

**THE BOOK COLLECTING RACKET:
A Few Notes on the Abuses of Book Collecting
Aleister Crowley
Harry W. Schwartz
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Aleister Crowley

I have long planned to write a note on Aleister Crowley but have delayed it so as to be able to preface with it his bibliography upon which I am working. It appears, however, that the work on the bibliography is endless, and as I have received a number of requests for information on Crowley, I print the little I know here.

Crowley is perhaps the most libeled and slandered man alive. He has been variously described as a "monster of wickedness", "a dirty degenerate", and "England's worst man". Just the other day one of our gutter tabloids smeared over its pages the latest Crowley libel. It appears in this case that an artist's model by the name of Nina Hamnett wrote a stupid book called *Laughing Torso* in which she drags Crowley's name around too freely. He brought suit against her for libel. Of course the newspapers, quickly seeing an opportunity to titillate their readers with the old stories of vice, lechery and drunkenness, spilled their filth.

And a few years ago the press carried another story equally absurd. It seems that whenever a poor hack of a journalist is reduced to his last dime he can always earn a couple of dollars by inventing a piece about Crowley. In this article it was made to appear that Crowley was trying to commit suicide. In the space of one week he had flung himself in the paths of speeding automobiles twenty times. (Imagine Crowley with his enormous knowledge about every drug in existence attempting to commit suicide in the stupid manner of a shop-girl.) And why was he trying so desperately to kill himself? Because, so the hack continues, his books would then increase in value. Crowley had confided to him, he adds, that he had a thousand copies of his books stored away. If he could kill himself his books would immediately rise in price, he would become a sensation, and men would call him great. Who would benefit from the sale of the thousand books we are not told.

A man of many talents, Crowley has chosen the field of "Magick" in which to do his serious work. As a poet he has been ranked with the greatest of his time. His poetry can be as lyrical and saccharine as Swinburne's, and it can also be as brutal and unconventional as March's the author of the *Wild Party*. To read his poem called *Chicago May* is an unique experience. I quote the first stanza:

This is my hour of peace; the great sow snores,
Blowing out spittle through her blubber lips,
Champagne and lust still oozing from the pores
Of her fat flanks: then, let my hate eclipse
All other lamps of my pale soul, and flare—
A curst star sparkling in the strangled air:
Her shapeless limbs are sticky with stale sweat;
Yet, she would wake if I withdrew, belch hard
The ferments of the fodder, turn, and fret
This inch that is the ruins of a yard.
Is there no sparrow, ram, ass, bull can stay
The "love"—dear Jesus!—of Chicago May?

Besides this, he is a linguist knowing more than a dozen languages including Hindustani, a profound scholar of philosophy, a mystic, a big game hunter, a practiser of magical ritual, a chemist, a chess player, a painter who has painted over 200 canvases which will cause an artistic furore if he can be persuaded to exhibit them, a mountain climber whose achievements have never been equalled, (he has climbed the Alps, the Himalayas, and the Mexican volcanoes) and number one eccentric. He has walked across the Sahara and across Spain and China on foot. He has lived as a Yogi in an Indian village, as a laird in Scotland, and as a "Bohemian" in London, Paris, and New York. He has been expelled from Italy by the Fascisti and was asked to leave France.

Although Crowley is one of the most fascinating writers to collect, he has but few enthusiasts. His literary output is enormous and completely distinguished in manner. Practically all his publications have been issued privately with all the unctious of fine amateur printing. Of his early works, two are the rarest and almost impossible to obtain. They are also his first published writing. One of these, *White Stains*, by George Archibald Bishop (Crowley), a poetic reply to Krafft-Ebing, was very privately printed (100 copies) and distributed. In delicately veiled obscenities he has written an erotic poem that would gladden

the heart of Baffo, whom Casanova called the most erotic of all erotic poets. The book, being also collected for erotica, is made doubly scarce. *Aceldama*, the second of his early published work, while not as scarce as *White Stains*, will nevertheless lead the collector a merry chase.

At this point I would like to mention Mr. P. R. Stephensen's book on Crowley called, *The Legend of Aleister Crowley—A Study of the Facts*. The book is an excellent record of the campaign of vilification carried on against Crowley, a campaign of persecution such as the world has never seen before. Every student of Crowley will have to be thankful to Mr. Stephensen for the facts he uncovers. The book's only weak point is the bibliographical information. Here, Mr. Stephensen, who is apparently not overmuch concerned with the niceties of bibliographical detail, makes several errors. *Konx Om Pax* is not "utterly unobtainable nowadays." The book is not common but it is not anywhere near as scarce as a dozen others and does not begin to compare with the scarcity of *White Stains* or *Aceldama*. The same is true of *Liber 777*. Stephensen is, however, correct when he says that at present there is no man living who possesses a complete collection of the Works of Aleister Crowley. Not even Crowley himself.

