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Black Magic Once Detroit Cult

**Lives Ruined Decades Ago by
Sorcerer Aleister Crowley**

By William T. Noble

To worshippers in black magic cults it probably would have been just as well for Robert J. Lund to have left the books in their musty grave.

If Aleister Crowley was the man or spirit he said he was there is no doubt his ghostly image will arise from the dust of his long forgotten books and cast a hex on anyone so foolish as to stir up memories of the darkest chapter in his life.

But not a believer in such things, and scornful of cultists Crowley's threats, Lund—an international authority on magicians—is studying recently discovered bibles and recalling the weird man's experiences in Detroit.

The set of 125 books written by Crowley were found by Lund in a Detroit warehouse. They had been untouched and forgotten for 36 years.



Robert J. Lund

Painful Memory

To most Detroiters the man is only a hazy memory. But to a small band of wealthy citizens who accepted Crowley as the high priest in a cult practicing necromancy, Lund's find will restore painful, better forgotten memories.

One Detroitier lost two wives and his fortune by trying to follow Crowley's dictates. There is no telling how many other lives were ruined by the self-professed wizard who said his spirit was the reincarnation of such historic rascals as Pontius Pilate, Cagliostro and others.

The cult was so fantastic most followers rarely ever boasted about their membership.

Termed a Beast

Crowley, a rotund Englishman, once shocked his devotees by trying to prove he could make himself invisible. The experiment, said Lund, was the most astounding by an intelligent man in the annals of modern magic.

He was called a "monster of wickedness," a "beast," almost a frightening mortal whose devilish, supernatural thoughts—skillfully phrased through his natural talent as a writer and Cambridge University education—tempted many converts in Detroit and throughout the world.

"This man," said Lund as he thumbed through unpublished Crowley manuscripts and expensively bound books at his library at 8503 Hartwell, "actually believed he was a wizard."

Many Memoirs

"Modern magicians are hardworking fellows who practice hour after hour to perfect their hokum. They have no illusions that their magic is the work of the devil. But Crowley did. He honestly believed in black magic and its hexes. He is the only contemporary . . . [missing text]

Lund believes this set of Crowley books is among the most valuable in his library, already bulging with the memoirs and gadgets of world-famous Merlins.

Crowley was born in 1875 and was left a vast fortune by his parents. He became a dilettante and traveled extensively.

Malevolent Look

While a young man he became famous as a mountain climber. He wrote poetry and received excellent reviews. Crowley also dabbled in art and illustrated his books with weird paintings. But his life changed after years of travel in the Orient where he studied their magic and theosophy.

When not clothed in the robes and turban of a mystic, the round-faced Englishman looked no different than a London businessman.

But when he draped an Inverness cape about his shoulders and talked black magic, his eyes glittered malevolently and he hypnotized listeners.

In 1916 he came to the United States and wooed susceptible people with occult mutterings and his strange poems. It was about 1918 that he landed in Detroit and established a branch of his cult known as the Order of the Temple of the Orient.

He talked Albert W. Ryerson, owner of a flourishing book store, the Universal, to head the Detroit branch and use his store as an outlet for Crowley books. Uninitiated book dealers would not touch them. Other Detroiters contributed large sums of money to Crowley, who had squandered most of his inheritance.

The Black Mass

Under Crowley's tutelage cult members learned the art of celebrating the black mass. Each mass was held clandestinely and what actually happened never has been disclosed although a few of his books hint at the shadowy doings.

Women sometimes permitted their bodies to be branded with the "mark of the beast," and proudly showed it to members. Code of the cult was: "Do what thou wilt shall be the whole of the law."

At one point in his career here Crowley's experiment with invisibility left even his most avid followers aghast.

Crowley said that in the Orient he had discovered the secret of invisibility. He wanted to prove it.

Horns of Hair

He shaved his head, and sometime let two long tufts of hair grow, stiffened them with glue and shaped them like horns. He

painted his face with a dye and slipped an Inverness cape about his body.

In this fantastic get-up he walked downtown and, wrapping the cape over the lower part of his face, swooped into a restaurant where he was well known.

The restaurant was filled with his acquaintances. They stared open-mouthed at the sight and never uttered a word.

Believed Own Story

"You see," remarked Crowley, "I have discovered the secret. I walked through that place and not one of my friends saw me."

"A unique thing about Crowley," said Lund, "is that he actually believed he was invisible. It was only in his mind, but that is all that was necessary for him."

In 1922 Ryerson went into bankruptcy. It was through this trial that the cult's activities here were disclosed. Later Ryerson's wife Elvira divorced him because she did not believe in the occult.

On to Paris

After leaving Detroit Crowley continued his wandering, staying on countries only until authorities got wind of his rites and then ordered him away on the first and fastest boats. He lived in Paris for a while and announced he was writing a voluminous book about his loves.

During the war he acted briefly as a British spy. At one time he so impressed Somerset Maugham that Crowley was the main character in Maugham's book, "The Magician."

Crowley died peacefully in England in 1947 at the age of 72.

In one of the unpublished manuscripts Lund purchased, Crowley tells how to go into a trance and conjure up visions of Satan.

"But it will be difficult," said Lund. "You must have all the ingredients for the brew—dragon's blood and bat's eyebrows.