

**VANITY FAIR
27 OCTOBER 1909**

**ON THE KINCHIN LAY (Part 3)
MOUNTAINS OR METAPHYSICS (Part 1)**

**By
Aleister Crowley**

At earliest dawn, therefore, and not before, I arose and girded myself and set my tent in order, and got on my claws and hefted up mine axe, and ran at great random down the slopes, like Galahad going for the Grail. (I hope I am justified in asserting a casual connection between the purity of my heart and the decuplation of my strength.) Hardly five minutes from Camp V, I came on the place of the accident; and like the late John Keats, except that they were boots, I stood in my shoes and I wondered, I wondered, I stood in my shoes and I wondered. It was a baby avalanche on a baby slope. Exceptionally timid ski-runner as I am, I had proposed the previous morning to go down on ski. Reymond had glissaded down to the rescue; a fact which speaks volumes, that even Reymond had not discovered a cornice (Reymond, I should explain, "sees cornices" everywhere, just as some other people "see snakes.") I would gladly have started a similar avalanche and sailed down on it—head first if required—for the sheer fun of the thing, as I have done many times in the Alps and elsewhere.

There needed no ghost to come from the grave to tell me what had happened. Six men closely roped will set sliding a mass of snow where a solitary man would pass safely. Six men roped sliding down in a whirl of snow—each man hampers his neighbour, neutralises his efforts to keep on top, drags him deeper, and perhaps jerks the very breath out of his body.

There are undoubtedly uses for ropes—a lot of people would be better hanged—and there are, of course, situations in mountaineering when a rope, properly used—*PROPERLY USED*—conduces to safety.

But most people put on a rope just as an African savage hangs a spent cartridge-case to his waist to ward off fever or the attack of ghosts, and think that, as long as they have got it on, they are immune to all the shocks of Fate. Despite the tragedy—and a true Greek tragedy it is, seeing how the ulti-

mate catastrophe was involved in, and deducible, even at the first to a truly wise eye, from the characters of the Doctor and Righi—one experienced, the theory of mountain craft ever next one's heart, a certain sombre joy, such as Cassandra must have felt when she beheld tall Hium lapped with flame, and heard the crash of the ruining palaces, and the death-cry of their thousand heroes. The Doctor's last words to me had been "I don't care *that* for you!" Don't Care was made to care; Don't Care was nearly killed in an avalanche.

Considering the text of the agreement, signed by all of us—"Aleister Crowley shall be sole and supreme judge of all matters respecting mountain craft, and the others will obey his instructions," on which sole condition I had travelled 8,000 miles and contributed much good gold—this open defiance was a very flagrant contravention. Even Reymond (that morning) had been very difficult to start; but the counter to his "Tu commences a m'embêter," "Et vous a me tutoyer," had aroused his better self.

Hearing noises on the rocks below Camp IV, I did not descend the avalanche track, where the sight of two bamboos some five feet below the path puzzled me, since I still supposed the "accident" to have occurred on the steep the ice below Camp IV, but approached that camp, calling aloud "Who is there?" No answer; the noises died away. Soon they began again; I could have sworn I heard voices. Again I called, and again dead silence fell. Almost I began to think myself the prey of an hallucination. Passing Camp IV, I went down the snow, and on arriving at steep ice, saw that the snow which should have covered it had fallen away for some twenty feet of width, and only fragments of the regulated track still stuck to the ice. Here, I thought, was the scene of the catastrophe, and I began to suspect that there had been two "accidents" instead of one. Moving slowly across the bad patch, I felt that curious certitude that there was somebody behind—one which most people will recognise—a sensation, presumably a relic of some ancient savage aptitude.

Turning, I saw the pallid line of coolies, fifteen or sixteen of them, whom the Doctor had chased from me and the comfortable coolie tents of Camp V, and who had passed the night in a scared condition under the rocks. (It should be well observed that these men, unroped, had passed in safety the place where the combined weight of the roped men and the Doctor's head had caused the death of two-thirds of their number.)

They now stood silent and spectral, prepared to follow me. I warned them that they would probably be killed if they did; and told them to go round over the snow-slopes; but they answered never a word, and by dint of much step-cutting with an axe they had they got over a little before I arrived at Camp III.

At that delightful spot I found my comrades and Righi very sick and sorry for themselves; the Doctor with a back and a knee, but without traumatic injury to the brain; while, on the other hand, the cephalic enlargement from which he had been suffering had practically disappeared; Righi, somewhat sobered by his adventure to the almost complete suppression of the "Three Men in a Boat" atmosphere, with a sore rib, which nobody could persuade him was not rupture of the heart, a twisted knee, and a "partial moan," which ought to have been audible for miles.

The reason for our rear-guard troubles was soon apparent. Bahadur Singh and Salama, being in obvious difficulties with my sleeping valise and dispatch-box, which I had told them to bring, I wished to send off a couple of regular coolies to their aid, so that I could start off home next morning. But Righi whined that no coolies could ever be got to go up, that he wouldn't take the "responsibility of trying to persuade" them, and so on, till, heartily sick, I turned to Nanga Sirdar, and told him that if he wanted a good testimonial from me I had got to have those things P. D. Q.—a Hindustani expression signifying "at the earliest possible moment."

Without a murmur the thing was done, and well done. Not two, but twelve men went, and brought down not only my things, but the rest of Camp V as well. Just so the Doctor had been trying to bribe men with presents of boots and claws to take up a third of a load. The coolie, it may be explained, is always "trying it on" to see what his master is made of. For instance, one of them came complaining that for food he had "only *sattu*." "That's all right," I replied; "after next march you'll get only snow."

Even at Falut they had come to say they could go no farther, because there was no water. No water! when one could wring gallons out of one's clothes. But I told them quite solemnly that I had heard about that, and brought champagne for them. It was only their fun. But if you are fool enough to take these complaints seriously, they naturally play it up to the limit. Consequently, a man who spends his time in stupidly moaning over their wickedness, or being stupidly angry at their little jokes, cursing, grovelling, and whining, all without reason,

complains constantly of them and never gets good work out of them. They had got a soft thing and they knew it. The relation of the traveller to his coolies should be that of a father to his children. Not the foolish fondness of the American father, who tries to make up in endearment what he lacks in certainty, but the grave authority and wise kindness of the high-caste Hindu father, or the best type of British father, who teaches his sons to love, honour, and obey him. The first great rule is never to lose your temper; the second, always to keep your temper; the third, if you are really obliged to beat a man, let it be within an inch of his life! Otherwise, he will jeer at the light arm of the sahib. But of course I should have sent Righi back at once when I heard of his ridiculous antics with Mr. White's coolies. He took out his kukri and revolver and threatened them. They knew he would not dare to use either, laughed at him, and went off. But let us not leave out the supernatural interpretation of the facts.

It turns out that Righi, like most-class Italians, is intensely superstitious; he attributed his escape to a little image given him by a Lama, and confessed that he rarely took any steps without consulting it. Probably, therefore, the image was in conspiracy with the Demon of Kinchinjanga to starve me out!

It also appears that he was afraid that people in Darjeeling would "say we had treated him as a servant" and so was discontent with being appointed to the second most important duty in the expedition, that of Transport Officer. As if we were not all servants! As if the proudest title yet arrogated to himself by men were not "Servant of the Servants of God!" It is the mongrel dregs of dollar-ridden America, perhaps the only country in the world where not even the shadow of liberty may fall, that say "hired man" for "servant."