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ALEISTER CROWLEY—MAN OR DEMON?

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Accused and praised at the same time, Crowley is today an outstanding figure in occult lore. He has been called England's worst man and a hydra-headed monster, and then proclaimed a genius in cabalistic arts and sciences and a great poet to be compared with Byron and Shelley.

Here, indeed, is a name to conjure with—Aleister Crowley, a name which has lived in headlines, is forgotten, then lives again; one that invokes fear in timid souls, hate in some sections of the occult world, love and respect in others. The *New Age* in 1907 called him a “hydra-headed monster”; the *English Review*, in 1912, compared his genius to Byron and Shelley; yet a few years ago *John Bull* called him “England's Worst Man.” Wherever he has gone throughout the world, the press has found him colorful copy and labeled him “The King of Depravity, The Wickedest Man in the World, A Cannibal at Large, A Man We'd Like to Hang, A Human Beast Returns.” Yet those who know him or have studied his works, proclaim him a great poet, a genius in the knowledge of cabalistic arts and sciences, an encyclopedic mind, a master of mountain climbing and a dozen other things. His motto is, “Do What Thou Wilt Shall Be the Whole of the Law,” a motto he has abided by and which has led him into strange experiences and places. Born in England in 1875 under the sign of Leo, just rising at the time, he bore on his body the three most important distinguishing marks of Buddha. He was tongue-tied, and on the second day of his incarnation a surgeon cut the fraenum linguae. He also had the characteristic membrane which necessitated an operation for Phimosis some three lustres later. Lastly, he had upon the center of his heart four hairs curling from left to right in the exact form of a swastika.

Crowley's interest as a small boy in pure science led him to accept, verbatim, the phrase, “A cat has nine lives.” He de-

duced it was therefore almost impossible to kill a cat, and he therefore became imbued with this ambition. He caught one and first gave it a large dose of arsenic, then chloroformed it, hanged it over a gas jet, stabbed it, cut its throat, smashed its skull, and, when it had been pretty thoroughly burned, drowned it and threw it out the window. He discovered he had successfully killed it. I cite this incident because it is emphatical of his thoroughness in doing things.

He was a handsome, strange boy, and his mother nicknamed him "The Beast 666." First educated privately, then at Trinity College, Cambridge, in 1895, his adolescent hobbies had been poetry, chemistry, mathematics and chess; his chief sport rock climbing. It was in connection with the latter interest that he had his first experience with psychic phenomenon, about which he knew nothing at the time.

He was at Beachy Head, England, and one summer day he went up Beachy Head with his mother and took her down to the grassy slopes which extended eastward from Etheldreda's Pinnacle. It was something of a scramble for an old lady to reach them from the top of the cliff, but it could be done by descending a narrow gully called Etheldreda's Walk. He put his mother in a comfortable position where she could make a water-color sketch, and went off to do some climbing on the Devil's Chimney, which is some distance west of the pinnacle. The general contour of the cliff there was convex, so that he was entirely out of her sight, besides being a quarter of a mile away. Such breeze as there was came from the southwest; that is, from Crowley to his mother. He was trying to make a new climb on the west of the Devil's Chimney, and had got some distance down, when he distinctly heard her crying for help.

As I stated, at this time, Crowley had no knowledge of psychic phenomenon, yet he recognized the call as of this type; that is, he had a direct intuition that it was so. It was not merely that it seemed improbable that it could be normal audition. He did not know at the time for certain that this was impossible, though it afterwards proved to be so by experiment. He had no reason for supposing the danger to be urgent; but he rushed madly to the top of the cliff, along it, and down to the Grass Traverse. He reached his mother in time to save her life, though there were not many seconds to spare. She had shifted her position, to get a better view, and had wandered off the Travers onto steep, dusty, crumbling slopes. She had begun to slip, got frightened and done the worst thing possible: had sat down. She was slipping by inches, and was on the brink of the

cliff when he reached her. She had actually cried for help at the time when he had heard her, as nearly as he could judge; but, as he explained above, it was physically impossible for him to have done so.

