

**THE SUNDAY EXPRESS
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Babble About Books.

The Doped Publisher.

By JAMES DOUGLAS.

I have received the following letter from Messrs. Collins:—

In your issue of last Sunday you made an appeal to us, as the publishers of Mr. Aleister Crowley's novel, "The Diary of a Drug Fiend," to withdraw that book from circulation on moral grounds, and we trust that you will give up this opportunity of explaining why we refuse to do so.

We have seen this book from the first as a fine presentation and exposure of the evils of drug-taking. In the beginning the two chief characters are exhibited as elated and in a sense exalted by the effects of cocaine. These effects, however, are of extraordinarily short duration. As soon as the drug-takers have lost what is known as their "drug virginity," the taking of drugs—cocaine and heroin—becomes more and more a matter of necessity, while all the pleasurable effects vanish one by one. Before we are halfway through the book we see these two unfortunate creatures struggling with their misery and unable to escape. They no longer get any pleasure from Cocaine or heroin, and at the best can only hope to mitigate the pains that those drugs are now causing them. Finally, every reader must feel the wonderful relief experienced when, by following the stringent training of the real hero of the book, King Lamus, they are at last freed from what De Quincey called "the accursed chain."

A FINE LESSON.

Now this we contend is essentially a fine moral lesson and a powerful warning to any unfortunate creature who might be tempted to experiment with these drugs. We are naturally puzzled that you should ask us to withdraw from circulation what is in effect a tract at a time when every one is keenly interested in this problem, and the Government is employing ever more

stringent measures in order to reduce the sale of cocaine, heroin, and morphia. We claim, in fact, that this is a book which cannot fail to do good and may even save a few people here and there from what Mr. Crowley himself describes as a "pestilence."

Lastly, we are not concerned to defend your attack upon the personal character of Mr. Aleister Crowley. Publishers do not, and obviously cannot, make a strict inquiry into the past life of an author who comes into their offices with a manuscript for sale, but surely this is the book of a man who is trying to help rather than to degrade humanity.

HIDDEN MEANINGS.

In another letter Messrs. Collins suggested an interview with Mr. J. D. Beresford, their literary adviser. Mr. Beresford accordingly called on me to discuss the matter. He told me that the meaning of certain scabrous passages in the book had not till then been apparent to him. He did not contest my view of these passages. I suggested to him that Mr. Crowley had with diabolical cunning duped the publishers into publishing cocaine and heroin propaganda larded with veiled obscenities disguised as poetical metaphors. He admitted that this was a possible explanation. Nevertheless, he maintained that the novel could not be regarded as likely to induce anybody to resort to the use of cocaine and heroin, because, first, the horrors described would act as a deterrent, and, secondly, because it is not easy to procure these drugs.

COCAINE SLAVES.

I pointed out that, in fact, the traffic in cocaine continues, in spite of the measures adopted by the police. With regard to the plea that King Lamus delivers the cocaine slaves from their slavery, I referred Mr. Beresford to the letter from him to "Unlimited Lou." In it he argues that cocaine can be used in moderation like soap, with benefit to the users and others, and without danger of their becoming slaves. "We have tamed the wild lightning after all; shall we run away from a packet of powder?" And this is "the real hero of the book," which is supposed to be a tract!

Mr. Beresford informed me that Sir Godfrey Collins was reading the book in order to decide upon their course of action with regard to its withdrawal. Thereupon I suggested that it

might be well to defer the publication of their letter of refusal until Sir Godfrey Collins had pronounced final judgment. But Mr. Beresford pressed me to publish the letter at once.

PASSAGES DELETED.

Mr. Beresford is a brilliant novelist and man of letters. I am sure he was artfully duped and deceived by Mr. Crowley. He very frankly confessed to me that he had himself been doubtful about the novel, and that he deleted some passages from the original manuscript. Apparently Mr. Crowley, as an habitual cocaine taker, offered to write a novel purporting to analyse the horrors of cocaine. Mr. Crowley declares that he is able to take cocaine without danger or detriment, and Mr. Beresford believes this incredible claim, although it ought to have put him on his guard.

It is obvious that a drug-taker who believes that he can himself safely take dangerous drugs like cocaine and heroin is not exactly the ideal writer of a tract against cocaine and heroin. In fact, he has written a tract in favour of cocaine and not a tract against it. That is what Mr. Beresford might have expected.

THE RIGHT COURSE.

The publishers are now in an absurd dilemma. They commissioned an exposure of cocaine from a cocaine-taker, knowing him to be a cocaine-taker, and knowing that he maintained its innocuousness if taken by the proper persons in the proper way. They bought a tract against cocaine and they got a tract in favour of cocaine. They must either admit that Mr. Crowley duped them or defend an indefensible delusion.

I warned Mr. Beresford that if this novel were to be sold after my exposure of its true character, the publishers would set an example which would be followed by less reputable firms. There would be a flood of pornographic novels. The responsibility is heavy. I hope that Messrs. Collins will give decency the benefit of any doubt in their minds or in the mind of Mr. Beresford. That there is a doubt in Mr. Beresford's mind our conversation made clear to me. After all, there is no need to hesitate to admit that you have been duped by a cunning pornographer masked as a missionary.