

Crash! Goes Aimee Gouraud's Shrine on the Burma Road

A Jap Bomb Wrecked It, But the Memory of the Eccentric Heiress, Who Had a Dozen Husbands (5 Official), a Spirit Double Resembling Apollo, and a Pet Python for a Dinner Companion, Still Lingers On

By IVAN NARODNY

HAVE just received word from my friend, Professor Nicholas Roerich, the distinguished Russian artist, now living in Darjeeling, India, that perhaps the oddest shrine in the world has been destroyed.

A Japanese bomb, aimed at the Burma Road, went wide of its mark a few weeks ago and demolished it.

The airmen may regretted the incident as a waste of good metal and explosive, but if they had known more about their accidental target they would probably have cheered up.

For that shrine was dedicated to no Buddhist saint. In fact, it had no connection with anybody even remotely saintly.

It was a memorial to an uninhibited American heiress named Aimee Crocker Gouraud.

Aimee, who died last year, cut almost as deep a swath through the Far East in her day as the Japs are doing now.

She went there twice; as a young and beautiful woman, armed with \$10,000,000 and a taste for mysticism, and again in middle age, to revisit the scenes of her youthful indiscretions.

A brief but educational sojourn with the concubines of a Burmese prince, a nephew of former King Thebaw, was one of the highlights of her first pilgrimage. When she returned, some thirty-five years later, that dignity had been succeeded by his son, a young man of the most chivalrous disposition.

He chatted with her, swapped reminiscences of his father and ended up by saying that since she was already a legend among his people she really ought to have a shrine dedicated in her honor.

Aimee thought that would be nice, too, so, not long afterwards, Nicholas Roerich, a friend, was commissioned to do the job.

He drew up plans, put some natives to work and the first thing anyone knew there was the shrine, complete with bells, altar and a panorama of paintings depicting Aimee's Burmese invasion.

It is, of course, the avowed purpose of the Japanese to cleanse the Orient of all signs of Western influence, so the bomb with the address of Aimee's shrine written on it can not be said to have fallen beside the point.

Aimee was rich, fantastically impulsive, beautiful—a combination that does not often occur in this world. When it does, it usually makes a deep impression.

Aimee started making one when she was scarcely out of her teens. California, her native State, became aware that it had a problem child on its hands when, in 1882, a couple of roaring young bloods sat down to a poker game with Aimee as stakes. She had so agreed and so sat in and watched with understandable interest.

The game was lent added zest by the fact that her father, Judge Edwin B. Crocker, of the famous railroad-building family, had just died, leaving her the \$10,000,000.

The men playing for her were Richard Porter Ashe, nephew of Admiral Farragut and scion of the family for whom Asheville, N. C., is named, and Henry F. Gillig, past-commodore of the Larchmont Yacht Club.

They played one hand of stud. Ashe was dealt four aces, and that cold hand won him Aimee's warm one.

But the prize didn't stay his very long. The split-up came over the first stirrings of Aimee's yearning for the East, expressed rather modestly at that time in an insistence on living in New York. Ashe preferred the West. So, after the birth of a daughter, Gladys, Aimee was divorced, settled down in Larchmont, on Long Island Sound, and devoted the next seven years of single-blessedness to preparing herself for the great adventure.

This preparation consisted largely of knocking the ears off New York society with a series of improbable parties, featuring semi-nude Oriental dancers and mystic recitations. She filled her home with Bohemians and some 200 odd statues of Buddha.

Occasionally, when the hired dancers grew weary, she would entertain the guests with a few numbers of her own devising.

It was natural that Harry Gillig, her disappointed suitor, should run into her occasionally during this period, for her chosen home

was also the scene of his erstwhile distinction as a commodore. Love had not died in the Gillig breast; it had just been banked. Nor did her present extravagant behavior extinguish it.

Apparently the ex-commodore figured that she had gone about as far along the mystical line as possible and that a reaction was due; so he married her, expecting to benefit by it. Aimee rewarded him, not with the expected reaction, but with the announcement that she had at last decided to visit the countries of her spiritual adoption.

Gillig didn't want to go, but there were plenty of others who did. She set forth on her travels with a hizzarre company of Bohemians, declassé aristocrats, fakirs and fakers. Like Columbus, she aimed to reach the East by heading west.

First stop was Hawaii, then under the sway of a native king named Kalakaua. He was renowned for his fabulous collection of jewels. Aimee wanted to get her hands on these and set about it with simple forthrightness, first by offering to buy them and then, when that had failed, by turning on her feminine charm.

