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FOR THE THELEMITES

ROSE AND ALEISTER CROWLEY'S STAY IN EGYPT IN 1904
A STUDY OF THE CAIRO WORKING
AND WHAT IT LED TO

BY
PERDURABO ST



FRATER PERDURABO, to whom this revelation was made with so many signs and wonders, was himself unconvinced. He struggled against it for years. Not until the completion of His own initiation at the end of 1909 did He understand how perfectly He was bound to carry out this work. (Indeed, it was not until his word became conterminous with Himself and His Universe that all alien ideas lost their meaning for him). Again and again He turned away from it, took it up for a few days or hours, then laid it aside. He even attempted to destroy its value, to nullify the result. Again and again the unsleeping might of the Watchers drove Him back to the work; and it was at the very moment when He thought Himself to have escaped that He found Himself fixed for ever with no possibility of again turning aside for the fraction of a second from the path.

The history of this must one day be told by a more vivid voice. Properly considered, it is a history of continuous miracle.

THE EQUINOX OF THE GODS, 1936 E.V.



Soror Virakam – Mary Desti, née Dempsey (1871-1931). Through her second marriage she became Mary d’Este Sturges. After her divorce she became Mary d’Este. Later she changed it to Mary Desti. Frater P. and Mary d’Este Sturges had a short affair during which in a dream Mary came in contact with Ab-ul-Diz, the head of five White Brethren, who wished to communicate with Fra. P. It was Ab-ul-Diz who gave Mary the name Virakam. Note that in relation to the Ab-ul-Diz Working Virakam is mentioned as Mary d’Este Sturges, and not Mary d’Este, since a “Note” by her in *Book Four – Part Two* is signed using the name Mary d’Este Sturges.

An old acquaintance of Crowley was in New York City at the time of his arrival. Mary Desti, who under the name Mme. Desti made perfumes in Paris, was reported staying with friends in New York City in the beginning of April, 1915 E.V., and had lost all in Paris by the war.²⁸⁴⁴ Mary Desti, or, Mary Vely Bey, had also been doing business as dealer in perfumes at 347 Fifth Avenue, but had filed a petition in bankruptcy on December 23, 1914 E.V.²⁸⁴⁵ Desti also worked as a playwright and had several plays produced in New York.²⁸⁴⁶ Whether Crowley met Desti, whom he based his main character on in *The Butterfly Net* (published as *Moonchild*), which he wrote in 1917 E.V., is not known to me, but perhaps he did. Around May, 1915 E.V., Desti went to France as a Red Cross Nurse for four months.²⁸⁴⁷ Desti was born as Mary Dempsey on October 10, 1871, in Quebec, Canada – later she called herself Mary d'Este.²⁸⁴⁸ She died in Manhattan, New York City, on April 12, 1931 E.V., at the age of fifty-nine, of superabundance of white corpuscles in the blood, a disease that she contracted after the tragic death of her friend Isadora Duncan – the funeral services were held in her apartment, 603 Fifth Avenue, on April 14.²⁸⁴⁹ She is remembered by Thelemites as Soror Virakam, the one who in November, 1911 E.V., brought Crowley in contact with Ab-ul-Diz, the "head of the 5 White Brothers", first "seen" by her in a dream, and the next day she communicated with him in a trance in a hotel room in Zürich, a contact which gave birth to the inestimable "Ab-ul-diz Working" and to "Book 4", whose first part Frater Perdurabo and Soror Virakam wrote together in Posillipo near Naples after the Ab-ul-Diz Working in the Palace Hotel, St. Moritz (Figure 35) – and later they also wrote *Book 4, Part Two* together.²⁸⁵⁰ And she is remembered by others, among other things, as Mme. Desti of 4 Rue de la Paix in Paris, the inventor of profound perfumes, weird cigarettes and cigarette cases, and for introducing mauve powder and the vogue for green and blue hair! Later in the 1920s she opened a studio on Fifth Avenue in New York City where she purveyed costly hand-painted shawls, perfumes and dresses. At that time she was married to her fourth husband, an English-born ex-Army officer Captain Howard L(eonard) Perch (1890-1957), who had served in the British Indian Army, a bachelor who she had married in St. George Hanover Square, London, in November, 1920 E.V.²⁸⁵¹ Her third husband was Vely Bey, the son of Ilias Pasha, court physician of Sultan Abdul Hamid, the last

²⁸⁴⁴ New York Tribune. New York, NY: New York Tribune. ♦ Sunday, April 4, 1915, p. 4. (*WOMAN LOST ALL IN PARIS BY WAR; Quit Costly Shop, and Landlord's Claims Bankrupt Her - Asks United States Help*, p. 4.) ♦ For Mary Desti, see also note⁹⁵⁹ above.

²⁸⁴⁵ See: *The American Perfumer and Essential Oil Review*. New York, NY: Perfumer Publishing Company. ♦ Vol. IX, No. 11, January 1915, p. 301. (*TRADE NOTES*, p. 301.)

²⁸⁴⁶ Sunday Pictorial. London, England: Sunday Pictorial. ♦ Sunday, September 5, 1915, p. 5. (*PASSING PAGEANT. A FEW REMARKS ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN IN THE NEWS; Nurse and Playwright*, p. 5.)

²⁸⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 5. (*PASSING PAGEANT. A FEW REMARKS ABOUT MEN AND WOMEN IN THE NEWS; Nurse and Playwright*, p. 5.)

