's women, broke under the combined strain of brutality, magic, the Chinese "walk" and abandonment. After Crowley had hung her by the heels in a closet a few times, she began to drink heavily. Rose divorced the Beast, but the brief marriage had been too much for her; she spent the rest of her life locked up in a insane asylum.

The next few years saw Crowley doing occult society work in London and criss-crossing Europe to contact local seers. His antics in Paris inspired Somerset Maugham to write a novel, "The Magician." In 1913 he gathered up four lady musicians and toured Russia with an act he called "The Ragged Ragtime Girls."

Then came World War I, and Crowley, anxious to work in peace, left England to conduct the struggle by herself. He went to America for the duration. Incensed because the English press called him a draft dodger, he joined with Irish Republicans in an anti-English rally, making a pro-German speech at the foot of the Statue of Liberty.

After touring the country he settled in New York Greenwich Village. Here he embarked on still another career, painting. Postal regulations forbid reproduction of most of his crudely drawn works. While the majority drew on his imagination for subject matter, he sometimes used models. He ran the following ad:

WANTED: Dwarfs, Hunchbacks, Tattooed Women, Harrison Fisher girls, Freaks of All Sorts, Colored women only if exceptionally Ugly or deformed.

All sorts of people flocked to his studio. Among them was a Bronx music teacher, Leah Faesi. Crowley quickly took this dark, dumpy, unattractive woman and initiated her into the most mysterious of sex mysteries. He branded her chest with the Mark of the Beast and elevated her to a special post, Scarlet Woman.

When peace came he returned to England with the Scarlet Woman in tow, but his home country never really accepted his faith. As explained in Crowley's "Book of the Law," the creed was simplicity itself: "Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law." Crowleyanity professed to reach beyond the senses by indulging them, to remove temptation by giving in to it, to achieve restraint by practising none.

There were money problems. Never one to bother with petty economies, he had the finest taste in cigars, drugs, liquor and presents for women. These tastes, plus his divorce settlement, had reduced the income on his inheritance.

Once he lived a week on no money at all, by betting a friend he could do it. His technique: taking a number of friends to dinner at a top-flight restaurant and insisting on treating. Then, over Corona Corona cigars and 20-year-old port, he asked for the bill and plunked down a 100-pound note on the silver salver. The management regretfully stated that it had not sufficient change. One of the company offered to lend Crowley the money. With a change of friends every night, Crowley continued this routine all week. Finally, he collected the note, which was the amount of the wager.

With the scarcity of money and followers in England, Crowley looked abroad for a good place to set up headquarters for his "faith." He found Sicily inexpensive enough, and established the Abbey of Thelema there. The Abbey was actually a run-down one-story building with bare whitewashed rooms.

The prayer room was in the center of the building, its floor painted with concentric circles—the innermost held the altar. In the walls were Crowley's vivid, crudely painted scenes of sex magic.

The most dramatic sight of all was Crowley himself, head shaven, his dark eyes dominating his now-bloated face. He wore long silken black robes with loose sleeves so that he could hold his arms mandarin fashion. Pacing slowly to the center of the room he intoned the opening prayer, "Artay I was Malcooth Vegubular, Vegadura, le-ar-la-ah moon."

The introduction over, he broke into a series of ecstatic, grotesque dances, and after a closing prayer, grub guzzlers made for the mess hall where they sat down to a breakfast of goat cheese, goat's milk, bread, tea and coffee. This was also the lunch and dinner menu. Economic necessity, not religious principle, dictated the diet—Crowley's income now was only about \$15 a week.

Yet, by careful managing this small sum—and whatever Crowley could gouge out of adepts—provided what the members enjoyed most. Opium, hashish, cocaine, heroin, morphine, veronal were available to all the adults. And, lest the children feel out of things, they not only were allowed to smoke, they witnessed sex rites as part of their "religious training."

