

VANITY FAIR
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**ALEISTER CROWLEY:
MYSTIC AND MOUNTAIN CLIMBER**



ALEISTER CROWLEY
From a sketch by Augustus John

All the Britons who are not fighting in the Great War seem to be coming to New York this year. One of the most extraordinary of our recent British visitors is Aleister Crowley, who is a poet, an explorer, a mountain climber, an "adept" in mysticism and magic, and an esoteric philosopher; in short a person of so many sides and interests that it is no wonder a legend has been built up around his name. He is a myth. No other man has had so many strange tales told of him.

He is an Irishman, and was educated at Malvern and Trinity College, Cambridge, as a preparation for the highly respectable and sedate Diplomatic Service. But such a mission was not to his taste. He soon found that he had no liking for the beaten tracks in life. So he became an "adept," a mystic, a wanderer on the face of the earth.

"The Equinox," his work on occultism is only a part of the gigantic literary structure which he has built up in the past five years, yet the work contains the stupendous number of two and a half million words.

Mr. Crowley has a habit of disappearing suddenly from Paris, only to bob up again in Zapotlan, Tali Fu, Askole, Ham-bantonia, or Ouled Djellal. To him a long journey is an achievement, a satisfying thing in itself, like the "hidden knowledge" which he is forever in search of. In 1900 he explored Mexico without guides. Two years later he spent three months in India at an altitude of 20,000 feet. In 1906, he crossed China on foot. The success of his magic-dramas, "The Rites of Eleusis" in 1910 in London, did not tempt him to settle down there for long as he was next heard of in the heart of the Sahara.

As a naked Yogi he has sat for days under the Indian sun, begging his rice. Like every true magician he has experimented with hundreds of strange poisons in order to discover the Elixir of Life and the Elixir of Vision. He has devoted much time to the art of materializing divine influences, which he does by the aid of secret incenses; of invocations; and of rituals inherited from the Gnostics and Rosicrucians. He once masqueraded through a Cairo season as a mysterious Persian prince. He shocked the orthodox by his book "The Sword of Song"—which was virtually an attack upon everything established—but soon compelled to forgive him because of the religious fervor of his next volume—a book of devotional hymns. He holds—like all good mystics—that "All thought, or speech, is false: Truth lies in divine ecstasy beyond them."

He lives in Paris when not on his travels. One of his friends is Augustus John, the painter, one of whose beautiful sketches of Mr. Crowley we are privileged to print.