

THE BOLTON NEWS
BOLTON, LANCASHIRE, ENGLAND
12 JANUARY 1952
(page 2)

BOOK REVIEWS

"THE GREAT BEAST," by John Symonds (Rider and Co., 21s.)

When Aleister Crowley died in 1947, "Time," the American magazine, announced his death as an event equal in importance to the end of the war. Crowley's literary executor, Mr. John Symonds, has now published the first biography of Crowley, "The Great Beast." It is an attempt to compress an incredibly varied life into 300 pages. Crowley, the magician, the mountaineer, the poet, the drug-addict, the libertine, the painter, the prince Chioa Khan—one could prolong the list. Mr. Symonds has done so, and allowed himself little space to show under all the masks the face of one man. This is unfortunate, as his attitude to Crowley is one of tolerant patronage, causing many passages in his book to be tediously picaresque.

The variety of Crowley's occupations supports the idea that his life was a search for peace in the first article of his creed: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law." The "Liber Legis," mysteriously dictates to Crowley in a Cairo temple is more than a complicated reversal of the doctrines of the Plymouth Brethren, as Mr. Symonds suggests.

Crowley was a figure of international reputation, and influenced many of the déraciné intelligentsia between the wars. Writers as various as Somerset Maugham, Ronald Firbank, and Yeats fell temporarily under the spell of his personality or "Thelematic" teaching. Few, however, have spoke of his ruthless sacrifice of normal human pursuits in obedience to the laws he received from his guardian angel, "a tall dark man, active and strong, with the face of a savage king, and eyes veiled lest their gaze should destroy what they saw."