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**Piquant Personalities—
“Cabalist” Crowley**

By Francis Dickie

**A Modern Cagliostro—Master of Black Magic—
Famous War Spy—Remarkable 20th Century Figure—
Was Deported from Italy and France—Has Been Reli-
gious Leader and Daring Mountain Climber.**

A few days ago in New York city the collection of a noted bookman was sold and there appeared in Schulte's catalog of the sale 35 volumes by Aleister Crowley. To the general public this meant nothing, yet Crowley in the 20th century is as amazing a character, his adventures equally vivid and varied as those of Cagliostro in the 18th. Countless thousands of readers are familiar with the latter, due to Dumas's "Memoirs of a Physician," and Thomas Carlyle's "Life" of this notorious cabalist of the 18th. Crowley is the counterpart of the Italian. Of him the catalog says:

"Crowley is one of the strangest abnormalities among modern religious revivalists of mysticism. He steeped himself in the lore of magic and astrology, in the Elusian and Orphic mysteries, in secret expositions of Buddhistic rites. As a writer he is unique, dealing almost exclusively with those early expressions of religion. Phallicism and Orphicism. Curious stories are told about the retreat he established in Italy for his devotees."

The theory of the cabalists, both ancient and modern, is that the discovery of the "mystic word" for anything, gave them absolute mastery over that thing. Their mysticism is a medley of psychology, demonology, astrology, black magic, chiromancy and medicine. The motto of Crowley, the modern king of them is: "Do what thou wilt is the whole of the law." And, alas, and alas, how many thousands of gullible people have followed this maker of fine-sounding phrases.

Attempts Suicide.

On that night in 1929 when I first met him upon the Boulevard Montparnasse in Paris, I knew nothing of this man, though great was his notoriety and widely spread. We started across the wide spaciousness of the boulevard from the Café du Dome to Le Select. Taxis and huge lorries and private motors rushed either way with that limitless speed that only Paris permits. Suddenly Crowley stepped in front of me two quick steps, right in the path of a big touring car traveling at high speed. But French drivers are amazingly dexterous. In the nick of time the chauffeur swerved the car. The flange of the wheels grazed the curb, the car rocked a moment, steadied, went on, while a string of curses from the driver floated back momentarily upon our ears. Crowley heaved a vast sigh.

"You see, they won't hit me. I've tried it 20 times this last week, and they always miss me." There was dreadful resignation in his voice. I wish I were dead," he went on, "and then perhaps my books would be in demand and men would call me great."

As he finished speaking we set foot upon the sidewalk, and it was my turn to sigh with relief, from quite the opposite reason. We entered the Select. It was five o'clock in the afternoon. The place was strangely deserted. In a corner Crowley heaved his huge bulk along the length of the banquette. He wore a brick red coat, plus-fours to match and a golfing cap that shrieked its yellow brightness to heaven. When he took it off, he revealed a closely-cropped head of black hair with a bald streak running across it like a furrow. His heavy round face was that of an English squire, but with an addition of cunning country living seldom gives,

Well-Known Character.

In this minute, as I have already said. I knew nothing of the man's reputation. Only a few minutes later he made to me the most amazing proposition, the strangest I have had in a fairly eventful life of 20 years as a newspaperman, did I realize that this nearly allowing himself to be run down by an automobile was but a part of his artistic showmanry to grip my attention. Undoubtedly it was the excellence of his technique, combined certainly with a degree of bravery and a fine knowledge of showmanship that had given him his former success as a religious leader of a strange cult, and his reputation as a worker of black magic.

"You see," he went on, "I am rather well known in England and America. A number of my books have been published. At present I have 1000 copies stored away in London. My books are fairly scarce and are listed at good prices in the catalogs of the booksellers. But a man's books always increase in value after he is dead. Now if it could be made to appear that I had died, or committed suicide under mysterious circumstances, my books would leap up in value. That is what I propose to do, and I want an experienced newspaperman to write up this disappearance and spread it to all the papers possible. Then, with this interest aroused, I will have the thousand copies of my books offered to various old book dealers.

Amazing Career.

I repressed my astonishment with difficulty. To make so blatantly dishonest a proposition to a perfect stranger was astounding. But I saw in the man a very interesting story, so I asked, with a great show of interest, which was in no way feigned; something about the books and his life in general. At this and several subsequent meetings he told me a number of remarkable stories about himself. Queerly enough about the same time I met a dilettante from Detroit, a young man of rich parents who was interested in the occult and a follower of Mme. Blavatsky. He had seen me with Crowley and told me something of the man's adventures in Detroit. From the facts thus gathered, and from the man who had been a schoolmate of Crowley's, I can here give a brief outline of this amazing career.