Kalakaua, however, was regretfully forced to inform her that the laws and customs of his people made him less the actual owner than just the trustee of the royal jewels. In other words, he was afraid she couldn't have them, unless she wanted to put the matter to popular vote.

In something of a huff, Aimee, and company, bounced out of Hawaii. Samoa, the island retreat of Robert Louis Stevenson, was her next port of call.



Yvonne Gouraud, Who Besides Being Aimee's Adopted Daughter Was Also Named Corespondent in One of Her Divorces.



Aimee With Her Pet Python, Prince Paul, Who Used to Dine With Her, Much to the Dismay of Her Guests.

Gay Young Prince Alexander Gallizne, Who, At the Time of His Divorce From Aimee, Asked the Court This Power: "How Could There Be Infidelity Where There Never Was Love?"

After Spending a Month Among the Concubines of a Burmese Prince Aimee Came Away With So Much Loot It Took an Elephant to Carry It.

age on the spot. Aimee accepted.

A month later she emerged laden with gifts: Strings of pearls, diamond necklaces, boxes full of assorted sapphires and emeralds, cloth of gold dresses, etc., etc. The problem of transporting this hoard was so acute that the prince was moved to throw in an elephant, not to mention a pair of bejeweled gates, which he thought would be a nice memento of her visit.

Evidently feeling that the time had now come to put aside worldly things and concentrate on the spiritual aspects of her trip, Aimee checked her baggage through to India and spent a month all by herself living in a tent in Tibet. This mortification of the flesh was rewarded by another visit from the Apollo-like figure.

She spoke to it, asking who it was, and this time, thanks perhaps to her diligence in picking up enough of the native tongues, was able to understand its reply.

"I am you," said the figure.

"Me?" said Aimee, startled. "What do you mean?"

"You have a masculine soul," said the figure (this must have come as a shock, after her experiences with the prince). "In your next incarnation you will be a man, just such a one as I."

Then, after prophesying rather incongruously that in her present incarnation she would be allowed twelve husbands, she said, the apparition warned her:

"If you take a 13th he will bury you." As a parting word, the golden vision added that he would appear to her once more, just before her death, and moved off across the barren Tibetan plains.

Twelve husbands seemed to allow so much scope that in India, Aimee felt safe in running through six more, none of whom, however, was taken on with benefit of Western clergy. These, plus Ashe, Gillig and the Burmese potentate made a total of nine.

With three still to go, she returned to her homeland and was astonished and pained when Gillig met her at the dock, announcing that he had heard a little about her adventures—some of her original retinue had drifted back—and wanted a divorce.

Aimee obliged him, and soon afterwards, made Jackson Gouraud, well-known song writer and man-about-New-York, her third Occidental spouse, tenth international one. When Gouraud died in 1910, she swore that his should be the name she too would die with and that she would never wed again.

As it turned out, the first of these vows was fulfilled, but not the second, for in 1914 she celebrated the outbreak of war by marrying a Russian prince named Alexander Miskinoff. Miskinoff disappointed her, not only in respect to his title, which was bogus, but also by falling in love with a young girl named Yvonne Gouraud, whom Aimee and her previous husband had adopted.

So Aimee divorced Miskinoff, naming Yvonne correspondent.

With only one husband to go—short, that is, of the one she had no desire to be buried by—she took pains to remain single for the next ten years, then became a bride for the twelfth and last time.

The lucky man was half her age, another Russian prince, genuine and named Alexander Gallizne. It came out ironically enough at the divorce which followed two years later that she had taken every precaution to ensure the success of her last match.

After convincing herself that his title was bona fide, the prince charged, she had drawn up a prenuptial contract in which she hired the use of that same title as well as, to a limited extent, of his person, for \$250 a month.

One of the terms of the agreement, it was alleged, was that he should dance with her a couple of hours each day.

The prince professed himself hurt and bewildered when she obtained a divorce on grounds of infidelity. How, he logically enough asked, could there be infidelity in a marriage not for love?

Disillusioned, Aimee secluded herself in her Parisian mansion, which she had named 'The House of Fantasy.' It was a surrealist abode, filled with Dalí-esque touches, such as a toy railroad on the dining room table, and the precious souvenirs of her travels: the jeweled gates, the clothing, the Buddhas. It was filled also with twenty or thirty feet of her pet python, Prince Paul, who would ruin the appetites of guests by coiling next to her at dinner.