Crowley regarded this incident as very extraordinary. He has never taken much stock in the regular stories of people appearing at a distance at the moment of death, and so on, nor did the fact of something so similar having actually happened make him inclined to believe such stories. There is no explanation, apart from the conventional magical theory, that a supreme explosion of will is sometimes able to set forces in motion which cannot be invoked under ordinary circumstances.

When Crowley left Cambridge at the turn of the century, he had a fortune of about \$200,000, to do with as he pleased. He went to London and lived as "Count Svareff" in a flat in Chancery Lane, which he fitted up as two magical temples. One was white, the walls being lined with six huge mirrors, each six feet by eight; the other black, (the object of establishing two was probably to satisfy his instinct about equilibrium) a mere cupboard, in which stood an altar supported by the figure of a Negro standing on his hands. The presiding genius of this place was a human skeleton, which he fed from time to time with blood, small birds and the like. The idea was to give it life, but he never got further than causing the bones to become covered with a viscous slime.

The demons connected with Abramelin do not wait to be evoked; they come unsought. One night Crowley and a friend went out for dinner. He noticed on leaving the white temple that the latch of its modern lock had not caught. Accordingly, he pulled the door to and tested it. As they went out, they noticed semi-solid shadows on the stairs; the whole atmosphere was vibrating with the forces which they had been using, trying to condense into sensible images.

When they came back, nothing had been disturbed in the flat; but the temple door was wide open, the furniture disarranged and some of the symbols flung about in the room. They restored order and then observed that semi-materialized beings were marching around the main room in almost unending procession.

When he finally left the flat for Scotland, it was found that the mirrors were too big to take out except by way of the black temple. This had, of course, been completely dismantled before the workmen arrived. But the atmosphere remained, and two workmen sank into a fainting illness that lasted for several

hours. It was almost a weekly experience for Crowley to hear of casual callers fainting or being seized with dizziness, cramp, or apoplexy on the staircase.

A pushing charlatan thought to better himself by taking the rooms, and with this object he went to see them. A few seconds later he was leaping headlong down the five flights of stairs, screaming in terror. He had just sufficient genuine sensitiveness to feel the forces, without possessing the knowledge, courage and will required to turn them to account or even endure their impact.

Spiritual facts, it is said, are the only things Crowley believes worth-while, contending that brain and body are valueless except as instrument of the soul. "Material welfare is only important as assisting men towards a consciousness of satisfaction," Crowley once stated.

From the nature of things, he therefore regards life as a sacrament; in other words, that all our acts are magical acts. His definition of magic is the spiritual consciousness acting through the will, and its instruments upon material objects, in order to produce changes which will result in the establishment of the new conditions of consciousness which we wish.

Crowley became an adept in the Hermetic Order of the G. D., based on a cipher manuscript found in the seventies or eighties of the last century by a Dr. Woodman, a magician of repute. It contained the rubric of certain rituals of initiation and the true attribution of the tarot trumps. This attribution had been sought for centuries and it cleared up a host of Qabalistic difficulties, in the same way as Einstein's admirers claim that his equations have done in mathematics and physics. Crowley made great progress after his initiation.

Magic is indubitably one of the subtlest and most difficult of the sciences and arts. There is more opportunity for errors of comprehension, judgment and practice, than in any other branch of physics. It is above all needful for the student to be armed with scientific knowledge, sympathetic apprehension and common sense. Crowley's training in mathematics and chemistry supplied him with the first of these qualities; his poetic affinities and wide reading with the second; while, for the third, he had his practical ancestors to thank. Shallow critics argue that because the average, untrained man cannot evoke a spirit, the ritual which purports to enable him to do so must be at fault. He does not reflect that an electroscope would be useless in the hands of a savage.