Sex magic went on day and night, though Crowley permitted some non-participating members. One was Elizabeth Fox, known to the American movie-going public as a promising starlet. Crowley had met her in the south of France. Soon his hypnotic stare, amazing learning and charming personality persuaded her that her talent and her money could be put to better use at the Abbey. After a suitable donation, Betty Fox left behind fame and possible fortune to become Crowley's personal secretary.

This was an important post in the Crowley ménage, because the Beast, who belted out an impressive total of 107 books during his lifetime, was constantly dictating.

After 12 hours of writing and dictating, with time out for goat-cheese repasts, Crowley began to prepare for sleep. He suffered from insomnia, and turned to two standard cures, drugs and sex. Six hours of such "treatment" gave him three

hours of fitful dozing. Then he was up again, to start the daily "prayer meeting."

Each inmate at the Abbey kept a secret magical diary. Typical entry in the Beast's: "The Dog was lying quiet smoking her opium pipe when all at once she annoyingly started to have visions."

Crowley conducted sex rites with two ends in mind. Not only did he enjoy them and find the "spiritual plane" he was seeking, but they helped to make inmates docile and co-operative. Shock and shame weakened their will to resist; they were willing to do anything.

Here in the ascetic-looking Abbey, Crowley set up house-keeping with the Scarlet Woman, her child, Concubine Number Two and her child. While both ladies were true adepts, jealousy sometimes reared its ugly head. Then the Beast exiled one woman or the other to the top of a neighboring rock. When Crowley figured repentance had set in, he flashed a mirror in a signal to come down.

Besides collecting women and catering to their varied needs, Crowley accumulated disciples, for both religious and economic reasons. Crowleyanity could scarcely last 1,000 years without them, and his income was dwindling fast. Even with 1920 prices and the generally low cost of Sicilian living. \$15 didn't buy much grub—not to speak of dope—for an ever-growing community.

Disciples who brought themselves back alive give different accounts of life at the Abbey. All agree that Crowley followed his faith, and did what he pleased.

In this small world Crowley was king. His word was absolute. People got up and went to bed when he commanded. He approved the meals, designed the clothes and conducted the religious rites. Only he was permitted to use the word "I." Anyone else who did had to pay a penalty of one razor slash on each arm. Crowley provided inmates with a razor for that purpose.

Until Betty May Loveday came to the Abbey, each and every member followed this rule. By one of the oddest quirks of fate, Crowley, the Cambridge-educated son of wealthy parents was undone by Betty May, one of the Great Unwashed of London's East End. Born in the filthiest slum, Betty May worked as an artist's model when posing in the altogether was altogether shocking. Her beautiful body opened doors that might otherwise have stayed shut, and she met prominent artists, students and rich men out for excitement.

Along the way she made and unmade three marriages. Her current husband was Raoul Loveday, an Oxford graduate turned poet. Loveday's interest in magic eventually led him to acquaintance with Crowley who had left the Abbey on one of his trips to London.

During the next few weeks Betty May and Crowley struggled for control of Loveday. The two men stayed up all night discussing magic. When Loveday got home, Betty May greeted him with a string of abuse that was pure East End. Then, with another time-honored female tactic, she twined her arms around his neck, and by the next day Raoul was promising eternal love. But, like so many poets' wives, Betty not only cooked the bacon, she had to bring it home. When she was away, Raoul crept out to meet Crowley. When Betty objected, he stayed away the whole night.

He finally brought Crowley home, and, in a scene to end all scenes, the magician ordered dinner to be prepared. Betty refused. "I'll never make a meal for you."

She couldn't have been wronger. Within a month she not only lived at the Abbey: she was its chief cook.

Soon the Lovedays were on their way to Sicily. After traveling for 48 hours on the unyielding wooden benches of third-class railway coaches, Betty May arrived with her husband at Palermo, Sicily, then traveled by donkey-back to the Abbey.

It was late. If there had been any lights, the nearest would have been from farmhouses almost a mile away. In the thin moonlight Loveday stepped forward and knocked at the large oaken door. Minutes passed. Then the door opened, but only long enough to admit the poet.

