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**When the Witches and Sorcerers  
Held a Conclave in Kansas City**

A number of years ago in, of all places, Kansas City, I attended a curious gathering. It was made up of self-styled magicians, witches, spiritualists, clairvoyants, satanists and other practitioners in the field loosely described as "the occult." I was admitted as the friend of an influential "sorcerer" with whom I frequently drank beer at a disreputable cafe.

Anyone familiar with the ways of occultists will know at once that this was, indeed, a curious gathering. Spiritualists, for example, are unalterably opposed to magicians and witches, particularly those practicing black magic; clairvoyants are in a much different business than any of the others, and generally avoid them; and the satanists are usually engaged in waging a magical—and sometimes more tangible—war against the rest.

What brought these people together, a couple of dozen of them in all, was a summons from a gentleman who purported to be an emissary from the late Aleister Crowley, then enjoying the reputation of being the world's greatest magician (and "wickedest man," if you read the British newspapers). This alleged emissary, who called himself "Father Giraud," and who appeared at the meeting dressed as a priest (he claimed, of course, to have been defrocked), told us that he had been assigned by Crowley to organize the occultists of Britain and the United States into one vast federation "which will seize power and rule the world under the leadership of the Secret Chiefs."

The idea was typical of Crowley, but I doubt that "Father Giraud" was a genuine emissary. He had credentials, but forgery is commonplace in occult circles. His having access to the names of all of those who attended was less easily explained. While spiritualists and clairvoyants are not difficult to obtain information about, witches, sorcerers and diabolists are another matter. "Father Giraud" must have had extremely able informants in the occult underworld of the Midwest.

Nothing came of the idea, except that, or so I heard, the satanists launched a magical attack against Crowley, who died not too long after (of other causes, I feel sure). Crowley was more than a match for the Kansas City crowd. As for "Father Giraud," he vanished as mysteriously as he came, telling us to await fur-

ther instructions. So far as I know, they realized that Crowley's name while powerful enough to bring people to the meeting, was not in itself sufficient to organize them or get them to raise the funds he suggested would be needed.

My purpose in relating this story is to demonstrate that our society is made up of far more diverse groups than the casual observer might suppose. I have run across other witches, sorcerers and the like in Manila, Paris, Munich, New York and Los Angeles, those latter two cities being the real bastions of American occultism. I have also encountered yogis, clairvoyants, spiritualists and other practitioners of the occult in dozens of other places. They are there, if you are interested enough to look for them.

These are the people who, one supposes, and along with scholars in the black arts themselves, constitute the audience for the vast amounts of occult literature published (the serious works, not the popular treatises on reincarnation, instant mediumship and the like). They also keep in business such large enterprises as the DeLaurence Co., which conducts a thriving business selling magic wands, crystals, magic mirrors, amulets, talismans, incense and candles for special occult rituals, etc.

There is also a considerable market for occult literature among psychologists, who realize that this field, which emphasized concentration, unusual states of consciousness and the like, has much to teach them. Psychoanalysts have been seriously interested in occult phenomena since Freud led the way. Occultists and psychologists share the knowledge that most of the phenomena is or should be susceptible to psychological investigation. Occultists seek, however, to keep their techniques a secret. Naturally, since their living depends on it.

Good books in the field of occultism are if one does not know the sources or live in a very large city, hard to come by. However, there is one shop in New Orleans—the Coronet Book Shop—which specializes in books on the occult and books about cats. It has a rather good, though expensive selection. The last time I was there I noticed on the shelves a number of works by Aleister Crowley, including his "Theory and Practice of Magick," which is excellent. The shop is located in the French Quarter, and is worth a visit. A very excellent source of occult books is Samuel Weiser, Inc., 752 Broadway, New York 3. Weiser puts out frequent catalogs, available on request, and is good at finding volumes not listed in the catalogs. Prices are reasonable.