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RASCAL'S REGRESS

Edward Alexander ("Aleister") Crowley was born 72 years ago into a conventional world. Being conventional, that world pretended that it was easily shocked. Aleister determined to be a shocking young man. He went to Cambridge and became interested in magick (as he insisted on spelling the word). On a legacy of £30,000 he traveled to China and Tibet for further studies in the black art. Most of his books and poems (*Clouds Without Water*, *The Winged Beetle*, *Confessions*) were printed privately because of their obscenity. Aleister achieved his shocking ambition. But he discovered that, although he was notorious, he had also become ridiculous.

The *Charming Cats*. Newspapers called him "The Worst Man in the World." They told fantastic stories of him: he could raise devils and dead cats; he drank blood; he celebrated the obscene Black Mass in his "temple" at Chancery Lane. Crowley added some stories of his own. He said he could make himself invisible, and claimed to have walked around a town once in a red robe and golden crown, unnoticed by anyone. In a treatise on magic he blandly remarked that "for nearly all purposes, human sacrifice is best." In 1934 he sued Authoress Nina Hamnett for libel, claiming that he had been represented in her book as a practitioner of black magic; he said his magic was white.

In court a young woman witness told of Crowley's villa in Sicily: "About half-past five in the morning, the household had to go out and face the sun. It was called 'adoration.' The evening ceremony was the great thing. In one corner was a chair in which Mr. Crowley sat in front of a brazier in which incense was burned. There was a scarlet woman who wore a jeweled snake under her robe. There was a sort of hysterical business. [Once] a cat was sacrificed. The knife was blunt and the cat got out of the red circle. That was bad for magical work."

The counsel for the defense tried to point out a mitigating circumstance: "Are the cats in Sicily not wild and destructive?" Replied the witness: "I knew only two, and they were very charming."

The Harmless Gentleman. The jury found against him. Said Mr. Justice Swift: "I have been over 40 years engaged in the administration of the law [but] I have never heard such dreadful, horrible, blasphemous and abominable stuff. . . ."

But the wicked magic of world events made Crowley's little orgies look tame. He resented it; he was envious. Said he: "Before Hitler was, I am." But it was no use. He became a fat, olive-skinned man with heavy jowls and mean little eyes which made him look like a stockbroker when the market is bad. He was crushed to hear himself described one day as "a rather harmless old gentleman."

Last week Death, as it must even to magicians, came to Aleister Crowley. The world of 1947 buried him almost without noticing it, and without a shudder.