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Incense, Incantations and Ancient Magic

From the earliest times men have endeavored to get in touch with the spirits of the unseen world. From the earliest times magicians and masters of Black Art have formulated ceremonials and sacrificial rites to call to their aid these spirit powers—sometimes the arts of magic have been used for good and often for evil.

One of the best known modern mystics, who is at present in New York, is an Englishman, known as Aleister Crowley, who has been a life-long student of occult mysteries and forces. For a long time Mr. Crowley lived in Paris, and from time to time he will disappear, only to bob up again in Zapotlan, Tali Fu, Askole, Hambantota, or Ouled Djellal. To him a long journey is an achievement, a satisfying thing in itself, like the hidden knowledge which he is forever in search of. In 1900 he explored Mexico without guides. Two years later he spent three months in India at an altitude of 10,000 feet. In 1906 he crossed China on foot. The success of his magic drama, "The Rites of Eleusis," in 1910, in London, did not tempt him to settle down there for long, as he was next heard of in the heart of the Sahara.

As a naked Yogi he has sat for days, he says, under the Indian sun begging his rice. Like every true magician he has experimented with hundreds of strange poisons in order to discover the Elixir of Life and the Elixir of Vision. He has devoted much time, he says, to the art of materializing divine influences, which, he says, does by the aid of secret incenses, of invocations and of rituals inherited from the Gnostics and Rosicrucians. He once masqueraded through a Cairo season as a mysterious Persian prince, he says.

Speaking of magic and the power of unseen forces, Mr. Crowley recently said that his magic had prophesied the present world war. He said:

"A magician evokes a particular spirit by a special ceremonial rite. He works for a given result and does not, like the spiritualists, wait for some spirit to turn up and become the slave of whatever does turn up. Once within his magic circle the magician is master. The spirits must obey. What follows believe or not, as you please.

"It was in London. Three of us—myself, a British naval officer of high rank and a famous violinist—decided to evoke the spirit of Mars. By Mars we don't mean the planet in the sky at all; we mean the hidden forces that possess the powers we attribute to Mars. Also we performed no sacrifice. In the old days when the Israelites went out to give battle they would sacrifice an animal, but nowadays it is not necessary to shed blood. You use the proper incense and the beings you want materialize from the smoke.

"As we were going to evoke the spirit of Mars I used a blood-red robe and wore the crown of the Uraeus serpent and armed myself with the sword and the spear. My two assistant Magi were clad in white and gold.

"Around the altar we had traced a large circle, ample in size to contain the three of us. And then, following the ancient rites, we consecrated the spear and then the sword, and then the altar and lastly the magic circle itself. So long as we remain inside that circle no harm could come to us. Once we were secure we conjured the Dog of Evil, just as the minister exorcises the spirits of evil before laying the foundation stones of a church, and having done that we bound ourselves by a great oath to the purposes of the ceremony. That is one of the most important things.

"And as the clouds of incense slowly took form, and standing without the circle a sexless, ox-like form appeared, with dull, deceitful head and hideous human features suffused with blood. It stood panting, its heart beating violently, and in a deep, hoarse voice it answered my question. It said that in less than five years there would be two wars, and prophesied that the greatest of the two would end by the crushing of Germany."

The picture of Mr. