

JOHN BULL
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Is A New Smyth-Pigott Among Us?

Mr. Aleister Crowley's Blasphemous and Prurient Propaganda.

A "new religion" is usually viewed with suspicion in this country, but Mr. Crowley is just the person for such an enterprise. He is a man of good birth and education, with distinguished, almost pontifical manners. He has traveled over all the unusual parts of the world and investigated fantastic things with zeal, if not with discretion. He has probed the secret recesses of most Oriental religions and has made a special study of all the endless literature of magic and mysticism. Though he has never yet succeeded in catching the long ear of the public, he has been a voluminous writer, and has published works which fill many shelves. "Konx Om Pax" and "777" have already been noticed in this journal. To the uninitiated, they appear like the outpourings of an extremely clever lunatic, now solemnly revealing the secrets of the ancients, now running off into the most delightful nonsense, now assuming the role of the preacher, now frankly pulling legs. His chief efforts have been concentrated upon the composition of really remarkable poetry. His rhythm and metre and melody are often quite perfect, and as a lord of language he runs Swinburne very close. Often he goes very near to the borderland of insanity.

His work, however, is spoiled by the intrusion of wild, erotic, and disgusting images and startling blasphemies, which restricts his writings to private circulation, though it possesses an artistic enchantment quite apart from its appeal to pruriency and debauchery.

His present "mission" was heralded

in March of last year by a portly publication called *The Equinox*. The idea, evidently, is to attract the public to the teachings of medieval alchemists or magicians. The propaganda consists in assembling a number of ladies and gentlemen in a dark room where poems are recited and a violin is played with considerable expression amid choking clouds of incense, varied by barbaric dances, sensational interludes of melodrama, blasphemy and erotic suggestion.

Our Representative's Report.

By special favour, or good fortune, or both, I was able to get free admission into the chamber of mysteries, which others less fortunate than I could not enter without paying in advance a fee of £5. In the corridor there stood none other than Aleister Crowley himself—a man of fine physique and with all the appearance of an actor—in a long white garment which reminded one of a cassock one moment and a Roman tunic the next, although undoubtedly it was neither the one nor the other. He vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared. Then there came among us, for a few brief seconds, a woman, with strong features set in a deathly pale face. Someone said, "That is Leila Waddell. She plays the violin and takes the chief part in the mystic séance."

A few of my own sex, in evening frocks, some looking as though they were strangers in the place, were enquiring for the dressing-room, and were informed there was only one such room, used by both sexes. A figure in a brown, monk-like frock, with face completely hidden by a cowl, passed among us, handing around typewritten sheets explanatory of the performance, and then it was time to visit the mystic chamber.

"Master of the Temple" and "Mother of Heaven".

The room was in semi-darkness, a bluish light hanging from the ceiling at the far end, a heavy smell of incense pervading the air, while the solemn stillness and hushed voices helped to enhance the weirdness of the place. I was taken to the front row, and a large cushion was given me to sit on. There were evidently no rules as to the prose one should adopt, for the evening I saw some very Bohemian attitudes. To say the least, the cushions were not conducive to comfort, but those people behind me fared worse still. They sat on low wicker and bamboo footstools; several of these gave away during the performance, letting the unsuspecting occupants down, and not too gently! Presently the door was closed and locked, the low blue light fell pale and mystical upon a male figure sitting behind a cauldron, with a drum between his knees; he beat the drum with his hands, paused, and then resumed the beating, and from a small door behind him entered a number of male and female figures, ten or twelve, clothed come in white, some in brown. He ceased to beat the drum, and one of the male fig-

ures then performed the "vanishing ritual of the Pentagram," which is designed to keep away evil influences. He then lighted a fire in the cauldron, and, crouching behind, recited. Next, he joined with the brethren in an endeavour to arouse someone whom they called the "Master of the Temple." I could not refrain from a feeling of envy at his ability to slumber through such a din! They failed to wake him, and the same brother appealed to the "Mother of Heaven." She appeared in the person of Leila Waddell, played an invocation, and the "Master of the Temple" was at last aroused. I was not surprised!

Our Representative Embraced.

He came forward, crouching behind the cauldron, and recited a most blood-curdling composition, filled with horrible allusions to "the stony stare of dead men's eyes," &c., &c. After all, one couldn't blame him for getting angry at being disturbed, I suppose. However, suddenly he lifted what looked like a tin of Nestlé's milk, and pouring the contents on the flame, extinguished the fire, declared that "there is no God," that everybody was free to do just as he or she liked, and left the audience in utter darkness! Not the slightest ray of light entered the room, and the atmosphere seemed heavier and more oppressive than even. There was a sound as of people moving quietly about which added to the uncanniness. How long this lasted I do not know, but all of a sudden an arm was placed round my neck, and a moustache pressed to my cheek—someone had kissed me!

The Dead Men Fed.

The next moment the blue light appeared. The mystical figures were moving before me, and I watched, fascinated. The presence of a traitor among them was suspected, and a man clad in white, sword in hand, sought this traitor among the crouching figures. What a weird picture it was! With an unearthly scream he fell upon one of the male figures, and, dragging hi, forth, "slew" him before our eyes. After this there was more violin music, and a wild barbaric dance in the misty, smoky blue light. One little scene that chilled my blood occurred when the lights were extinguished. In the utter darkness, and after a long pause, in which one could hear one's own heart beat, a male voice, a terrible voice, called out: "My brethren, are the dead men fed?" "Yes verily, the dead men

are fed," came the reply. "My brethren, upon what have the dead men fed?" "Upon the corpses of their children," was the horrible answer. I had had enough, and was most heartily glad when it was all over.