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Astounding Secrets of the Devil Worshippers' Mystic Love Cult

Revealing the Intimate Details of Aleister Crowley's Unholy Rites, His Power Over Women Whom He Branded and Enslaved, His Drug Orgies, His Poetry and Mysticisms, His Startling Adventures Around the Globe as "the Beast of the Apocalypse"

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Chapter VII.

Aleister Crowley wearing the Hood and Robe for His Weird Séances and Devil-Worship Ceremonies in New York, Detroit and Elsewhere.

I just got a radio message from Aleister Crowley's "holy abbey," perched on a Sicilian mountainside above Palermo, Sicily, overlooking the Mediterranean.

It was a "commercial wireless" and it came "collect," full rate. It was in answer to a cable I had sent asking him to mail me certain photographs.

Two or three words would have sufficed for his answer.

Instead of that, when I tore open the envelope, this is what stared me in the face:

"DO WHAT THOU WILT SHALL BE THE WHOLE OF THE LAW. EVERY MAN AND WOMAN IS A STAR."

And after three lines of this, at about ten dollars a line, three words tacked on the end like an afterthought, "am sending pictures."

I suppose I should have been surprised and annoyed, but I wasn't. Crowley has never let his own money—or that of his friends—interfere with preaching his extraordinary "new religion."

I happen to know that, on quitting Cambridge University, he had a fortune that ran close to a hundred thousand pounds. So far as I know, he hasn't got a nickel of it left—and most of it has been spent (squandered, if you like) preaching, teaching, writing this "Do What Thou Wilt" doctrine.

If you happen to take a trip up the Hudson this Spring, in one of the boats plying between New York, West Point and Albany, you will pass a rocky island in the river, some hundred miles above Manhattan.

It is called Aesopus Island. And if you look closely at the flat rock surface fronting the channel you may see traced upon it, in huge, crimson, weather-beaten letters:

"Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be the Whole of the Law."

This sign must have amazed thousands of tourists when it was bright, new and easily legible. I wonder if any of them ever dared to put it into practice.

Of course it was Crowley who painted it there. I can see him now, in the basement of the Brevoort Hotel, with his baggy English knickers, solemnly announcing to a surprised circle of Greenwich Villagers that he was going into a "magical retirement." I can see him—and their increasingly surprised faces—when he later exhibited the equipment for his "magical retirement"—an old canoe, two moth-eaten blankets and five immense cans of red house paint.

No provisions. Not even so much as a box of soda crackers. And not a cent in his pocket. He had spent his last twenty-five dollars on the paint.

"But how are you going to eat?" someone asked him.

"Remember Elijah and the ravens," he replied with superb gesture. "Heaven will provide!"

Blasphemy? Or a childish faith? I haven't the remotest idea.

But it actually turned out that Providence, or luck, or something, did provide.

It didn't send Crowley manna, but something much more modern, and infinitely better suited to his whim—a pretty Italian

countess in riding breeches, who not only supplied food for him in his "magical retirement," but cooked for him and waited on him like an Oriental slave.

However, that is getting ahead of my story. You shall have it all presently—both sides of it—Crowley's own version and that of the pretty little countess. And a rare story it is. You would have to go back to Chaucer to find its parallel. Sir Gilbert Frazer, of Oxford, who writes about comparative religions in the Encyclopedia Britannica, once said about Crowley that his chief fault was that he had been born "five hundred years too late—or five hundred centuries too early."

Where did he get it, the "Do What Thou Wilt" doctrine, which he has been preaching so recklessly and passionately all his life, and will preach, I think, until he dies?

I happen to know, and there are a great many people, I believe, who will be interested to learn the real truth about it, briefly. Crowley's family belonged to a sect of religious bigots in England, called the "Plymouth Brethren." There is nothing quite like it now in the United States. It corresponds approximately to the worst of the narrow-minded "Puritan" type that flourished in New England in pre-Colonial days—the kind of false Christianity that takes all the joy out of life and believes that happiness is wicked. His childhood, therefore, was dismal and repressed. This distorted, so-called "Christianity," that was not real Christianity at all, came to him simply as a series of "Thou shalt nots," forbidding him to do everything he wanted to do—including many of the most harmless pleasures. When he began to think for himself he rebelled violently against it, and came to the conclusion that any religion which manifested itself in such a way was wrong—was an obstacle to human happiness and freedom.