Just as Betty May moved to enter, the door was slammed shut in her face. After a half hour of impassioned pounding, the door opened again. Exhausted by the trip, her spirit broken by standing alone in the Sicilian night, Betty May slunk into the Abbey following a red-gowned woman to the cell she was to call home. The walls were bare; a pile of straw on the stone floor was the bed. There were no other furnishings or sanitary arrangements. The next morning Betty May was initiated into the life of the Abbey.

First all members were brought together for the Pentagram, the morning service. Men and women alike were garbed in long, flowing robes, the men's heads clean-shaven except for a symbolical tuft in the center of their heads, the women wearing their hair dyed red or black, and changing it every six months.

For the next few months there was a running battle between Crowley and Betty May refused to slash her arm for saying "I." She stayed away from many of the mystic ceremonies. She committed the final error of befriending a cat that Crowley disliked.

One day, during the most "sacred" part of a Crowley rite, a cat crept into the room and, after brief exploration, leaped onto the altar. Following this feline personality, Crowley tore at the thinning tufts of his hair and Betty shooed the cat to safety. Crowley vowed revenge and looked for the cat. Betty kept it out of sight and fed it with scraps for two days.

Then the cat escaped and repeated his first offense. Crowley stopped the services and, despite his great bulk, scrambling around the prayer room, finally catching the animal. Although he wanted to strangle it, he controlled his first impulse and put it into a cage.

He conducted special services for two days, then killed the cat as a "religious ceremony." He caught the cat's blood in a "consecrated" cup. The Scarlet Woman took the first sip, then Raoul Loveday drained it.

One week later Loveday died, and his widow ran shrieking from the Abbey. She blamed the slashed arm and the drink of cat's blood for his death. Or so she said to the British consul in Palermo, bringing the Abbey to official notice.

All along the villagers of Cefalu had been aware of the Abbey. Sicilian men, themselves noted for virility, respected Crowley's ability to keep so many women happy. Sicilian women, on the other hand, objected to the nudity and claimed that Crowley sacrificed little boys.

Official pressure from the British consul made it impossible for the Italian Government to ignore the situation any longer. Not only was the group immoral, it was secret. And if the Fascists allowed the existence of one secret society, although non-political, others not so harmless might shoot up.

The local commandant called in the sergeant.

"Fanfari, get that crazy Englishman near the rock. Close that place. Don't hurt the women and children, just make sure everyone leaves. Take six men if you have to, but get it done."

Fanfari saluted, wheeled out of the office and called to his carabinieri, "Palioto, Gronchi, Montesi, Sevaro, Grande, Grote-si!" Six of Mussolini's roughest, toughest men snapped to attention in the courtyard, were told their mission and marched off to the Abbey.

When they arrived, Fanfari rapped at the wooden door and was answered by a red-robed woman saying, "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."

Fanfari looked surprised for a second, almost lost his official face, then reverted to the tried-and-true sergeant.

"Signora, we are sent here on orders from Rome. We must enter," With that he pushed Leah back and strode into the Abbey.

Crowley was brought in. Fanfari drew a sheet of paper from his tunic. "I have here a warrant for your arrest. Citizens of Cefalu have complained there is nudity here and you are contributing to the delinquency of children. You are ordered under arrest."

The Beast was imperturbable. He smiled and gestured to the pornographic paintings on the wall. "Gentleman, please look at me, you can see that I am engaged in a new and startling work."

Their eyes fixed on his hypnotic ones. A minute later they began to examine the paintings. The midday heat poured down on the roof and engulfed the room. Crowley's voice grew monotonous as it droned on. The seven Italians stood still and stared.

The disciples, women and children had already packed and left. Crowley tore out of the room, slapped his possessions together and with seven armed men rooted to the spot, slipped out of the Abbey and took the next boat for Tunisia.

He had escaped, but from this moment on his career took a steady downward turn.