Crowley wrote under what seems to be hundreds of aliases and pseudonyms. Some of these have been identified as Crowley, but a good many more have as yet not been traced. I list a few of them here: A.C.; Christabel Wharton; Ethel Ramsay; Ariel; A. Quiller; the Author of 'Rosa Mundi'; N.; O. Dharmaloyu; Ananda Vigga; J. Mc. C.; Fra. O.M.; H.K.T.; Francis Bendick; A. Quiller, Junior; Coris Leslie ('Baby'); "C"; Hilda Norfolk; Elaine Carr; Martial Nay; Edward Kelly; Perdurabo; D. Carr; Caligula II.; Boleskine; Jonathan Hutchinson, natuminimus; Dost Achiba Khan; Super Sinistram; Sherlock Holmes; Professor Jacobus Imperator; Percy Flage; Leo Viridis; Alice L. Foote; Probationer; H.G.; Tarr M.B.; Mohammed; M.W.; Georgos; Cantab; O.H.; Laura Graham; L.T.; Leo; Eric Tait; M. Tupper; Nick Lamb; Abhavananda; A.L.; Felix; Barbey de Rochechouart; Mary d'Este; Marechal de Cambronne; II.; Candlestick; Panurge; John Masefield, Junior; Diogenes; David Thomas; K.S.I.; St. Maurice E. Kulm; Lemeul S. Innocent; Morpheus; K.H.A.K.; St. E. A. of M. and S.; Gentleman of The University of Cambridge; Rev. C. Verey; Count von Zanaref; Alastair McGregor; Earl of Middlesex; Mark Watts; McGregor of Boleskine; The Master Therion; Count Vladimir Svareff. To make the task more difficult, Crowley refuses to

offer any help to bibliographers, apparently scorning this field of research.

One of Crowley's most remarkable books is the *Diary of a Drug Fiend* written in 27 days, 12 $\frac{3}{4}$ hours. Stephensen says this book was suppressed after the third edition. I have a letter from the publishers in which they state the book was allowed to go out of print in the ordinary way. It is also said that the American edition of this book published by E. P. Dutton in August, 1923, was suppressed. The publishers deny this too. Mr. Macrae, the president of the firm, wrote me that they have no record extant showing that any question was ever raised about the suppression of this book. The American edition was printed in an edition of 2025 copies. A part of this edition was sold at the regular price, and a part was remaindered at a low price. Dutton still has the plates of the *Diary of a Drug Fiend*.

The Diary of a Drug Fiend is such a startling book that when I found it was out of print in both England and America I was surprised. When I made an offer to Dutton to buy or use the plates for a small edition of the book I received no answer. I do not recommend the book to the faint-hearted, but if you can stand strong meat and are not afraid of a few horrors, read it by all means. If you have ever thought of taking drugs yourself, this book will not only deter you, but the mere mention of drugs will send shivers up and down your spine. It is one of the most horrible books I have ever read and one of the most gruesomely fascinating.

The anecdotes about Crowley are so numerous and so diverting that it is impossible to pick from among them. But to those who are anxious to know something about "the beast" I refer them to the *Confessions of Aleister Crowley*, published by the Mandrake Press in London. Only two volumes have so far appeared but it is said that two more volumes have been printed and are lying in sheets in some London warehouse, no publisher having the courage to issue them. I have written to several people about these sheets but the answers have been vague and equivocal. *The Confessions* were to be completed in six volumes. Those who take the trouble to look into these two volumes will be well repaid. A more fascinating autobiography has never been written, as indeed a more grotesque man than Crowley has never lived. Besides recounting a life that was not dull for a minute it is illuminated with flashes of intelligence and packed with curious and esoteric knowledge.

To those who like to read their biography in fiction form I recommend *The Magician* by Somerset Maugham which is a

novel about Crowley. Don't be surprised if the book revolts you because Maugham painted an even more scurrilous picture of Crowley than either of those two experts in invective, James Douglas and Horatio Bottomley. In this book Maugham apparently got even with Crowley for unpleasantness suffered while a member of a bohemian circle in Paris to which Crowley belonged. The whole story is told by Crowley in volume two of his *Confessions*.

Strange as it may seem, Crowley manuscripts are comparatively common. They appear in booksellers' catalogs all over the world and are priced very reasonably. All of his former wives (four or five?) are said to be laden down with his manuscripts also.