Yet he was by nature strongly religious—like all mystics. So he set about to find a new religion. If he had begun amid different surroundings, if Christianity had come to him in a faire guise, I think it quite likely he might have become a Christian mystic. As it was, he shook the dust of England from his feet and buried himself in Central Asia in the hope of finding something better. He spent years in the study of religions, found none made-to-order that pleased him perfectly—and so he invented one for himself. Because the Commandments of Christianity, which he hated, seemed a series of "Thou shalt nots," he took as the sole commandment and creed of his new religion, "Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be the Whole of the Law."

It is really based, at the bottom, on an extraordinary faith in human nature. He believes that by becoming absolutely "free" in thought and deed, a race of supermen and superwomen will finally be evolved. Indulgence in the grosser appetites he regards as

"unimportant." The weak, who succumb, he thinks, should be eliminated anyway, and so will be no loss to humanity. The strong, eventually, will rise above most passions—and by a curious twist he thinks they will "rise" quickly be experiencing them. A dangerous doctrine, obviously, for poor weak mortals to learn that our own Emerson preached a variation of it. So did Thoreau. So did Swinburne. So did Shelley. So did Walt Whitman. But they contented themselves with merely "preaching" it, as a sort of philosophical abstract for intellectuals only. The difference in Crowley's case is that he actually practices it, and when he preaches it—he shouts it to the crowds.

So it was that Crowley, starting up the Hudson on a fine Summer morning for his "magical retirement" on Aesopus Island, carried with him five gallons of red house-paint, instead of the food that would have been taken by a sensible man.

Part of the Aesopus Island is farm land, and consequently the farmers of the neighborhood came out to it frequently. Crowley landed there at night, and when some men arrived the next morning to tend to their unripened crops they beheld him, by the water's edge, in front of a shabby little tent, kneeling on an Oriental rug, garbed in a monk's coarse, black robe, praying to the sun.

Courteously and with the utmost solemnity he explained to them that he was a "holy man," retiring for a time from the world to pray for the salvation of humanity. He explained further that his "holy views" had prevented him from bringing along any food, and that he would be very much obliged if they would occasionally give him something to eat.

Inside the shabby tent they caught glimpses of richly bound books. Here, at any rate, was no ordinary beggar. You would expect that a hard-headed up-State farmer would have scant patience with such a peculiar visitor. But Crowley had a way of getting along with all sorts of people when he wanted to. And for a couple of weeks the farmers actually did feed him.

It was like a chapter from the life of some long forgotten hermit who lived in the Middle Ages. Nobody but Crowley would ever have thought of doing such a thing in twentieth century America on the Hudson River. The farmers brought him eggs, hugs of milk and early "roasting ears." And Crowley, squatting all day on his prayer-rug in the sunshine reading his mystical books, getting what he needed to eat without having to raise his hand, was blissfully happy.

It was during these early days of his "magical retirement" that he chalked out "Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be the Whole of the Law" in enormous letters on the rocky cliffs facing the river and filled in the outlines with his red paint, so that all the excursion-

ists on the river boats could read the inscription. The neighbors let this pass as a crazy whim though they didn't like it.

However, it was a totally different thing that got Crowley "in dutch" with the natives. Like many another general whose campaign was going well, he made a grave tactical blunder. He put on a pair of knickers, and with them a pair of Scotch plaid golf stockings, with tassels on the cuffs.

Now for some curious reason, "up-State" farmers have an intense dislike of knickers. They may forgive a man for being a forger or a thief, if there are extenuating circumstances, but a man who will deliberately wear "short pants" arouses immediately their distrust and dislike. Crowley, the "holy man" in a coarse black robe, was one thing; but Crowley garbed like a "dude tourist" from the city, with tassels on his golf stockings, was a different matter. So they brought him no more food. They pointed out bluntly that if he wanted it he could go to the nearby "general store" and buy it, like any other "camper."

For the next two days Crowley fasted. But this was carrying holiness a bit too far. So the "prophet" pulled up his belt another notch, got to the mainland, hiked to the nearest small town that had a telegraph station, and sent a rush message "collect" to the pretty little Countess Guerini, who was then in Westchester County, inviting her immediately to visit his "Summer camp" on the Hudson, and giving her explicit instructions how to get there.