In North Africa he traipsed about with the Scarlet Woman and one of his disciples. After six years together, Crowley not only had grown accustomed to Leah's face, he was tired of it. Leah was ditched. She became a prostitute in Madrid after marrying one of Crowley's disciples. Finally she pulled out of her nose dive by joining the Catholic Church.

Meanwhile Crowley wandered through Spain, France and Germany where he found a second Scarlet Woman and got in close touch with a German secret order.

Finally he settled in the ultratolerant city of Paris. His apartment was a temple to his cult and the site of numerous trysts with the dozens of women willing to put up with his "religion," beatings and expenses.

In 1929 he married Maria Teresa del Miramar, a wealthy Nicaraguan who promised a secure future for the now-aging Beast. But the idyll of wedded bliss was broken when the

French Sûreté asked Crowley to leave Paris. Crowley later maintained that the policeman who came to investigate confused a coffee mill with a "sex machine." The official French reason had nothing to do with sex or swindling. The security-conscious French, aware of his dealings with the German secret society and his pro-German rantings in New York during World War I, suspected him of being a German agent.

His wife following faithfully, he headed for Spain where his sex-appeal ointment and hypnotic stare won still another conquest. Her name was Hanni, and she looked more like a sculpture herself than the sculptress she was; she was a tall, blond, blue-eyed virgin. In no time at all her admiring looks became loving glances. Crowley left his still-adoring Nicaraguan wife for the young Nordic beauty.

While this kind of adventure might have satisfied lesser and younger men, Crowley spiced it up with a fake suicide note to hold Hanni's attention. He left a note at his hotel and disappeared from sight. Local cops searched all likely spots and came up with nothing. Scotland Yard sent an operative with the same result. Meanwhile the press round the world carried the news of Crowley's death, and some of the liveliest stories ever to hit the normally sober obituary pages. Then Crowley calmly informed the London *Times* that he was still alive.

Crowley made the headlines in other ways. The world was entranced by the charge that he performed human sacrifice. When interviewed, he admitted it. "Of course, I sacrifice little boys," Crowley boasted, "provided they're beautiful and high-born."

The years that followed were anti-climactic. Bad luck continued to dog his women. His second wife returned with him to England and went insane. Hanni, his 19-year-old mistress, took a cue from his prank and killed herself. The second Scarlet Woman drank herself to death.

His own luck was on the downgrade, too. He found fewer and fewer disciples and without them was forced to seek other ways to make a living.

This became especially difficult after the libel trial. In a much-discussed book, Nina Hamnett, a friend of 20 years' standing, openly accused him of black magic. Friendship or no, Crowley promptly sued for libel. Bringing his huge bulk to the witness box he thundered that he was not a thrill-seeker but a religious prophet. Without any luck, his lawyers searched for two witnesses who would testify that Crowley was harmless, merely enveloped in a cloud of evil gossip.

Although Crowley swore that the name Beast 666 really meant Little Sunshine, he lost his case. But as he left the courtroom, a balding 59, still another 19-year-old threw her arms around his neck.

This was one of the last sparks of a dying flame. Year after year there were fewer sex partners and less money. His appetite for drugs, on the other hand, grew. He required the staggering and expensive amount of 11 grains of morphine each day. Three or four will kill a normal man.

To earn his daily drug, Crowley resorted to various techniques. One was selling Elixir of Life pills. Widely advertised in the sensational Sunday papers and sold in England's famous "sex shops," they were coated with the usual sugar-and-gelatin compound. Inside were a number of famous aphrodisiacs plus a certain "vital life fluid." (Crowley never told where he had gotten it.)

Hard times had really come to Crowley. By 1938 he was reduced to only one woman, a Sister Tzaba who stayed with him to his death in 1947, at the age of 72.

And, as though he were making a last joke at the world's expense after a lifetime of sexual excess and drug addiction, he died of the relatively sedate disease of chronic bronchitis.