

The Price I Paid for My Pearls.

By Elizabeth Van Benduysen
(Special Paris Correspondent)

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LAST Sunday at high noon Aimee Crocker-Ashie-Gillie-Gouraud, formerly of San Francisco, Cal., and more recently of No. 15 West Fifty-sixth street, New York city, globe trotter and high priestess of the occult faith, escorted from her Paris residence, No. 4 rue Alfred de Hallegue, to the owner of the Champs Elysees. There she alighted with her escort, Prince W. Cantacuzene de Tokalazy, and solemnly joined the slowly moving procession of fashion plate promenades.

And all well-trodden Paris, being there to see and to be seen, gazed in amazement as she passed.

Mme. Gouraud returned home satisfied. She had triumphed. An American woman had attracted more attention than any Parisian in the clothes captain's Sunday morning parade of frocks, frills and furbelows.

It was neither by acquisitions of toilette nor beauty of face and figure that attention was directed to this extraordinary woman. Paris has women by scores better dressed than Mme. Gouraud. Twenty years ago she was young as well as beautiful. Today she is a remarkably well-preserved woman—but no longer in the heyday of youth.

Women of a Thousand Fads

And still she had triumphed. "My beautiful pearls," she murmured emphatically. "They make Paris stare at me. I could see looks of envy on the faces of women younger, more beautiful and better dressed than I was. I noticed admiration on every hand. My beautiful pearls!" And she began shedding rags, necklaces, rings, forehead ornaments, earrings, bracelets and brooches conservatively estimated to be worth millions of francs.

"They are all mine," she went on. "Forty-eight millions of francs is what they are worth today and every heart in the salon belongs to me; tonight, I am paid 50."

And this woman, from the Pacific coast, million-

"I Have Lived Among Cannibals and Even in a Harem," Declares Aimee Crocker Gouraud, Whose Extravagant Displays of Pearls Worth Millions Are Creating a Sensation in Paris Every Time She Goes Outdoors.

ships, globe trotter, cosmopolitan, mondaine, priestess of occult faith, woman of a thousand fads, who lived among cannibals and for three months in the harem of a maharajah in India, whose truly oriental entertainments in her New York city house made even ultra-Bohemia gasp, smiled reminiscently over the sensation she had created during the Champs Elysees clothes parade, and added:

"And they were worth the price. I love them all."

Love seems to have played a conspicuous part in Aimee Crocker Gouraud's spectacular career. Two men gambled to decide which of them was to marry her. She had suggested a duel, winner to become her husband. The rival suitors, R. Foster Ashe and Henry F. Gillig, of San Fran-

This Remarkable Photograph of Mme. Gouraud with a Live Serpent Coiled Around Her Body Was Taken on a "Dare" and Won for Her the Necklace of Pearls She Is Wearing.



Mme. Gouraud Wearing Some of Her Precious Pearls, Gifts from Eastern Rulers. She Has Ornamented the Bronze Buddha with Pearls from Her Collection.

isco, preferred safety first. They played a game of "freeze out" and Ashe won. Then, peculiarly enough, following her wedding to and divorce from the winner, she married the loser. Then came her romantic marriage to Jackson Gouraud, song writer and showman of New York city, and following his death, the unexplained recording in St. Martin's Registry, at London, England, of the marriage of "Aimee Crocker Gouraud, widow, aged 40, to Alexander Mikloff, aged 28, by Registrar Joseph P. Bond, in the presence of Yvonne Gouraud and Amanda Gherson."

Tattooed for Pearls

"Absurd!" declared Mme. Gouraud later when Alexander Mikloff, who after being introduced to her New York acquaintances as "His Imperial Highness Prince Mikloff," began suing for a divorce and there was talk of a possible divorce. "Simply absurd! How can I get a divorce from a man I am not married to? The newspapers are always caricaturing me to somebody or other. Several times I have been gaily, but my legal name is still Gouraud."

But for Mme. Gouraud affairs of the heart have been merely a means to an end, and that end was the satisfying of a craving for pearls—for all the pearls a woman's heart possibly could desire. And at last she has them.

Every afternoon she may be seen at some tea room in Paris, with a part of her collection in

make any ostentatious show of them, but seems to wear them and keep them for her own pleasure.

Pearls from the expression of love for this strange woman, who has had more strange adventures than possibly any other white woman. When in India, years ago, Mme. Gouraud told me she had her body almost completely tattooed. She admitted she was a bit ashamed of that venture now, but assured me she had been very much in love with the India gentleman and it was his wish, and, besides, he had just bestowed upon her several magnificent pearls from his own collection.

She also told of her three months' trip to the desert, with only her guide and showed me the youth's picture, about as handsome a physical specimen as one can imagine. She spent three months in a harem, where the maharajah was so delighted with her wit and charm that, to the great disgust of his 300 wives, he bestowed on her possibly the most beautiful pearl she possessed, a large pure white pearl, which she wears on her forehead. (She is wearing it there in one of the pictures reproduced on this page.) Another adventure of this singular woman was a trip on a dahabiyeh up an almost unknown river, where the cannibal inhabitants helped to cheat the life of Mme. Gouraud. Her house is filled with pictures of her adventures; a life story in photographs.

The Poetry of Pearls

Mme. Gouraud has dipped into poetry over pearls, and a little volume of fantasies published by her offers a possible explanation of her passion for them. "Moon Madness" is the title of this volume, only circulated among her intimate friends. It is as vivid as the life of the remarkable woman who intends to live her quiet life henceforth with only her pearls as memories.

Here is an excerpt from her book that gives a clue to her passion for pearls:

"Pearls did not care for diamonds.

"Or rubies.

"Or emeralds.

"She cared only for pearls.

"And her feeling was more than mere admiration.

"It was love."

Then she makes her fantastic character a woman who offers to buy the pearls she loved, who stood before the jeweler's windows and devoured them with her eyes and then went home relieved of her feast. She pictures her heroine decorating her room with pictures of women wearing pearls, with books on pearls on her tables, and with all the mystic lore of pearls about her that she might trace them to the primitive originator of the sack of an empress.

She carries her heroine to the Orient where a rajah with many pearls and a love for women exchanged rare pearls for a beauty's smiles. One forgets that the heroine had a husband who was too poor to buy pearls and she evinced a natural curiosity to know where she picked up the show window of a jewel shop overnight. She tells him they are imitations and that she bought them in a shop. Then runs the conclusion:

"And he believed her.

"And she despised him for it.

"He did not know the value of pearls.

"But the Rajah of Reboha did.

"And so did Paula."

One needs only to skim through the pages of Aimee Crocker Gouraud's "Moon Madness" to understand the intensity of this strange woman's passion for pearls and the price she has faced to obtain them. But, as Mme. Gouraud herself admits, she considers them worth the price she paid for them.