

DAILY MAIL
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HE CALLED HIMSELF—
'Worst man in the world'



His names were Edward Alexander (but he called himself Aleister) Crowley.

He styled himself (in quotation marks) "The worst man in the world," and delighted in the fact that a painter once entitled his portrait "666"—the Mark of the Beast in Revelations.

He said he believed in magic—but he spelled it magick "to distinguish between mere conjuring and real magic."

He was accused of practicing Black Magic—which includes witchcraft and spell-casting and derives its alleged power from rites which cannot be described—but he himself proclaimed he was always a White Magician.

During World War I. he made pro-German, anti-British propaganda in the United States—and later said he did so only to reduce the successful German propaganda to absurdity.

In 1923 he was thrown out of Cefalu, in Sicily, where he maintained a "study circle" for magic (with a k), after one of the students had died.

In 1934 he brought an action against Messers. Constable, the publishers, and authoress Nina Hamnett for libel—and lost. He appealed—and lost again. The next year he was arrested

for receiving stolen letters, tried at the Old Bailey and bound over. In 1935 he went bankrupt: for £4,700—and vanished.

Aleister Crowley, born in 1875, son of a close friend of the founders of the Plymouth Brethren, held his reputation as "The worst man in the world" for nearly half a century. Wherever the occult has been discussed this century his name was sure to crop up.

The stories about him were a mephitic cloud—but most of them were told by people on whom little reliance could be placed. He attracted—and selected—such company.

Crowley was a writer. Before World War I. he was hailed by the less critical as a "lord of language" and placed only a little below Swinburne as a poet. But his books did not sell—and many of them were perforce privately printed. Most of them were so obscure as to be unreadable: some of the passages in them were, most definitely, not for the use of schools (even of magick).

In his youth he was a traveler and a mountaineer. He certainly travelled—on an inherited 30,000. It was said he had discovered the secret magic of the Orient: that he had brought back the lore of Mayas, Toltecs, Aztecs from Yucatan: that he had a scheme for climbing Everest. But the secrets remained secret: Crowley never told them.

He gave himself Considerable airs—"Like most men of distinction I have been expelled from Italy," he would say. His manner was pontifical and, often, merely pompous.

He carried about with him a box of unguent with which he anointed himself in order, so he said, to make himself irresistible to women. That he had success with some women in undeniable. But he obviously did not rejuvenate himself: he was an elderly, and obviously elderly, man when I met him 13 years ago.

He claimed to be a very fine chess player—but did not play during the past 25 years: he had a scheme for putting over a new variety of bridge "to oust this new Contract" in 1933—but could not describe how it should be played.

Bluntly, Aleister Crowley, however he complained that he was a victim if ill-informed public opinion, enjoyed being "The worst man in the world."

It was his stock-in-trade for many a free drink; for many a subsidy from sensation-mongers who hoped he would open the door to heavens and hells they could achieve only in dreams. It is fair to say that he himself believed he could.

He died down at Hastings yesterday. He was 72 years old.

Only once was he put out of countenance—when he overheard himself defined by a man who had just met him, as "rather a harmless old gentleman."