

The "Chevalier O'Rourke" In The *Mexican Herald*

by CSM

A comic article published in the *Mexican Herald* of Sunday, 21st of April, 1901, entitled "Mr. Dooley Climbs Popo", was written, according to Aleister Crowley's [Confessions \(chapter 25\)](#), by a *Mexican Herald* reporter who was taken to the top of Mount Popocatepetl, about 40 miles south-east of Mexico City, by himself and his friend Oscar Eckenstein. This was, according to the *Herald* itself, on Wednesday, the 17th of April, 1901. Crowley and Eckenstein were both experienced climbers while the hapless reporter was, amusingly to them, not. They ended up dragging the exhausted and hysterical reporter up the last stretch of the eighteen and a half thousand feet mountain by rope. This was their revenge for some dishonouring remarks that reflected upon their credibility as climbers published in the *Herald* earlier that month. After he recovered, the reporter took his lesson in good humour. Crowley recalled: "Having put our man through the mill, we became seriously friendly. He took his lesson like a good sportsman and made his apologies in the *Mexican Herald*, by writing a long account of his adventure in the style of the then famous Mr. Dooley."

Crowley, however, neglected to record that he had attracted the attention of the *Mexican Herald* on quite a number of occasions previously, from as early as October, 1900. Neither did he mention that all of the articles addressed him by this name: the "Chevalier O'Rourke". That Crowley had lived under this pseudonym for a year in Mexico he could hardly have forgotten; yet it was, apparently, a secret that

he took to his grave. The Chevalier O'Rourke was, supposedly, "a wealthy Scotch-Irishman, owning vast estates in different parts of the old country" ("[Climber To Leave](#)", *Mexican Herald*, Wednesday, 24 April, 1901, p2). That he did not speak with an Irish accent might not have been particularly suspicious, as the British elite were often educated in English, "public" schools.

The author of "Mr. Dooley Climbs Popo" was quite possibly the News Editor of the *Mexican Herald*, Louis C. Simonds, an Englishman by birth; the author having described Crowley as "my spurious fellow-citizen". Simonds, who had been in Mexico since about 1885, contributed on occasion to British and U.S. publications over several decades but is, perhaps, now most remembered for a profile, in the *Atlantic Monthly* of June, 1914, of the president of Mexico at the time: [Victoriano Huerta, A Sketch From Life](#).

A description of the *Mexican Herald* as it was when Crowley was there appeared in a travel book: *Mexico As I Saw It* (1902). A Mrs. Tweedie, a well-regarded, at the time, travel writer, stayed in Mexico from December, 1900 and wrote admiringly of the *Herald* and its staff:

"At the present time Mexico issues more than 360 periodical publications, including the daily and weekly newspapers, besides magazines, literary reviews and organs of various industries and interests.

Side by side with advanced civilisation is barbarism. At the breakfast table every morning one finds the Mexican Herald, printed in the English language. It is an excellent paper, with all the Associated Press telegrams, which have to travel over a thousand miles by special wire for the benefit of the readers of this enterprising "Daily." Here is the latest news, published almost as soon as it is in London or New

York, and yet, though the editors are English and American, the compositors are all Mexican Indians, not one of whom knows a single word of the language he is setting up! He does it word by word from typewritten M.S., and really the "readers" are so careful that there is seldom a wrongly-spelt word in this hurriedly-put-together daily paper. President Diaz told me he had the telegrams translated for him every day! So the President is ever in touch with the world's news.

Mr. Paul Hudson, the manager, is a most enthusiastic scholar of Mexican manners and customs, who has edited an excellent guide. Mr. L. C. Simonds, an Englishman by birth, writes the English and political articles, and Mr. E. M. Conley, formerly on the staff of the "New York Sun," undertakes the archaeology. It is a wonderful little paper, and to its contributors I am indebted for much useful information and help."

The newspaper is now considered to have been sufficiently important for it to have been the subject of this recent thesis: [A Community of Modern Nations: The Mexican Herald at the Height of the Porfiriato 1895-1910](#) (2011).

The abstract describes the newspaper thus-wise:

"The *Mexican Herald*, an English language newspaper in Mexico City during the authoritative rule of Porfirio Díaz (1895-1910), sought to introduce a vision of Mexico's development that would influence how Mexicans conceived of their country's political and cultural place within a community that transcended national boundaries. As Mexicans experienced rapid modernization led partially by foreign investors, the *Herald* represented the imaginings of its editors and their efforts to influence how Mexicans conceptualized their national identity and place in the world. The newspaper's editors idealized a Mexico that would follow the international model of the

United States and embrace Pan-Americanism. The *Herald's* depictions of the ideal, future city provided an intelligible landscape to modernity. The editors' vision of modernity had significant implications for Mexican culture. The newspaper's articles and illustrations defined the parameters of modernity providing clear depictions of the physical, political, and cultural aspects of the community of modern nations."