Crowley, as a young man, inherited a large fortune, and at an early age took up the study of black magic. Astounding as it may sound, black magic has a large number of followers in this 20th century. Crowley's success was largely due, I am convinced, because of his thorough belief in himself and his powers. While in Paris early in 1929, he took me to see a moving picture show based on a book by Somerset Maugham called "The Magician," of which Crowley was the hero.

"Secret of Invisibility."

"The secret of invisibility," Crowley said, "is not concerned with the law of optics. It is to acquire a certain mental state—a peculiar variety of mental self-absorption. This distracts people's attention from one automatically. Thus once in Mexico City I was able to take a walk in the street in a golden crown

and a scarlet robe, yet no one saw me. Once in Calcutta at night in the street of infamy called "Culinga bazar," I was set upon by several men. I shot one of them, and was able by my power of invisibility to walk through the crowds who were quickly attracted to the spot."

Next to an absorbing ambition to write great poetry and be a master of magic, Crowley desired to climb the highest peak in the Himalayas. Between the years 1900 and 1906 he was part of three expeditions two of which reached a height of 25,500 feet. The two most successful took so terrible a toll of life from hardship and insanity that Crowley turned to other things.

There is no question that no leader of any cult of whatsoever nature has been successful without himself or herself believing in themselves and the tenets they proclaimed. Thus for the moment when I listened to Aleister Crowley, ex-high priest of the "Lamp of the Invisible Circle," and later "Order of the Temple of the Orient," tell of certain happenings in connection with his magic, so convincing were his descriptions that for the time being one felt them true.

Suffers from Magic.

In 1905, Crowley and his wife had returned to their manor, Boleskins [*sic*], in Scotland. A war had broken out among a secret order of magicians, and the greatest of these "made magic" against Crowley in Scotland.

"I had a pack of bloodhounds," Crowley related, "but he killed them all. The servants were made ill. The house had a plague of beetles sent upon it. These were about half an inch long, with a single horn nearly as long. I sent a specimen to London, but the experts declared it to be a hitherto unknown species. I at once set about counter magical work, employing the talismans from the 'Sacred Book of Magic,' evoking Beelzebub and his 49 servitors, including Nimorup, a stunted dwarf, and Nominon, a large red spongy jellyfish, and Holastri, an enormous pink bug. In this way the attacks were overcome and ceased from that time.

All of which sounds quite absurd coming from the lips of a fat, heavy-shouldered middle-aged man in plus-fours. Yet, thousands have been impressed by it; and lost money and reputations have marked the wake of Crowley's wanderings.

Edward Alexander Crowley, who assumed the title "Sir," early in life, was born at Leamington, Eng., in 1875. When only 20 years of age he had already spent much time studying oc-

cult matters. At 25 he went to Mexico and founded the order of "The Lamp of Invisible Light." In the next five years he dwelt for various periods in Honolulu, Japan and India. The greater portion was spent in India, where he studied Buddhism. Before the rock temple at Madura he dressed in native costume as a beggar and took up his position near the door. He became an expert in Yogi, a form of religion which, sponsored by many smooth-spoken priests, secured quite a following in the United States in the days previous to the Great War.

Order Founded in London.

From his various wanderings, Crowley always returned to Europe. He founded a branch of his "Order of the Invisible Light" in London. It was at this time that Somerset Maugham wrote his book about Crowley called "The Magician." Arnold Bennett also devoted a chapter of his book, "Paris Nights" to him. Against both fellow English Writers Crowley cherishes a grudge; but both are healthy and successful so evidently the magician's hatred has not assumed such proportions as to work magic against them, or else their lot would be pitiable.

Shortly after the cult was founded in London, it became whispered that strange orgiastic rites were practiced in connection with the new faith. At this time Crowley's book "The Key to the Great Mystery" was burned. He continued to produce books of poetry, novels and books of esoteric writings very rapidly over a period of years. In 1905 he arrived in Paris and was accepted in French artistic circles. Among those who he came to know intimately was Rodin, at the moment the center of an attack for his statue of Balzac.

"Rodin was more of a god than a man," Crowley said, in telling of his friendship with Rodin. He had no intellect in the pure sense of the word; he was an amazing virility constantly overflowing into the creation of vibrating visions. He told me how he had started out to do his Balzac. He had armed himself with all the documents, but after poring over them he was seized with despair. Then in a rage he abandoned all this pedantic program, and set to work on his own conception. He invited me to stay with him at Meudon, and write a poetical interpretation of his various works. I went and wrote a book 'Rodin in Rime.' This was illustrated by seven sketches which Rodin made for the book."

A British Spy.

At the outbreak of the war Crowley was in New York. He soon attracted attention for his German sympathies. The publication of violent articles against the allies in certain periodicals made him highly unpopular. Yet this apparent pro-Germanism was only a cloak to hide his true identity as a counter-spy working in the interest of England. He succeeded in gaining the confidence of German workers and thus proved highly valuable.