

# THE LOOKING GLASS

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### An Amazing Sect.—no. 2.

#### The origin of Their Rites and the Life-History of Mr. Aleister Crowley.

*A fortnight ago we published an article under the heading of "An Amazing Sect" in which we gave an account of a meeting or séance which we had attended of the Equinox Sect. of which Mr. Aleister Crowley is the presiding genius, and which we illustrated by exclusive photographs. After describing in detail the performances of which we were an eye-witness, we promised, in conclusion, that in the near future we should have something more to say about Crowley's history and antecedents. We now proceed to redeem that promise.*

#### The Ancient Rites of Eleusis.

We propose in the first place to give a brief sketch of the ancient rites of Eleusis, from which presumably Mr. Crowley has derived the performances of which we gave an account in our previous article.

The Rites of Eleusis take their name from Eleusis, a city of ancient Greece, and though little is known of their form by reason of the fact that the mysteries perished with the destruction of Eleusis in A.D. 396, yet tradition has handed down some data from which it is possible to reconstruct their general outline. Demeter, so the legend runs, incensed at the rape of her daughter Persephone, betook herself to Eleusis and there dwelt for the space of a year, plunged in solitary mourning for her child, in a temple built for her by the pious natives. Her advent, however, was in the nature of a calamity for those pious folk, as during her year of residence the Earth brought forth no increase, and the human race would have perished had not Zeus, on whom she had some sort of claim—possibly on the score of arrears of alimony, he being the father of the said Persephone—relented and ordained that Persephone should return from Hades. On the return of Persephone mother and daughter are reunited, the corn grows again, and once more all's well with the world. With a parting benison to the good folk of

Eleusis, Demeter prepares to exchange her austere temple for the more congenial atmosphere of Olympus. But before quitting Eleusis Demeter laid down the lines of the services which were to be held in her honour after she had gone. These were what came to be known as the Eleusinia—the rites of Eleusis.

### **The Original Ceremonies.**

So much for their origin. With regard to the ceremonies themselves the details are most nebulous, and there is marked divergence of opinion among the authorities. Lobeck in his "Aglaophamus," published in 1839, gives most minutiae. We are told that during the nine days before the festival the pious fasted, taking sustenance only between sunset and sunrise. At the commencement of the ceremonies, which started at Athens, a proclamation was issued ordering the immediate departure of all strangers, murderers, and undesirable. From this apparently comes Mr. Crowley's "banishing rites of the pentagram," to which we referred in our previous article. On the following day the initiates were bathed for outward purification, and were then decked in a fawn skin as their only garb. This was followed by public sacrifices to Demeter and Persephone, and by a private sacrifice of a sacred pig to Demeter by the initiates; and various ceremonies were also gone through *in camera* by the Order. From the time of the purification of the initiates by immersion the ceremonies were of a dual character, the public ceremonial and festival open to all—barring such aliens, murderers, and undesirable as had come under the ban of the opening injunction—and the private ceremonies open only to the initiates of the Temple. These last were under the leadership of a high priest known as the Hierophant, a man vowed to a life of strict and saintly chastity, whose duties were to show and explain the sacred symbols. Besides the virtue of chastity the Hierophant had to possess a good, clear voice for intoning. His right hand man was known as the Daduchus—the torchbearer—whose office it was to bear the sacred torch and relieve the Hierophant in the chanting. He, too, had to combine the virtues of chastity with a good voice and presence. For the female portion of the retinue the qualifications were not quite so searching, for the Hierophantis—priestesses dedicated to Demeter—were required to live a life of chastity "during their term of office."

## **Initiates and Their Myths.**

Initiates to the Order were required to pay a large fee, and the aim of initiation into the mysteries was that they should be gradually weaned from things of earth—in which category presumably was included the aforesaid premium—and have their higher impulses stirred. From this point the portrayal of the Mysteries of Eleusis is given by the Hierophant and his retinue, and from these rites all but the initiated were rigorously excluded. The mystics commemorated first the myth of Demeter and Persephone, starting with the rape of Persephone; and M. Stephani says that there can be no doubt that the scene of Baubo was given in all its indecent coarseness. Next was shown the union of Jupiter with Demeter; the resistance of the goddess; the god's ruses and final attainment of his desire, from which consummation sprang Persephone. In the next myth is shown how Zeus in guise of a serpent rapes Persephone, who gives birth to the god Bacchus. Then followed the complete myth of Bacchus—Zagreus. Finally the initiates drank a libation and consumed their nocturnal meal. The nine days' abstinence are said by some writers to correspond to the nine nights' continence of Roman ladies in honour of Ceres. As a French writer pithily puts it: "Nulle part il n'est question de l'emploi des journées qui s'interscalaint entres les nuits mystiques. Il est en effet probable que l'on n'y faisait rien de particulier et que les mystes les donnaient au repos, pais qu'ils veillaient toute la nuit."

## **A Tolerant Critic's Opinion.**

It is generally held that the rites contained scenes of the greatest license, and that there were many symbols of a coarse nature; for example, those represented by the Hierophant and the Priestess portraying the union of Zeus and Demeter, and later of Zeus and Persephone, which entered into the higher worship. Clement d'Alexandrie, most temperate of writers and tolerant of critics, says: "In any case it is true that the priest is chambered with the priestess alone, to give to the spectators the verisimilitude of conjugal union between the god and the goddess," and concludes, "La hariesse d'un tel rite suffrait a légitimer les protestations et les révoltes des Peres de l'Eglise chrétienne." Such were the Eleusinia as handed down by the ancient authorities, and from which the Rites of Eleusis, portrayed by Mr. Aleister Crowley, have presumably derived.