When Crowley was preparing for the operation of sacred magic in the above-mentioned order, he took a huge house on a Scottish estate at Boleskine, Iverness. It was a long, low, ominous building. While he was preparing the talismans—squares of vellum inscribed in Indian ink—a task he undertook in the sunniest room in the house, he had to use artificial light even on the brightest days. It was a darkness which could almost be felt. The lodge and terrace, moreover, soon became peopled with shadowy shapes, sufficiently substantial, as a rule, to be almost opaque—yet they were not shapes, properly speaking. The phenomenon is hard to describe. It is as if the faculty of vision suffered some interference, as if the object of vision were not properly object at all, as if they belonged to an order of matter which affects the sight without informing it.

During this period of preparation for the Second Order, Crowley continued the practice of vision of, and voyages upon, divers spiritual planes: Strange legends began to take shape concerning his activities.

In 1900-02, he made a trip around the world that included several mountain-climbing expeditions, making world's records by climbing what had been considered the unclimbable. He studied the Hindu spiritual discipline of Yoga, Ceylon, 1901; traveled to Cairo, 1904; revisited Ceylon for big-game shooting, 1904; walked across China, 1906.

Meanwhile he was delving deeper and deeper into magic, exposing racketeers and charlatans and making many enemies as well as friends.

He was compared to "Jack the Ripper, a bad man. . . . He eats babies. . . . He worships the devil. . . . He is an evil genius." His dozens of books were called erotic, obscene, blasphemous, indecent, corrupt, perverted, pagan, decadent, sensual and what not, and the legend of Aleister Crowley began to grow more serious. Yet in spite of all the mud flung at him, he ignored the attacks and did not defend himself against them, believing they were unworthy of reply. Crowley claims he has no motive for deception, because, "I don't give a damn for the whole human race—you're nothing but a pack of cards!"

He simply disappears from time to time and turns up in strange places throughout the world, then reappears in his old haunts in London, looking years younger, refreshed in body and mind.

He was in America before and during the World War and engaged in many escapades. Suffice to say that he worked to bring America to the side of England; and then, when America

entered the war, he became an agent of the Department of Justice. The war over, Crowley went to Sicily, where he lived in a villa called The Abbey of Thelema. There he continued to formulate his new religion, which he calls The Law of Thelema, the summary of which is, *Do What Thou Wilt*—a command from the gods to man. He was charged with establishing a love cult, because he welcomed both sexes, his religion being naturalistic. Wild stories began about bestial orgies, eating little cakes made of goat's blood, honey and grain, raw and aged, making a terrible stench; of using every drug from the Orient to the Occident, the abbey being "an inferno, a maelstrom of filth and obscenity." Italy expelled him from the island. France wouldn't have him either; so he returned to London. He tells his side of the story in an amazing book, published in 1922, called "The Diary of a Drug Fiend." The book made sensational front page news in London. One headline read, *A Book for Burning!* The publishers became frightened after the third thousand were sold and withdrew it from circulation. . . . Another campaign started against him, and he disappeared. I later saw a newspaper headline in America stating that he was dead, yet in 1929 he turned up in London. The press urged that he not be re-admitted to England, yet on his arrival in London, Crowley dined with one of the Scotland Yard chiefs!

No one seems to actually know much about him, yet everyone claims to: and some rare pamphlets have been printed about him as well as one book of one hundred copies. He makes you feel that he knows what is going on behind the scenes, not only in the world, but in others. He is a man about whom men quarrel. Intensely magnetic, he attracts people or repels them with equal violence. His personality seems to breed rumors. Everywhere they follow him. One knows him as a poet, another as a critic of American literature. Others know him as a holder of some of the world's records for mountain-climbing, or warn you against him as a thoroughly bad man, a Satanish devil worshipper steeped in black magic, the high priest Beelzebub. An actor knew him only as a theatrical producer and the designer of extraordinary costumes. A publisher said that Crowley was an essayist and philosopher whose books, nearly all privately printed, were masterpieces of modern printing. By others he is pictured as a big-game hunter, a gambler, an editor, an explorer. Some day he is a great genius, others that he is a master faker.