²⁸⁴⁸ Some of Mary Desti's papers are at UCLA in California (Department of Special Collections, University Research Library, UCLA): <https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt5779q4kv/?query=mary+desti>

²⁸⁴⁹ *TIME*; The Weekly Newsmagazine. Chicago, IL: TIME, Inc. ♦ Vol. XVII, No. 16, April 20, 1931, pp. 38-9. (*MILESTONES – Died. Mary Desti*, 59, pp. 38-9.) ♦ The Sun. New York, NY: The Sun. ♦ Monday, April 13, 1931, p. 27. (*Mme. Mary Desti*, p. 27.)

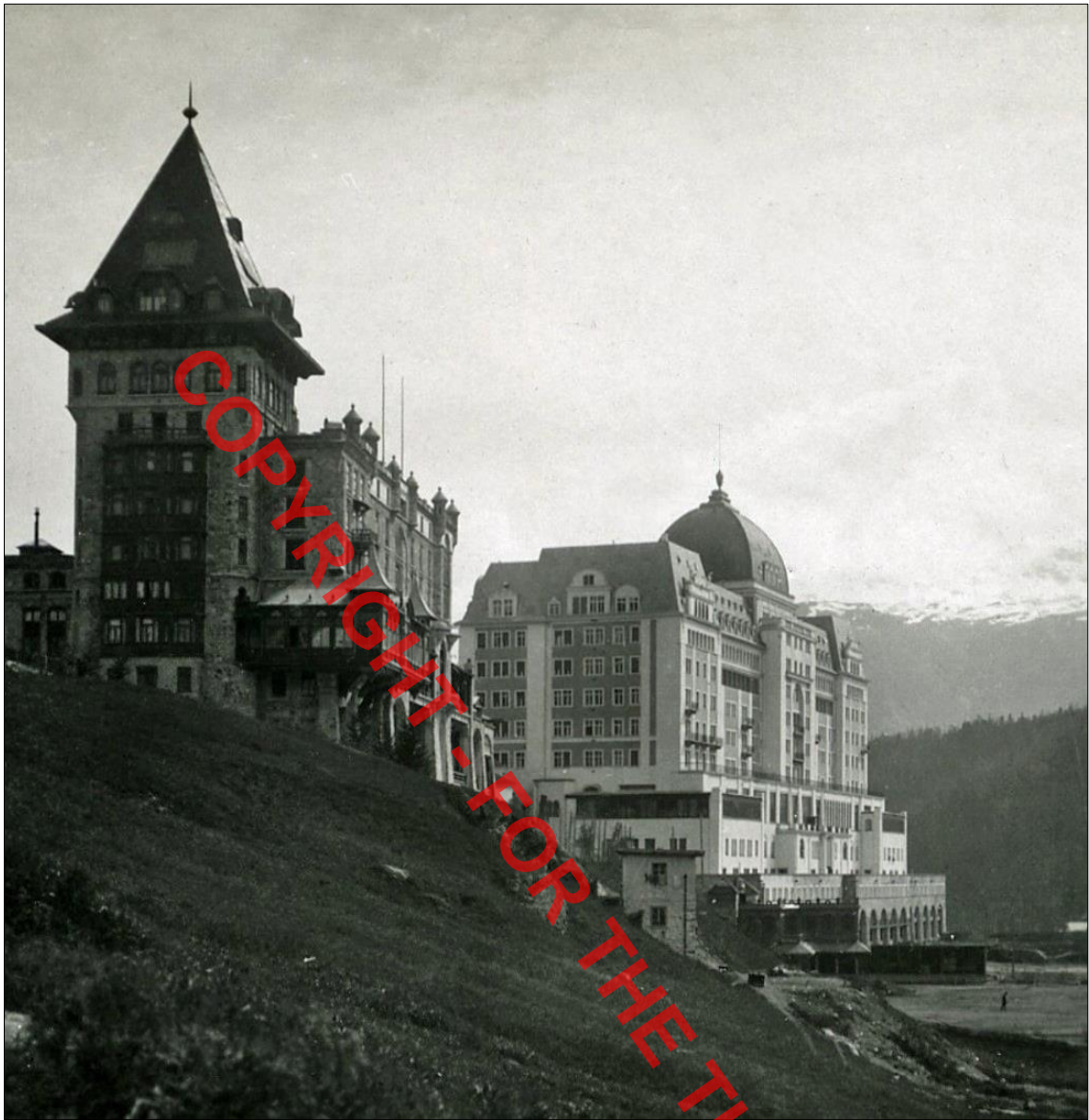
²⁸⁵⁰ For the Ab-ul-diz Working in St. Moritz, Switzerland, see note¹³⁸⁷ above.

²⁸⁵¹ GRO – From various official documents. ♦ The marriage was also mentioned in the *Dundee Courier* under the heading "*SECRET MARRIAGE OF MME. DESTA* [sic].", and where "Mme. Desta" was quoted for saying that she was thirty-eight years old – the bridegroom was thirty – although she at that time was forty-nine years old! Furthermore, the notice mentioned her as a widow, but Vely Bey was not dead! ♦ *Dundee Courier*. Angus, Scotland: Dundee Courier. ♦ Tuesday, November 16, 1920, p. 6. ("*SECRET MARRIAGE OF MME. DESTA* [sic], p. 6.") ♦ Howard L. Perch died in Hammersmith, London, in 1957 E.V.