Countess Guerini, London Society Favorite and Big Game Hunter, Whom Crowley Hastily Sent For When Death by Starvation Threatened to End His "Magical Retirement."

The Countess Guerini had known Crowley when he was rich, in London. She had also encountered him when he was hunting

big game in Africa. "Summer camp" sounded elaborate and attractive. And taking for granted she would find servants, bungalows, motor-launches, cool drinks and cooler breezes, she came.

Garbed in nifty riding breeches, with a big trunk full of sports clothes and semi-formal evening gowns, she got the shock of her life. She arrived at twilight and was dumped, with her trunk, on the rocky shore of Aesopus Island by a boat that immediately put back to the shore. There was Crowley, kneeling on his prayer-rug, back in his monk's black robe. And there was the shabby little tent. And there stood the petite and exquisite Countess in her sports clothes.

"I am at my devotions," said Crowley solemnly. "You must wait." While the Countess waited for a half hour, with growing anger and suspicion, the "prophet" addressed esoteric prayers in Hindustani to the rising moon.

"And now that this disgraceful farce is over," said the angry little Countess, "will you be kind enough to conduct me to your Summer camp?"

"But, my dear, where are your eyes?" demanded Crowley with a diabolical grin and a pompous wave of his hand. "You have arrived. The camp is here. And I hope you've brought something for supper."

La Guerini gazed with horror at the shabby little tent and with increasing rage at Crowley. "What a dirty trick! I shall go straight back to the city tonight."

"You can't do that, my dear; you can't get off the island. You'll have to spend the night. You needn't be afraid. You may have this palatial pavilion for yourself. I shall sleep, or meditate, among the rocks."

"But I must have my bath!" she rejoined.

With another of his wicked grins Crowley spread out his arms as if to embrace the whole Hudson River. "But I'm afraid you'll have to supply your own soap and towels," was his remark.

This was too much—much too much— for the Countess. She burst into hysterical tears and fled into the despised tent, which offered the only refuge, and sobbed herself to sleep, determined to leave at dawn.

Why didn't she leave the next morning? I really don't know. But she remained. And she was not in love with Crowley, then or at any other time. She was a good soul beneath her frills, and from what I know of women I think she stayed because she discovered that Crowley was hungry—that he hadn't had anything to eat for three days.

In the mass of contradictions that made up Crowley's character, there was a streak of something that, for lack of better words, I might describe as pathetic, childlike. It was the thing that made many people, men and women, keep a sincere affection for him, despite his dreadful faults.

Every little while the "Monster" and "Beast" became just a sort of bad little boy, posing and doing naughty things to shock the grown-ups—and then you felt sorry for him, and liked him, and forgave him everything.

I think it was this side of his character, more than anything else, that kept the Countess on Aesopus Island. For she stayed there nearly two weeks—and people who saw them beheld a situation that you would regard as fantastic and impossible even in the plot of a musical comedy.

The very next day she went over to the mainland in a rowboat, visited the "general store," and came back with a lot of canned stuff and other food.

And Crowley—with a selfishness that was also characteristic—now that his stomach was full again and food provided for tomorrow, paid not the slightest attention to the young woman who was making this sacrifice.

Aleister Crowley as the Countess Guerini First Knew Him—
A Rich, Young Londoner and Poet. She Found a Surprising
Change When She Visited Him on Aesopus Island.

Once assured that she was not going to desert him, he went back to the business of his "magical retirement" as if she were no more than a human servant—or a slave of the lamp sent by magic to wait upon him.

All day long, squatting or kneeling in his coarse black robe, he would pray or meditate. Half the night, with the aid of a flickering candle, shielded by a crevice in the rock, he would read his mystical books.

The Countess, still in her rising breeches—which were about the only garments that she had brought fit to be worn in such a place—cooked for him and waited on him as uncomplainingly as if she had been captured in the Arabian desert or bought in the slave-market of Samarkand.

"It was the first time I had ever done any work," she said afterward in New York; "the first time I had ever done anything to help anybody else, and I believe I really liked it.

And so this extraordinary episode ended without scandal. But presently Crowley returned from his "magical retirement" and took his "Do What Thou Wilt" doctrines to Detroit, where they

helped break up homes, got onto the front pages of the newspapers and ended in the Ryerson scandal, about which I shall tell in my next chapter.

(To Be Continued)