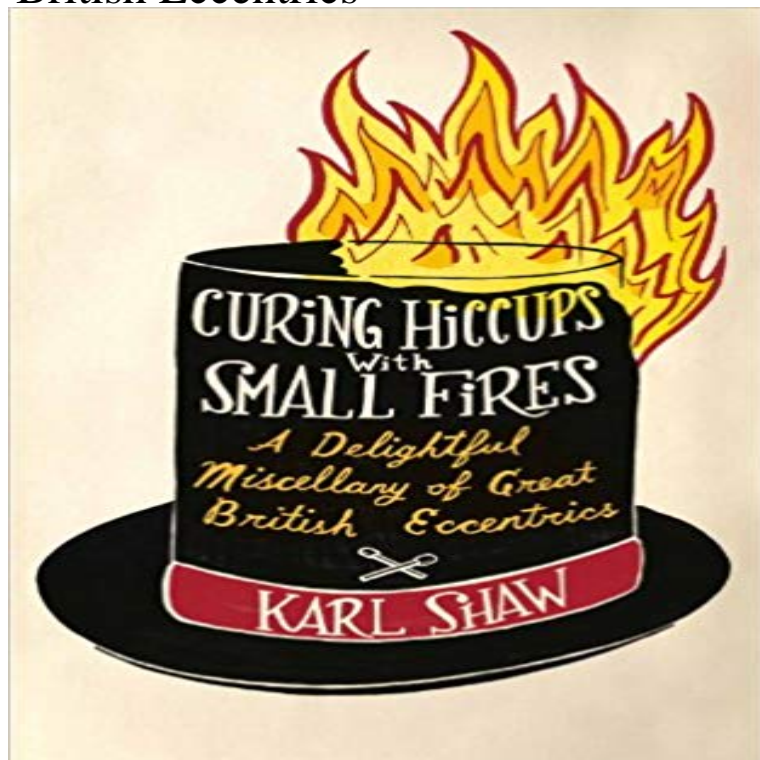


Curing Hiccups with Small Fires: A Delightful Miscellany of Great British Eccentrics



The English aristocrat John Mad Jack Mytton died a bloated, paralysed and penniless debtor in prison. His premature demise was partly due to injuries sustained while setting fire to his own night-shirt to try to cure hiccups. Just before the horribly burned Mytton slumped into unconsciousness he said, Well, the hiccups is gone, by God. An 18th-century French scholar attributed the British talent for eccentricity to a mixture of fogs, beef and beeraggravated by the tedium of the English Sunday. Whatever the reason, the British Isles do seem to have thrown up more than their fair share of magnificent oddballs, the finest of which are profiled in this fast, funny celebration of over 200 aristocrats, inventors, artists and the just plain weird... * Dr Samuel Johnson is said to have shaved off all of his bodily hair, just to see how long it would take to grow back * Spencer Cavendish, 8th Duke of Devonshire, once related an experience he had at Westminster: I had a horrid nightmare. I dreamed I was making a speech in the House of Lords, and woke up to find I actually was. * Percy Bysshe Shelley once tied a cat to a kite in a thunder storm to see if it would be electrocuted

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