FIGURE 35. *Palace Hotel, St. Moritz*

Artistic postcard, c. 1911 E.V., showing the Palace Hotel, St. Moritz-Dorf (Village of St. Moritz) in Switzerland by winter. It was in this huge Gothic pile with Gothic arches and hand-carved wood that the Ab-ul-Diz Working took place in November and December 1911 E.V. Frater Perdurabo and Mary d'Este Sturges – Mary Desti, née Dempsey (1871-1931) – arrived on Wednesday, November 22, 1911 E.V., and took a suite. This suite became the temple of the Working called 'The Ab-ul-Diz Working', wherein the "head of the 5 White Brothers", Ab-ul-Diz, communicated with the Seer Virakam (Mary d'Este Sturges) and Fra. P. about "The Book IV. Your instructions to the Brothers", a book that Fra. P. had to find (write) and return to the Brothers. St. Moritz, which in Romanic dialect is San Murezzan, is situated in the Eastern Alps in the Engadine valley on a mountain-terrace above St. Moritzer See (St. Moritz Lake), and is the highest village (1830 metres) in the Engadine. The village, a famous health and winter resort, had in 1911 E.V. 1600 inhabitants. The luxury hotel – today known as Badrutt's Palace hotel – opened in 1896. Note that the artist has removed the large Grand Hotel built in 1864 and located next to the Palace Hotel (on the right)! © From the author's collection.



1900s photograph showing, in the foreground, the Palace Hotel, St. Moritz-Dorf, Switzerland, and behind it the Grand Hotel.



Vestibule, Palace Hotel, St. Moritz-Dorf, 1910s.

sultan of Turkey, who reigned from 1876 to 1909 E.V., and Mary Desti had apparently decided that Vely Bey had died in the war and therefore spoke of herself as a widow, however, she and her new husband met Vely Bey on the street one day in Paris!²⁸⁵² Several writers state that Desti's marriage with Vely Bey took place in 1911 E.V., and others that it was in 1912 E.V., however, it was in 1912 E.V., exactly as stated later by Crowley. According to the register of marriages in England & Wales the marriage between the two took place in Marylebone, London, on February 12, 1912 E.V.²⁸⁵³ Vely Bey, a former guard to the deposed sultan of Turkey and former Turkey Consul to Mexico, had in 1906 E.V. founded Vizier Cigarette Co. in Chicago, IL.²⁸⁵⁴ The company was not a success and soon folded. He had apparently also opened a restaurant, Femina, in Forty-eighth street, just west of Sixth avenue, in New York City around the beginning of January 1916 E.V.²⁸⁵⁵ However, shortly after its opening it went bankruptcy.²⁸⁵⁶ It was through her marriage to Vely Bey who boasted a skin lotion (Elias Pasha's elixir, an elixir that came from Vely Bey's father, who besides being a physician also was 'Vice Admiral') supposed to contain beauty secret properties that Desti became interested in cosmetics and beauty treatments and opened a beauty salon in Paris.²⁸⁵⁷ Vely Bey was as a Turkish subject at Kingston, Jamaica, interned by the British in 1918 E.V.²⁸⁵⁸ Vely Bey and his father, Ilias Pasha, appeared in *Moonchild*, respectively as "Abdul Bey" and "Akbar Pasha". Crowley wrote in *Confessions* about how his relationship with Virakam ended:

The programme was cut short. The secret contest between the will of Virakam and my own broke into open hostility. A serious quarrel led to her dashing off to Paris. She repented almost before she arrived and telegraphed me to join her, which I did, and we went together to London. There, however, an intrigue resulted in her hastily marrying a Turkish adventurer who proceeded to beat her and, a little later, to desert her. Her hysteria became chronic and uncontrollable; she took to furious bouts of drinking which culminated in delirium tremens.

The partial failure of our partnership was to some extent, without doubt, my own fault. I was not whole-hearted and I refused to live by faith rather than by sight. I cannot reproach myself for this; for that, I have no excuse. I may nevertheless express a doubt as to whether full success was in any case possible. Her

²⁸⁵² For this, see: Ean Wood. *Headlong Through Life: The Story of Isadora Duncan*. Lewes, East Sussex, UK: Book Guild Publishing, 2006, p. 382. (*Chapter Seventeen; The Russian Temperament of Isadora's Six Star Pupils*, pp. 321-90.)

²⁸⁵³ A copy of the couple's Marriage registration states that: "Vely Bey; 34 years; Bachelor; Banker's Agent" on "Twelfth February 1912" married "Mary d'Este Sturges, formerly Dempsey, Spinster; 33 years [sic, but 40!]; The divorced wife of Solomon Sturges" at the Register Office in the District of St. Marylebone. • The marriage was mentioned in the Chicago paper *The Day Book*, February 24, 1912: "Mrs. Solomon Sturges, former Chicago divorcee, has been married in London to Veli [sic] Bey, former guard to the deposed sultan of Turkey." • The Day Book. Chicago, IL: The Day Book. ♦ Vol. 1, No. 129, Saturday, February 24, 1912, p. [31]. (*CHICAGO DOINGS BRIEFLY TOLD*, p. [31].)

²⁸⁵⁴ "VIZIER", a trade-mark of tobacco products registered in the United States of America in 1906 E.V. • Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office. Washington, DC: The Office. ♦ Vol. 124, No. 9, Tuesday, October 30, 1906, p. 2871. (Ser. No. 16,601 "VIZIER") • The Lakeside Annual Directory of the City of Chicago. 1906. Chicago, IL: Chicago Directory Company, p. 2357. ("Vizier Cigarette Co | Vely Bey pres[ident] | 260 Clark")

²⁸⁵⁵ The Evening Telegram. New York, NY: Evening Telegram. ♦ Tuesday, January 11, 1916, p. 18. (*Paris Atmosphere in New Restaurant*, p. 18.)