It has been suggested that Crowley went to Mexico at the behest of British intelligence, to work as a spy regarding oil prospects there (*Secret Agent 666*, 2008). The *Mexican Herald*, as an Anglo-American, English-language newspaper, based in Mexico City, close to the centre of the commercial and political life of the country, and to the social life of the expatriot communities, would certainly have been of interest to British intelligence. The evidence for such long-ago, covert activities are scanty and circumstantial at best, however. But contemporary readers of history often do not appreciate just how closely the ties of empire and class bound the British in those days. An educated, Oxbridge Englishman especially would have been naturally expected to be of assistance to his countrymen whenever possible even if not formally attached to a government agency.

Crowley, as the Chevalier (a French title, meaning "knight") was introduced to the readers of the *Mexican Herald* in October, 1900 after he had been, they reported, in Mexico City for about four months. An article titled "[Chevalier O'Rourke, A Redoubtable Climber is at Present in the City](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Sunday, 14 October, 1900, p13) reported the Chevalier's boast of having climbed many mountains in Switzerland considered inaccessible and that he was confident that he could climb "Ixtaccihuatl" (Mount Iztaccihuatl; also in sight of Mexico City and the fe-

male companion of the male Popocatepetl in Mexican mythology). What's more, to demonstrate his confidence that it was not as difficult as was commonly believed, the Chevalier had laid out in considerable detail, point by point, the terms of a \$1500 bet. He affirmed that he could take any fit English or American climber to the summit with him. Despite writing in *The Confessions* of having "published nothing" and having "made no claims" regarding their climbing activities, the issues of boastfulness and credibility regarding his climbing ability had been aired, if not by him, then, at least, in the *Herald*, five months previous to the affair which culminated in the publication of "Mr. Dooley Climbs Popo".

However, the credibility of the first article is undermined somewhat by a clearly satirical, if not outright scurrilous, article on the same theme titled "[Will Climb Popo](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Thursday, 27 December, 1900, p8). A Mr. J. S. Bowdle of Denver had arrived, it was reported, wishing to climb Mount Popocatepetl and had advertised for a climber to take him up. Such an [advertizement](#) had appeared the previous day in the paper and the *Herald*, commendably, did not bowdlerize its report of the result. The call was supposedly answered by "everybody's friend, the Chevalier O'Rourke, of Europe". It was reported that he told Mr. Bowdle that he had "climbed everything from a four board fence to a greased pole, and was never curried below the knees"; and that he was looking for a man to live with him in the crater of Popocatepetl "providing we find the location a pleasant place to live". Mr. Bowdle enquired whether there was any danger in climbing Popocatepetl and the Chevalier replied: "No more than stumbling over an empty tomato can in your back yard" and that "There is pre-eminently more danger in extracting the essence from a boisterous

and irreligious heifer. I am a living example.". Whether Crowley, who claimed, in his account of his time in New York on the way to Mexico, to rarely read newspapers, had this article drawn to his attention is not known.

A somewhat more respectful article, "[Bold Alpine Climber](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Saturday, 02 Feb, 1901, p5), reported that "Chevalier O'Rourke, the famous, Alpine rover" and "his mountain climbing companion O. Eckenstein" had returned to the city on the Thursday after having succeeded in climbing Ixtaccihuatl. That mountain being regarded as a slumbering lady in Mexican mythology, their acquaintance with the snow-capped "White Lady" was drawn at some length.

A more prosaic tone was adopted for an article, under the title of "[A Hard Proposition](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Tuesday, 19 March, 1901, p8). The *Herald* reported that "Chevalier O'Rourke and his fellow mountain climber, Mr. Eckstein [sic] returned yesterday" after having failed to climb the Colima volcano, as it was erupting at the time: "The chevalier for the first time in his life found something which he could not climb."

