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**IAN MACKAY'S DIARY**

**He Tried Hard to be Wicked**

During the journey down from Edinburgh yesterday in the Flying Scotsman the talk turned to the great characters and eccentrics of our time. And after dallying as far as Dunbar with such major worthies as Prince Monolulu, The Count Potocki and the Great McGonagall, we got round mentally, to Aleister Crowley, the famous monster of Bloomsbury.

There has been a lot of speculation about him in the Press recently and one of our company, a charming lady, said that she "just couldna' believe that such an awfu' man ever existed." And she asked me if I had ever met him.

I had indeed. And as there has been an awful lot of nonsense written about him recently—as well as some sound sense by Mr. Calder-Marshall—perhaps you may be interested in what I said.

By the time I met him Crowley was already a back number, a kind of shabby, dilapidated devil desperately trying to be bad in a world that was really far too wicked for him. For what were his trumpety little devilries compared to the means test or the hideous goings on in the Nazi and Fascist slave camps? Somebody called him Mephistopheles with the mangle.

The first time I met him he was with Nina Hamnett, who is of course an angel as well as one of the finest painters, and he took a poor view of me.

We talked about art, of which he knew less than I did, and in answer to some banality of mine he declared that the highest form of artistic creation was based, not on ethical or aesthetic abstractions like beauty, goodness and truth, but on what he called "irreverent irrelevancies."

This was the so-called diabolical principle on which he based his beastliness and made a profession of perversion.

Crowley worked hard for nearly half a century trying to be wickeder than the world he lived in.

His great desire was to emulate the Prince of Darkness and, I believe, he even put the satanic axiom "Evil be thou my Good" on his notepaper when he lived in Italy.

But he forgot—as Edgar points out in “Lear”—that the Prince of Darkness is a gentleman. “Modo, he’s called, and Mahu.”

The result was that poor Crowley, who was really an elder of the kirk gone wrong became one of Bloomsbury’s biggest bores.

### **Naïve Sinning**

For the great joke about Crowley was that he was the wildest of all irrelevancies himself. He was a living *non sequiter*. Though he was always talking about sin he went about it as naively as a nun in a night club.

He knew so little about wickedness, really, that he had to create a fantastic diabolical drama of dirt and darkness before he could work himself up into a sinful mood.

I never met him anywhere except in crowded bars, though I often passed him in the Strand or Gower Street slinking along in his artificial aura of evil.

Rumours of his organized obscenities sometimes reached Fleet Street; occasionally news would come in from bizarre places like Fez and Aleppo that the Great Beast 666 had been celebrating one of his Black Masses in the minaret of some abandoned mosque.

But it was all, as Al Smith said of bricklaying, boloney.

### **Just A Fake**

My own view is that Aleister Crowley was a fake. His wickedness was about as genuine as Mr. Stiggins piety. He was just an exhibitionist who, having discovered he could not make a name for himself by being good, tried to do it by being bad.

He certainly made a name for himself, but I don’t believe he was ever really bad. For, as I have said in this column before, you have to be good to be bad. Crowley was not good enough to be wicked.

He once came near to it, however, when he interrupted me when I was talking about cricket and said: “To Hell with Jack Hobbs.” That, as Chesterton—or was it Belloc?—said about a much wickedder person, shall not be forgiven him.