²⁸⁵⁶ New York Herald. New York, NY: New York Herald. Wednesday, February 16, 1916, p. Twenty-one. ("*The Femina Restaurant Corporation, restaurant and café*")(*Bankruptcy Matters*, p. Twenty-one.)

²⁸⁵⁷ See: The Knickerbocker News. Albany, N.Y.: The Knickerbocker News. ♦ Thursday, August 6, 1959, p. 17A. (*Preston Sturges, Film, Stage Director, Dies at 60*, p. 17A.)

²⁸⁵⁸ See: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C2617704>

*own masterless passions could hardly have allowed her to pass unscathed through the ordeals which are always imposed upon those who undertake tasks of this importance.*²⁸⁵⁹

Mary Desti married four times [perhaps/perhaps not, there was a very short marriage before Biden?] – her first marriage, which she later described as ‘A disastrous runaway marriage’, was with the father of her son, a man named Edmund C. Biden, and her second marriage was to a wealthy Chicago stockbroker, Solomon Sturges (1865-1940).²⁸⁶⁰

Desti's son of her first marriage the American playwright, screenwriter and film director Preston Sturges, born Edmund Preston Biden, (1898-1959), was thirteen years of age when his mother and Aleister Crowley met, and he did not like his mother's new lover and Crowley mentioned him in *Confessions* as: “Virakam's brat – a most god-forsaken lout.”²⁸⁶¹ Later when Preston Sturges wrote his autobiography he probably thought he wrote a screenplay and was exempted from wasting his precious time on tireless research and therefore he wrote the following pretentious balderdash:

*My mother, under the appellation of Soror Virakam and under the delusion that she was temporarily a Babylonian uhu or call girl, took down in spiritualistic shorthand an entire manual of black magic known as Book Four. This work was dictated to her from the dark blue yonder by a Babylonian pimp working under the name of Abduliz [sic, Abuldiz].*²⁸⁶²

Desti was an intimate friend of the American dancer who revolutionized the art of modern dance, Isadora Duncan, born Angela Duncan (1877/1878-1927), and in February, 1929 E.V., one and a half years after her death Desti published the biography *The Untold Story: The Life of Isadora Duncan, 1921-1927*.²⁸⁶³ Isadora Duncan had died on September 14, 1929 E.V., in Nice, France. She was strangled when an enormous silk scarf she was wearing, a gift from Desti, got tangled in the rear hubcaps of her open car.

Desti also worked as a playwright and had several plays produced in New York. The first play she wrote was apparently a ‘problem drama’ called “*The Freedom of the Soul*.” – a single production was given at Ravinia Park, Illinois.²⁸⁶⁴ Her second play, “*The Law*”, had première at

²⁸⁵⁹ *Confessions*, pp. 680-1.

²⁸⁶⁰ For Edmund C. Biden [?1871-?1935], see: *Diane Jacobs*. Christmas in July; The Life and Art of Preston Sturges. Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press, 1992, pp. 7-8. (*Part I: Sentimental Education. Chapter 1*, pp. [3]-16.)

²⁸⁶¹ *Confessions*, p. 678.

²⁸⁶² *Preston Sturges*. Preston Sturges by Preston Sturges; Adapted and Edited by Sandy Sturges. New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1990, p. 76. (*15 Chapter*, pp. [73]-84.)

²⁸⁶³ *Outlook and Independent*. New York, NY: The Outlook Company. ♦ Vol. 151, No. 7, February 13, 1929, p. 268. (Review signed “E. M. Benson” of “*The Untold Story. By Mary Desti: Horace Liveright. Published February 10.*”) (“*EVERY DUNCAN ENTHUSIAST has been waiting for just such an authentic account as Mary Desti has given us of Isadora's last frenzied unrecorded years. [...] This is one story, certainly, that was worth the telling.*”)(*Speaking of Books*, p. 268.) ♦ *Mary Desti. The Untold Story: The Life of Isadora Duncan, 1921-1927*. New York, NY: Horace Liveright, 1929. ♦ Isadore Duncan's year of birth is generally believed to have been 1878, however, her baptismal certificate which was discovered in San Francisco in 1976 E.V., records her year of birth as 1877.

²⁸⁶⁴ *The Chicago Daily Tribune*. Chicago, IL: The Tribune Co., Publisher. ♦ Friday, March 15, 1912, p. 3. (*MEET HERE; WED IN LONDON*, p. 3.)

Garrick Theater in Chicago on November 21, 1907 E.V.²⁸⁶⁵ Only four months before the première of *"The Law"* Desti had experienced a true drama on the sea. She and her son were onboard the large German liner SS Kronprinz Wilhelm when the liner struck an iceberg. *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle* quoted her saying about the accident:

Mrs. Mary d'Este Sturgis, a cabin passenger, telling the story of the collision with the berg, said:

"It was about 12:30 on Monday morning [July 8, 1907 E.V.] when the shock came. I had been sitting up in my stateroom as had the rest of the passengers in the first cabin. My 9-years-old boy was in bed, having been too tired to remain up. The first I knew was when I was thrown to the floor. The fog horn had been blowing continuously for seven hours, making sleep impossible. Then came the crash and, nervous as we already were, we were fairly panic-stricken then. I threw some clothes about my boy and carried him into the main saloon. There a dozen or more women had gathered and fainted. Others were praying about the saloon, while overhead we heard the crew running about and the hoarse orders issued by the officers.

