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The Sinister Mr. Crowley.

By David Bateman.

"Aleister Crowley," by Charles Richard Cammell. Richards Press; 15s.

In popular imagination Aleister Crowley (who died in 1947) was one of the most sinister men of our century.

C. R. Cammell, for some time one of his close friends, while having the highest regard for him as a poet and scholar, disclaims any affinity with Crowley's anti-religious beliefs and dark-magical practices. For that reason he has been able to write a memoir that is balanced with fairness and (for the most part) with objectivity.

Aleister Crowley was, by tradition, of Welsh descent, traced back to the time of Henry Tudor. Two Welshmen had a strong influence on his life—George Cecil Jones, an analytical chemist who was a keen student of the esoteric, and John Dee, a 16th century scholar (of the Welsh Royal blood), whose works on necromancy Crowley studied and deeply admired. A supremely egotistical man, he came to regard himself as "The Celtic Pendergon" in the emancipation of Ireland and Scotland.

His biographer regards him as "a formidable personality, a great lyrical genius . . . a false prophet and dangerous man." His poetry is certainly considerable (chiefly in a "sumptuously barbaric" way) though one would hesitate to accept Crowley as one of the great poets.

The man's twisted character is partly attributed to the fact that, in sensitive childhood, he was "destroyed by the prurience of Puritans." His unhappy mother even called him "The Beast." Perhaps it is no wonder that one carrying too much wealth and "the afflictions of genius" ran so wild. Crowley had his better side.