The "impertinence" that offended Eckenstein and provoked their vengeful prank was a paragraph in an article announcing the arrival of a party of young tourists from the U.S. and France: "[A Roosevelt Here](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Sunday, 31 March, 1901, p16). Particularly noteworthy and of interest to the *Herald* was the presence of one "A. Roosevelt". This was [André Roosevelt](#), who went on to become something of an adventurer himself; and also a filmmaker. Combining the two pursuits, he made the 1932 film *Goon-Goon, An Authentic Melodrama*, filmed partly on location in Bali. It was responsible for starting the Bali craze of the 1930's, which ex-

tended through to the 1950's Hollywood films *Road to Bali* (1952) and *South Pacific* (1952). As related in this summary of [Bali In Film](#): "In New York high society *goona-goona*, a Malay and Javanese term for love magic, was turned into a popular phrase. *Goona-Goona* can be credited with linking sex and magic in the popular image of Bali.". And furthermore: "The 'Bali Hai' of *South Pacific* (1958) had nothing directly to do with Bali, but everything to do with Bali's image. The island shown as Bali Hai was not in the right ocean, but the name and the soothing sea-breeze-like notes of the hit song were thought to be sufficiently close to something resembling 'Bali'. Hollywood made Bali the paradise of paradises by combining all the ideals of the South Seas into one.". Roosevelt's film even spawned the name of an entire genre of film: the "[Goona-goona epic](#)".

Roosevelt was, the *Herald* noted, a cousin to the already-famous Theodore Roosevelt. In fact, it was his father who was Theodore's cousin. Born and educated in France, one of André Roosevelt's French companions was a climber: "Dr. Thoan is a member of the celebrated Alpine Climbing society in France and discredits the claim of Chevalier O'Rourke, to being a member in good standing of this distinguished society. The chavelier [sic] and his aide Eckstein [sic] both have said they were Alpinere, but now come these gentleman with the unmistakable accent and with no Bally Bay apostrophes chopped into their names, denying our friends their thunder with painful positiveness." Ballybay is a town in Ireland, the reference being to the Irish name "O'Rouke". The society was presumably the "Club alpin francais". Roosevelt was of sufficient standing in New York society, having just worked in a family bank there for two years, for this article to be picked up by a New York paper. The doings of this party of

tourists were summarized briefly in a society column: "[Society's Sunday Review](#)" (*New-York Daily Tribune*, Sunday, 21 April, 1901, p7). There was, however, no mention of the Chevalier or Eckenstein.

Three days later, making no mention of the attack on their credibility by the three visitors, a brief announcement appeared in the *Herald*: "[To Try Orizrba \[sic\], Chevalier O'Rourke and Party Try a Hard Proposition](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Wednesday, 3 April, 1901, p8). The *Herald* reported: "Chevalier O'Rourke and his aide Eckenstein expect to leave today for the mountain of Orizaba which it is their intention to inspect from top to bottom, inside and out." They were to have been accompanied by one John Benjamin Marshall, from Kentucky, who was also a climber; and the manager of the "International Stenographic Bureau". According to an advertizement in the *Herald* (Tuesday, 02 April, 1901, p7), the bureau provided "Accurate Translations, Stenography, Typewriting, Mimeography".

The *Herald* reported, on the Thursday, the sudden departure of the Roosevelt party from Mexico. They had returned on the Wednesday morning after "some rather rough experiences" during an ascent up Popocatepetl ("[Altitude Too Much, Rough Experiences of Three Young Mountain Climbers](#)", *Mexican Herald*, Thursday, 04 April, 1901, p2). The *Herald* reported: "Fatigued by much travelling the party left this city last Monday morning after a one day's rest and the effect of the mountain's altitude came near putting some of the party out of the mountain-climbing business altogether. The strange part of the experience was that Mr. Roosevelt who led the expedition was the greatest sufferer while at the same time he knew nothing of it." Roosevelt had "lost consciousness"; meaning that he had no memory of the ascent: "When we reached a certain height", said Roo-

sevelt, "I lost consciousness although my physical condition did not seem to be impaired as I continued the journey. I joined the other boys in their explorations, photographed and allowed my blood vessels to be tapped regularly at different altitudes for the benefit of the experiments being made by Dr. Thoan, but the entire journey is to me a blank." Dr. Thoan concurred in blaming fatigue from their travels and the lack of acclimatization. The *Herald* reported that Roosevelt was glad to leave the country and that he had even said: "I believe I would die in this country".

In an article the next day ("[The North Pole](#)", *Mexican Herald*, Friday, 05 April, 1901, p2) about a coming, novel attraction at a circus, a pantomime involving a "North Pole" made of ice, the *Herald* took this playful dig at the remaining climbers: "There will be something new for the Chevalier O'Rourke and his friend Eckstein [sic] to climb next week. It will be in this city, too. It will be nothing lower than the North Pole which the enterprising Orrins have brought to this city."