"When the first crash came there was a sound as if water was pouring into the ship. Afterwards we learned that it was a shower of snow and ice that had tumbled on the deck overhead when the bow of our ship sliced off a piece of the iceberg that we struck.

"The crunching noise was terrific. Until the officers came down below, which seemed a long time afterward, but was, in reality, within a few seconds of the first crash, we did not know but that we would sink. The officers told us that the ship was not damaged and that we were perfectly safe. In the meantime many of us rushed to the upper deck, but the officers sent us downstairs again.

*"For ten minutes after the Kronprinz came to a dead stop, we lay to while the officers made an examination. Then we proceeded as before, very cautiously, with the fog horn still blowing. Not a soul slept all night."*²⁸⁶⁶

Four years and nine months later on April 14, 1912 E.V., the White Star liner Titanic struck an iceberg and sank, leaving 1,513 dead.

²⁸⁶⁵ Ibid. ♦ Friday, November 22, 1907, p. 9. (*"The Law. A Drama in Four Acts. By Mary d'Este. – Presented at the Garrick theater, Chicago, by the Donald Robertson Players, Nov. 21, 1907."*)(*NEWS OF THE THEATERS*, p. 9.) • This review stated: *"Mary D'Este" is known to be the nom de plume of Mrs. Solomon Sturges, and it is understood that this is her first essay at the fashioning of dramas.* However, the same paper stated in 1912 E.V. in connection with her marriage to Vely Bey that she two years after her marriage to Solomon Sturges – which took place in October 1901 – went to Germany, and that she on her return to America *"wrote a problem drama called "The Freedom of the Soul."*": *"She had been married only two years when she decided to go to the camp of Isadora Duncan at Grunewald, near Berlin, Germany, to study dacing. She returned to America and wrote a problem drama called "The Freedom of the Soul." A single production was given at Ravinia park [Illinois], and it caused much comment because of the liberal Jigger of "freedom" in the plot."* • Ibid. ♦ Friday, March 15, 1912, p. 3. (*MEET HERE; WED IN LONDON*, p. 3.) • In 1926 E.V. and 1929 E.V. Desti co-wrote two plays: *'Selling a Husband'*, 1926 E.V.; and *'Isodora; or, Aphra'*, 1929 E.V. • Catalogue of Copyright Entries. Part 1: Books, Group 2. New Series, Vol. 23, Part 1; First Half of 1926; Nos. 1-8. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1927. ♦ No. 4, 1926, p. 709. (Dramatic Compositions: *"Selling a husband; a comedy in 3 acts, by L. Waller and Desti [i. e. M. Desti]"* • Catalogue of Copyright Entries. Part 1, Group 3. Dramatic Compositions and Motion Pictures. Vol. 2 for the Year 1929; Nos. 1-12. United States Government Printing Office, Washington, 1930. ♦ No. 10, 1929, p. 300. (Dramatic Compositions: *"Isadora; or, Aphra; a play in 2 acts, and a prologue, by Mary Desti [i. e. M. D. Perch] and C. Randolph."*

²⁸⁶⁶ The Brooklyn Daily Eagle. Brooklyn, New York City, N.Y.: Brooklyn Daily Eagle. ♦ Wednesday, July 10, 1907, p. 1. (*Liner Struck Iceberg, Causing Panic Aboard*, p. 1.)

Desti experienced another drama in 1925 E.V., as narrated by the *New York Evening Post* under the headings: "Art Dealer Robbed, Hurt – Mme. Desti Loses Shawls Worth \$2,000 From Fifth Avenue Studio":

Madame Mary Desti, proprietor of an art studio at 603 Fifth avenue, is recovering today from bruises incurred while grappling with a thief who tried to make off with shawls value at \$2000 during an exhibition.

*Madame Desti, after chasing the thief downstairs from her studio and falling most of the way with him, pursued the man down Fifth avenue into Forty-eighth street. He jumped into a taxicab and disappeared. Madame Desti said the design instantly would attract attention if the thief attempted to dispose of the articles.*²⁸⁶⁷

The brave woman was at the time of the incident fifty-three years old!

"Desti's" – the name of Madame Desti's 1920s perfume business – was in London located at 6, 7 & 8, Old Bond Street. In London in October and November 1923 E.V. Madame Desti appeared in a weekly broadcast programme titled "Beauty Culture."

Pearson's Magazine, another monthly New York magazine edited by Crowley's friend Frank Harris, former editor of the London *Vanity Fair*, wrote about *The International* and its new editor in October 1917 E.V.:

The International for August looks good. It is now edited by Aleister Crowley, and he has put in it stories of Anatole France and Arthur Schnitzler that everyone should read.

*Aleister Crowley is a strange and original personality. He has gone up and down the earth seeking, not whom he may devour, but to learn and to know. He has a touch of the mystic in him, but at the worst is always a born writer and poet. What he will do is still on the knees of the gods; but he has already written a good deal that is interesting. He is an Irishman by birth, and can therefore see the English from the American angle, which exasperates them but is very wholesome for them. There are sure to be interesting things in *The International* under his editorship.*²⁸⁶⁸

The notice was as already mentioned illustrated by a picture of "ALEISTER CROWLEY (From a *Psycho chrom* by Leon Engers-Kennedy) [sic]".²⁸⁶⁹ At the same time as the notice appeared in *Pearson's Magazine* Crowley published a piece titled "Robbing the Poor Man of His Beer?" in *The Brewers' Journal*:

Whatever may be the powers exercised by any government, there is one thing which cannot be done without a revolution. That is to interfere with the customs of the people.

