

**COUNTRY LIFE
LONDON, ENGLAND
18 JANUARY 1952
(pages 175 & 177)**

NEW BOOKS

Reviews by **HOWARD SPRING**

THE "WICKEDEST MAN IN THE WORLD"

Aleister Crowley: *The Man, the Mage, the Poet*. By Charles Richard Cammell (Richards Press, 15s.)

This last sentence [He rubbed the wrong lamps: but he was a great magician.] might be taken as summarizing too, what Mr. Charles Richard Cammell thinks of Aleister Crowley. I gather from Mr. Cammell's book *Aleister Crowley: the Man, the Mage, the Poet* (Richards Press, 15s.) that Crowley was blazed upon by notoriety several times during his life. One or two newspapers "featured" him as "the King of Depravity," the "Wickedest Man in the World," and so forth; and, although this happened between the wars, I missed it all, and had never so much as heard Crowley's name until I came across it here and there in contemporary autobiographies, notably Mr. Calder-Marshall's *The Magic of My Youth*. Even after what I have recently learned about Crowley, I doubt whether he ever was taken note of by more than an esoteric few. I find it impossible to accept such a statement as this, which opens Mr. Cammell's book: "Not so long since, when the subject of this book was alive, one had but to mention his name to witness a surprising effect on any company." The odd thing to me, after having read Mr. Cammell's book, is that Crowley was so *little* known, for I am quite sure that nine out of ten *in any company* had never heard his name, and what makes it odd—to me, anyway—that he was so little known is this: that he was a poet of genuine inspiration.

"MAGICAL THINGS"

Crowley, who died only four years ago, appears to have genuinely believed himself to be a "mage" who could do magical things, and Mr. Cammell clearly is not the man to question that such things are possible. He accepts the

magician, but thinks that he “rubbed the wrong lamps.” Crowley, when 24 years old, made a high and awful oath, but he fell from grace and thereafter was “a man accursed” who had “lost all sense of good and evil.” That is how Mr. Cammell sees it.

It would be necessary to know far more about such matters than most of us *do* know before venturing an opinion. I am prepared to leave all that aside and to commend Mr. Cammell’s book for its charity. Heaven knows, there has been little enough of charity in the bits and pieces I have come upon concerning Crowley. To say that he did not deserve charity is beside the point, for charity and deserts are not related. For the first time, I begin to see something of what Crowley was and what he meant to a small set of people. I am sure I should have detested him, but I have detested many people who had admirable qualities, and I bear their detestation of me with the reflection that they are strangely blind to mine. But I cannot detest Crowley’s poetry at its best, and what I thank Mr. Cammell for most of all is making some of this available. I have been looking through recent anthologies and there is not a line of him in any one of them; yet any anthology, I feel, should contain *The King-Ghost*, part of which is quoted here. It may not deserve Mr. Cammell’s question “Is there anything more weirdly supernatural in Coleridge, in Poe, in Rosetti?” I am afraid the answer is “Yes,” but it’s a splendid poem all the same; and it is splendid to find a friend who remains a friend even while acknowledging so much that might have destroyed friendship: “his foibles, his sins, his fabulous claims, his ‘Magick’,” and even in face of the sad fact of estrangement: “I saw him only once again—in London, after the war. We did not speak.”