Next, in "[Ascent Impossible, Holy Week Not Favorable To Mountain Climbing In Mexico.](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Saturday, 06 April, 1901, p8), the *Herald* briefly reported the return of the Chevalier O'Rourke, Eckenstein and Marshall the previous day (Easter Friday) from their expedition to Mount Orizaba, having failed to ascend it due to the lack of guides, it being "holy week" (i.e. Easter), and other obstacles. That was the [Pico de Orizaba](#), the highest mountain in Mexico, also known as Citlaltepetl. Supposedly, Crowley and the highly-organized, railway-engineer Eckenstein left on the Wednesday, not anticipating that Easter might present a difficulty, travelled part of the hundred miles to the mountain (presumably by the train, which itself took most of a day), found that there were no guides available then travelled

back (again by train) on the Friday. Of this expedition, Crowley wrote, vaguely (Confessions, Chapter 25): "We had intended to finish our programme by climbing Citlatepetl; but there were difficulties about mules and none about the mountain. We were too bored to trouble to climb it. Somehow or other, the current of our enthusiasm had become exhausted. We had achieved all our real objects and the next thing was to get ready for the Himalayas. Eckenstein returned to England and on the twentieth of April I started for San Francisco, westward bound." Crowley did not record actually going even part of the way to Mount Citlatepetl. But he does associate the abandonment of the proposal with the end of his time in Mexico. And he notes it after telling the story of the reporter being dragged up Popocatepetl, as if the attack of boredom followed that diverting incident. The *Herald* contradicts that chronology.

It was only in the Easter Sunday edition of the *Herald* that it was reported that the climbers had taken offence at their article of the previous Sunday ("[Offended Climbers](#)", *Mexican Herald*, Sunday, 07 April, 1901, p16): "Offended Climbers. Think Their Achievements Have Not Been Properly Treated. The Chevalier O'Rourke and his friend Mr. Eckenstein are said to be taking legal advice in this city with a view to prosecuting the Herald because of the alleged liberties which this paper has taken with the names of those persons. Mr. Roosevelt, of New York, who recently visited here, stated that the mountain climbers O'Rourke and Eckenstein were not members of any climbing society that he knew anything about, and the gentleman are said to have taken exception to the remark. Mr. Eckenstein also asserts he is no "aide" to O'Rourke, and O'Rourke thinks [he] never needed an aide. The chevalier [has] written a number of books, some of which are very good and oth-

ers have never been reviewed. His name when he is an author is Aleister Crowley. He is a shadow of Swinburne." Perhaps Crowley and Eckenstein were made aware of the item in the previous Sunday's edition only upon their return or, perhaps, after the poor showing by the Roosevelt party as climbers, and their departure, they felt vindicated and wished to drive the advantage home. Or perhaps it was more complicated. However, there was no further mention of the offence taken or of legal action. The *Herald* reported on the Tuesday, without reference to the dispute, that the Chevalier and "Col. Eckenstein" were to leave that evening to ascend Popocatepetl ("[Personal Mention](#)", *Mexican Herald*, Tuesday, 16 April, 1901, p8). Presumably, sometime in the previous few days, Eckenstein had hunted up the impertinent journalist in his seedy bar. It read: "Chevalier O'Rourke and Col. Eckenstein will leave this evening for a tramp up the mount of Popocatepetl after which they expect to begin the descent on the inside. If such a thing is possible they will do the inside of the crater by means of their hands and feet, no ropes nor buckets to be taken along. Otherwise they will return to the city without exploring the inside of the mountain."

There was nothing further until the unexplained and unattributed appearance of "[Mr. Dooley Climbs Popo](#)" the following Sunday. As Crowley recalled, it was written in the style of the then famous Mr. Dooley. This referred to the newspaper articles, subsequently collected into books, by the Chicago journalist [Finley Peter Dunne](#), which were very popular in the U.S. at that time. The fictional Mr. Dooley expounded upon political and social issues of the day from his Chicago, South Side, Irish pub, often to his long-suffering friend Mr. Hennessy. Mr. Dooley spoke in the thick brogue of an Irish immigrant from Coun-

ty Roscommon and the accent was rendered phonetically in a style that is now (and perhaps even then) near-impenetrable to those unfamiliar with the accent. The choice of style no doubt alluded to Crowley's adopted, Irish, O'Rourke persona; though they were aware, at least, of his real name by this time — even if they believed that *it* was the pseudonym. Or perhaps Simonds was by then aware that Aleister Crowley was his true name and he was playing along; the use of the amusingly-thick, Irish brogue referring to Crowley's lack of any discernable, Irish accent. Just what was a joke and what was kept quiet for other reasons is difficult to judge.