[...]

The man of the common people has so little pleasure in his life. It is as crazy as it is criminal to attempt to remove the little he has got. Robbing the poor man of his beer is a desperate adventure.

²⁸⁶⁷ The New York Evening Post. New York City, NY: The New York Evening Post. Thursday, March 5, 1925, p. 6. (Art Dealer Robbed, Hurt, p. 6.)

²⁸⁶⁸ *Pearson's Magazine*. New York City, NY: Pearson Publishing Company, Vol. 38, No. 4, October, 1917, p. [168]. (In *the Limelight*, pp. [168-9.] • In the same issue was a column by Crowley entitled *Near Poetry: Mr. George Santayana*. (See note²⁸⁹¹ below) • Ibid., p. 175.

²⁸⁶⁹ Ibid., p. [168]. • See also note²³⁸⁶ above. • For Leon Engers Kennedy exhibiting his *Psycho chrom* of Aleister Crowley, see note²³⁸⁸ above.



Mary Desti's son American playwright, screenwriter and film director Preston Sturges (1898-1959), wrote later about Aleister Crowley:

"Generally accepted as one of the most depraved, vicious and revolting humbugs that ever escaped from a nightmare or a lunatic asylum, the practitioner and staunch defender of every form of vice historically known to man, universally despised and enthusiastically expelled from every country he tried to live in, Mr. Crowley was nevertheless considered by my mother to be not only the epitome of charm and good manners, but also the possessor of one of the very few brains she had been privileged to observe during her entire lifetime, that she could almost bring herself to admire. Ask me not why!"

(From Preston Sturges Private papers, quoted in: *Andrew Dickos. Intrepid Laughter: Preston Sturges and the Movies.* Lexington, Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985, p. 11; Note 22 on p. 133.)



Aleister Crowley wrote in *Confessions* about his first meeting with Mary Desti, at that time Mary d'Este Sturges, in the Savoy in London on October 11, 1911 E.V.:

"This lady [Mary d'Este Sturges], a magnificent specimen of mingled Irish and Italian blood, possessed a most powerful personality and a terrific magnetism which instantly attracted my own. I forgot everything. I sat on the floor like a Chinese god, exchanging electricity with her."

(*Aleister Crowley. The Confessions of Aleister Crowley. An Autohagiography* edited by John Symonds and Kenneth Grant. [Abridged 1-vol. edition] Correct. ed., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979, p. 676.)



(Above) Mary Desti also worked as a playwright and had several plays produced in New York. Photo, New York, 1915 E.V. Later co-written plays (Mary Desti Perch): 'Selling a Husband', 1926 E.V.; and 'Isadora; or, Aphra', 1929 E.V.



(Right) Mary Desti Perch in New York City in the 1920s.



1900s street scene from outside 4 Rue de la Paix in Paris – the address where Madame Desti had her business. © From the author's collection.

NEWS OF THE THEATERS.

THE LAW.

A Drama in Four Acts.

BY
MARY D'ESTE.

Presented at the Garrick theater, Chicago, by the Donald Robertson Players, Nov. 21, 1907. The cast:

Dr. John Morton	Donald Robertson
Mimi Morton	Alice John
Jane Woodford	Olga von Brause
Toto Frascatti	Hermann Lieb
Tonlette	Yvonne de Kerstrat
Kitty Ashton	Marion Redlich
Walker Lamont	Edward Longman
Carey	J. R. Barrie
Emme	Florence E. Bradley
Signor Fevroni	Milton Sells
Frederick Heinse	James E. Nelson
Anton von Grosse	George Pierrot
Gretchen Sneider	Anna Titus
Walter at Paggain's	A. Craft

"The Law," which the Donald Robertson Players presented for the first time on any stage at the Garrick yesterday afternoon, is better than is the average drama written by an inexperienced playwright. "Mary D'Este" is known to be the nom de plume of Mrs. Solomon Sturges, and it is understood that this is her first essay at the fashioning of dramas. She has done work which is not without its merits and it would seem that should she persevere in her endeavors she might in time win success as a playwright.

The chief shortcoming in "The Law" is a lack of definiteness—definiteness in both intent and execution. The auditor is left decidedly in doubt when the final curtain has fallen as to what is the "law" which the dramatist believes is the vital one in our existence. Is it love? Is it duty? Is it to seek happiness no matter what be the cost to others? Is it to obey conventions or to defy them? Any of these may be taken as the conclusion reached in the last act of the play, and yet no one of them is clearly enough emphasized to prevent doubt as to the playwright's intention. The fault is a serious one, for a problem play—and such is "The Law"—must first of all have its problem unmistakably outlined.

The indefiniteness in execution shows itself in the presence of a large amount of "small talk" in the dialogue, which results in nothing save the wasting of time, and in the aimless coming and going of people in certain scenes. These are chiefly faults of inexperience in playwriting, and can be overcome with time and practice, but the indefiniteness in the statement of the author's intent is a vital one, and needs immediate remedying if the play is to be used after its presentation this afternoon.