## **East and West Intermingle.**

The number of rites in Mr. Crowley's series is seven, and he has been apparently influenced in his choice of that number by the fact that it corresponds with the number of the planets, and he has ordered the sequence by the rate of their progress across the heavens.

Into the ancient Greek ceremonies Mr. Crowley has interpo-  
lated many Eastern observances, with which his long wander-  
ings and research in the East have rendered him familiar.

The result is the ceremony which we endeavoured to de-  
scribe a fortnight ago. Our readers will recollect that in sum-  
ming up we made the following remarks: "We leave it to our  
readers, after looking at the photographs—which were taken for  
private circulation only, and sold to us without Crowley's  
knowledge or consent, and of which we have acquired the ex-  
clusive copyright—and after reading our plain, unvarnished ac-  
count of the happenings of which we were an actual eye-  
witness, to say whether this is not a blasphemous sect whose  
proceedings conceivably lend themselves to immorality of the  
most revolting character." Remember the doctrine which we  
have endeavoured faintly to outline—remember the long peri-  
ods of compete darkness—remember the dances and the heavy  
scented atmosphere, the avowed object of which is to produce  
what Crowley terms an "ecstasy"—and then say if it is fitting  
and right that young girls and married women should be al-  
lowed to attend such performances under the guise of the cult  
of a "new religion."

## **The Personnel of Crowley.**

We now propose to give a few details of Mr. Aleister Crow-  
ley's career up to the present time, and we shall then once  
more leave it to our readers to determine whether or not our  
remarks as to his precious "sect" are or are not well-grounded.  
Alexander Edward Crowley—he assumed the Christian name of  
Aleister later in life—was born about 35 years ago. His father  
was an eminent member of the "Plymouth Brethren," and  
young Crowley was brought up in the odour of sanctity. He  
was educated privately, and afterwards went to Trinity College,  
Cambridge. There he made the acquaintance of Mr. Gerald  
Festus Kelly, and after leaving Cambridge these two spent  
some years in Paris studying art. From Paris Crowley went to  
the East, where he disappeared for some time, but subse-

quently returned to Paris about the year 1902, and became a disciple of Rodin. About this time he wrote an effusion entitled "Rodin in Rhyme," which he dedicated to his master. During this sojourn in Paris he made the acquaintance of the sister of his friend Mr. Festus Kelly, who was a widow, her husband, Capt. Frederic Skerrett, having died three years previously. He became very friendly with this lady, and in the following year, July, 1903, they met again at Strathpeffer in Scotland. Crowley proposed marriage to her, was accepted, and the marriage took place on the following day.

### **A Man of Many Names.**

In the marriage certificate he gave his name as MacGregor, but his father's name was given as Edward Crowley. After the marriage the happy pair went to live at Boleskine, Foyers, Inverness-shire, a large house with about 50 acres of land which Crowley had bought some years previously. This house he had fitted up in an ultra-aesthetic manner. He had one room covered entirely with mirrors, which he called a temple. Shortly after his marriage Crowley raised himself to the peerage, under the title of Lord Boleskine, he having previously, in Paris, gone under the style of Count Skerrett. In 1904 a child was born of the marriage, which died 21 months later. Shortly after the birth of the child, Crowley and his wife started for the East, where they traveled for about a year, and in 1906 they were at Hong-Kong. There his wife was in a delicate condition, but in spite of this he left her alone there, himself going to America, and the unhappy woman had to travel all the way home to her father's house in England, where her confinement took place. Crowley afterwards joined her at Chislehurst, and they then went to live at a house in Warwick Road, Earl's Court, which was taken in her name. In the summer of 1909 she found herself unable to stand Crowley's brutal treatment any longer, and on July 21st, 1909, she left him. On August 5th she learnt from the charwoman that her husband had had a woman staying with him in the house the previous night. Some time before that Crowley had asked his wife to take care of a child of one of his intimate friends, and she, of course, presumed that it was his friend's child. However, she accidentally opened a letter addressed to Crowley which gave the address of the mother of the child, a Miss Zweek, and Mrs. Crowley, on going to see this person, learnt that Crowley was the father of the child. This Miss Zweek was a milliner in the Burlington Arcade.

## **How the Sect Originated.**

A decree of divorce, with custody of the child of the marriage, was granted to Mrs. Crowley in the Edinburgh Courts on November 24th, 1909. Shortly before this, Crowley had started a half-yearly magazine called "The Equinox," which purported to deal with mystical and occult matters, and out of which was evolved the sect which we have under discussion, and which is technically known as the A..A.. Other stories are about Aleister Crowley, dark and forbidding stories, but we prefer to confine ourselves to indisputable facts—and we ask our readers, after reading this bare and unvarnished statement of facts, to say whether Mr. Aleister Crowley, with the record which we have outlined above, is likely to be the High Priest of wholesome or helpful doctrines, and whether this is the sort of man to whom young girls and married women should be allowed to go for "comfort" and "meditation."