However, there was possibly another edge to the choice of satirical form. Dunne had famously ridiculed "Tiddy Rosenfelt", and his account of the Cuban expedition, *Rough Riders* (1899), having Dooley declare that it should have been titled "Alone in Cubia" ("A Book Review"; republished in [Mr. Dooley's Philosophy](#), 1900). Theodore Roosevelt took it so well that Dunne was often, in later years, a guest at the White House. How well the young André Roosevelt, in his early 20's, might have taken being the target of a borrowed Dooley joke is not known. But the offence having been given by the Roosevelt party, and only reported by the *Herald*, something that Crowley was unlikely to have forgotten, there might have been a sub-text to his explanation, in *The Confessions*. Regarding the cause of the criticism that he seemed to attract, he wrote: "I suppose it is the abject ignorance and narrow outlook of ordinary people that makes them sceptical about anything out of the common." The Roosevelts, of course, did not consider themselves "ordinary people". And Crowley, in his account, has Eckenstein looming large in a low bar as if he might, literally, shoot the messenger — something that does not ring true regarding the man

of whom Crowley wrote: "I have never met any man who upheld the highest moral ideals with such unflinching candour." (*The Confessions*, Chapter 18). Crowley, a known practitioner of literary slight-of-hand, allows a possible solution. The unnamed "peccant reporter" of lies who they dragged up Popocatepetl to teach him who could really climb, and who was left "oncartin" in the brain, such that he could not say whether or not they had fed his carcass to the waves of the crater, might not have been a mere, hapless journalist.

Then again, despite spelling his name correctly previously, the *Herald* had referred to Eckenstein as "Eckstein" on three occasions: the first time on March 19th, well before the Roosevelt party arrived, and the last time in "The North Pole", on April 5th, immediately before the report of them taking offence arose. It was a rare name in the Americas — but it was a name that was used in *Mr. Dooley's Philosophy* (in "The Yacht Race"): "What's th' use iv buildin' a boat that's lible to tip an' spill us all into th' wet? Turn th' matther over to th' firm iv Wiggins, Schultz, O'Mally, Eckstein, Wopoppski, Billotti, Gomez, Olson, an' McPherson, an' lave us have th' law on him.". The *Herald* reporter may, indeed, have started it. And it may well have been he who "took his lesson like a good sportsman and made his apologies in the Mexican *Herald*". But, even if he did write it, he may still have taken his cue from the Roosevelt connection with the Dooley character. And he may have taken some inspiration from André Roosevelt's similarly-rough treatment by the sacred mount.

Whoever the joke was on, and whoever wrote the Popo piece — Simonds, Roosevelt or Crowley himself — someone found it amusing enough to have it published back in England. Eckenstein left Mexico in late April after having made peace with the *Herald*. They

carried an article about him leaving Mexico and having known Kaiser William at school in Germany, and his good opinion of him as an honest leader ("[Climber To Leave](#)", *Mexican Herald*, 24 April, 1901, p2). Eckenstein intended to sail from Veracruz to New York and was considering going on to travel in unexplored regions in Canada. And they reported that the Chevalier was staying on in Mexico; though Crowley's account has him leaving on April 20th — the day before "Mr. Dooley Climbs Popo" was published.

Eckenstein carried on a feud with the (British) Alpine Club for many years, which, as Crowley explained in *The Confessions*, Eckenstein considered snobbish. Quite possibly this was an element in the dispute with the Roosevelt party. But Eckenstein was a member in good standing of a climbing club: the Climber's Club ("[List Of Members](#)", *Climber's Club Journal*, March, 1901). And the June, 1901 issue of their quarterly journal included this unusual item: "[An Ascent Of Popo](#)" — attributed only to one "Mr. Dooley". And there it has lain, forgotten, ever since.

The *Mexican Herald* hadn't quite done with the gay Shivvyleer. In August, 1901 they gaily reviewed "The Mother's Tragedy And Other Poems" under the title of "[An Awful Book, The Noted Chevalier O'Rourke Out-Swinburnes Swinburne](#)" (*Mexican Herald*, Sunday, 18 August, 1901, p16). They had, by then, realized that "Chevalier O'Rourke is the Stage Name of the English Importation who answered to the Cognomen of Aleister Crowley" and, digging deep for appropriate terms of gratuitously-capitalized approbrium in imitation of the Crowley style, the *Herald* reviewer wrote that "his latest Riot of Rhyme has the War Production Beat a Mile, and Then Some, with the Decameron of Bocaccio Away Back in the Ruck, and Ella Wheeler Wilcox on ice among the Also Rans.

It is so bad that the Author is afraid to Read it Again, lest he be Corrupted. In short, it is Destined to be Among the Most Popular Books of the Season". The Author finished with this curious allusion: "And Other Poems" made "the Book so Bad that the Chevalier had to Print it Privately, and the Name of the Printer is as Completely Lost as Teddy Roosevelt".