The plot is improbable in its premises, but, these granted, a problem is propounded and indefinitely solved in the course of the four acts. A certain Dr. Morton befriended a strolling gypsy fiddler and his dancing wife—who was Irish, according to the doctor's own statement—and when the couple died they left him their daughter, Mimi, a girl 16 years of age, whom, at the dying mother's request, the doctor married. He sent her to school, and now, after three years, has brought her to London and introduced her to his friends. They have lived as father and daughter instead of as husband and wife, but it is the old doctor's intensest desire that some day love for him shall awaken in the girl's heart and he will have her come to him as his companion and wife. She, however, feels bound only by the tie of gratitude. The gypsy blood in her veins calls to her, and she holds the doctrine that love and love alone should govern our actions and be our guide.

A young Italian opera singer meets her, is infatuated, and she responds to his love. He declares his passion, she tells him she is devoted to him, and he begs her to elope with him to Italy. She hesitates, but her husband, being warned by the singer's jealous sweetheart, accuses her of infidelity, and, knowing now that she but wishes for her freedom, he declares that he will keep her with him and, forcing his love upon her, will show her what love really means. He kisses her passionately, and she, infuriated, leaves his house, goes with the singer, and, six months later, is found living in bliss with him in Venice. Thither goes the husband just at carnival time. He tries to induce her to come back to him, now that he is in poor health and near death, and she consents to do so. She will stay with him "till the end," but assures him that her heart is the singer's and that to this lover she will return. The curtain falls with the husband telling her in paternal fashion to stay where she is—in her lover's arms—and he will go away and die alone.

The character of Mimi is a strange and abnormal one. The gypsy longing, the wearing of a Greek costume—why her Irish gypsy mother should have dressed in Greek garb is not exactly clear—the defiance of all conventions, the strong yearning for love, the confidence in perfect truthfulness of statement, and the wish for freedom—all these make a combination confusing and distinctly trying for a sedate and respectable doctor to have with him when in London society. In a book such a character might be made into an interesting study, but on the stage it is difficult if not impossible of convincing realization.

Miss John played the part with excellent understanding, treating the character simply and directly, and doing for it about all that was possible. Mr. Robertson was the doctor and brought to it all his art, Miss De Kerstrat made a picturesque and interesting study of the spoiled and jealous sweetheart of the singer, and Mr. Lieb, as the singer, did meritorious work. The play was carefully staged and, barring interminable waits between the acts, moved smoothly and easily. The audience was of good size, and after the third act Mrs. Sturges appeared twice and bowed her acknowledgments.

MEET HERE; WED IN LONDON

Former Mrs. Sturges' Turkish
Spouse Once Chicago Man.

CIGARET COMPANY FAILURE.

Pretty Divorcee and 'Soul Dancer' Re-
newed Acquaintance Abroad.

Announcements of the wedding of Mrs. Mary D'Eate Sturges, divorced wife of Solomon Sturges, to Vely Bey were received yesterday in Chicago. The marriage took place in London on Feb. 12.

The marriage did not take place on the day for which it first had been scheduled. Mrs. Sturges overslept and the marriage was postponed a day. At the ceremony she was dressed in her classic Greek robes and sandals—the clothes which caused a Paris landlord to bring eviction proceedings against her and which were largely responsible for her first husband's suit for divorce.

The announcement of the marriage recalls the fact that Mrs. Sturges first became acquainted with Vely Bey, a native of Constantinople, in Chicago several years ago.

Whether or not Mrs. Sturges' interest in the blonde foreigner was responsible for her declaration that she would not reside in America and for her subsequent removal to Paris is known to herself alone. At any rate she deserted her husband, acquired a penchant for Greek costumes, took up the study of "soul" dancing under Isadora Duncan, and began to write "freedom of the soul" plays.

Mr. Sturges Secures Divorce.

A divorce was granted to Mr. Sturges in January, 1911. He charged desertion.

It is thought by Chicago friends of Mrs. Sturges and Vely Bey that the attraction between the two was strengthened through the latter's appreciation of Mrs. Sturges' dancing and Greek dress. They were not appreciated by her husband. Vely Bey left Chicago about five years ago, failing to make a success of a Turkish cigaret company of which he was the head. Several of his friends had invested money in the company.

Quantities of Turkish tobacco were shipped to Chicago, but business was poor and the company closed its doors. Previous to that the Turk was a translator in the foreign languages department of the Allis-Chalmers company. He resided for a time at the Virginia hotel and later had bachelor apartments with some of his friends on Dearborn avenue.

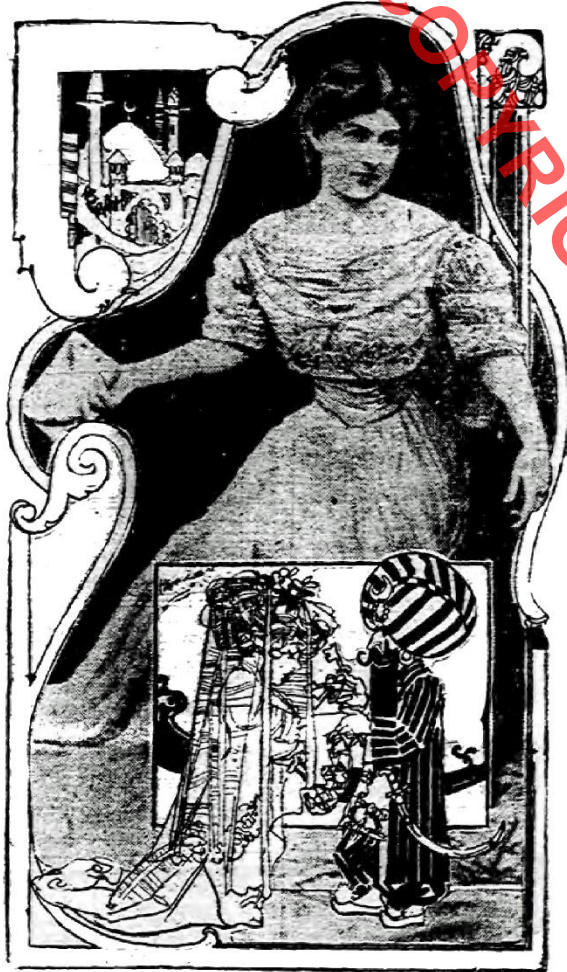
Vely Bey came from a prominent Turkish family, although he has spent most of his life in Egypt. His father is a vice admiral in the Turkish service. Vely Bey was more or less popular in Chicago. Among his friends were Mrs. Sturges, Mrs. Sidney Love, James R. McKay, Robert Hots, and S. Cobb Coleman.

In Paris Since 1906.

Mrs. Sturges had been residing in Paris since 1906. She was married to Solomon Sturges in October, 1901. She was known for her beauty and came into the limelight frequently by taking up one fad after another. She had been married only two years when she decided to go to the camp of Isadora Duncan at Grunewald, near Berlin, Germany, to study dancing. She returned to America and wrote a problem drama called "The Freedom of the Soul." A single production was given at Ravinia park, and it caused much comment because of the liberal jigger of "freedom" in the plot.

At about this time Sturges was quoted as saying he could put up with the writing of drama about unconventionality because it was infinitely to be preferred to bridge whist playing, and it wasn't so hard on a man's pocketbook.

MRS. VELY BEY



CHICAGO, Ill., March 25.—Society friends of Mrs. Solomon Sturgis, former wife of the prominent banker of that name, were surprised today by the announcement that since February 12, she has been the bride of Vely Bey, who, several years ago, was at the head of a big Turkish cigarette company in the Windy City. It was also learned that Mrs. Sturgis was garbed in the long flowing robes with which she startled Paris, several months ago, when she was married to her Turkish husband. This costume consists of long, loose robes of white, held up at the waist by a silken cord, and sandals on her bare feet.

Mrs. Solomon Sturgis of Chicago has made one more new sensation in Paris by returning from London today with a new husband. Mrs. Sturgis is the divorced wife of a wealthy Chicago broker, a cousin of the late President McKinley. She got a divorce from Solomon Sturgis chiefly because he did not approve of her unconventional play called "The Law" and also because she adopted the Isadora Duncan Greek style of dress.

Her new husband, Vely Bey, was an officer in the guard of Sultan Abdul Hamid and a son of Vice Admiral Elias Pasha, a close personal friend of the ex-sultan. Vely Bey is well known in Chicago, where he lived for several years. He is quite rich and is as well known in the American as in the Turkish colony here.

When laughing over the report that Mrs. Sturgis had recently married William W. McDowell, speaker of the House of Representatives, Montana, Veli Bey proposed to the pretty divorcee and was accepted. On the morning fixed for the wedding Mrs. Sturgis overslept herself and her anxious fiancé thought all was off, but next day the wedding took place by special license.

The wedding breakfast took place at the Savoy hotel, London, and now the happy pair is installed at No. 30 Avenue Charles Floquent. The bride was married in her Greek clothes.

Perry Chance and Mrs. Chance have been brought together in the divorce court for the purpose of giving them their last legal opportunity for a reconciliation. Mr. Chance is a brother of Wade Chance, the ex-husband of Mrs. Van Rensselaer Kruger; Mrs. Chance was a widow of the wealthy lumber man, James King of Chicago. Mr. Chance came all the way from California to be present at the attempted reconciliation, but the wife would not reconcile.

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IT HITS THE NOSE AND NOT THE HEART**



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LOVE AT FIRST
SMELL



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THE LATEST SIDE OF NIGHT CLUB LIFE : MONTMARTRE IN LONDON.

Montmartre came to London last week for at least one evening, as our photograph of Desti's Club shows. Every dancer was "got up" as an Art Student, and the mise-en-scène of bare boards, wooden bowls, and candles stuck in bottles to light the scene of merriment was complete. Madame Desti, the organiser of the club, is on the extreme right of our photograph.—[*Photograph by C.N.*]

Photograph from January 1920 E.V. from Desti's Club in London, which was first organized by her in 1919 E.V. The Dancing Club had opened in the basement of 70, New Bond Street, on December 7, 1919 E.V. Nine months after that this photograph was taken Desti married Captain Howard L. Perch, an English-born ex-Army officer. It was her fourth marriage. Her third husband was Vely Bey, the son of Ilias Pasha, court physician of Sultan Abdul Hamid, the last sultan of Turkey, who she had married in February 1912 E.V. Desti married four times – her first marriage, which she later described as 'A disastrous runaway marriage', was with the father of her son, a man named Edmund C. Biden, and her second marriage was to a wealthy Chicago stockbroker, Solomon Sturges. The above photograph appeared in the British illustrated weekly journal *The Sketch*, January 28, 1920. (Vol. CIX, No. 1409, Wednesday, January 28, 1920, p. 160.)

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(Above) Advertisement for Desti's in the British weekly illustrated paper *Gentlewoman*, April 10, 1920 E.V. (p. XXVI.) • (Right) Advertisement for "Desti Ambrée Perfumed Cigarettes" in *The Sketch*, February 2, 1921 E.V. (p. VII.)

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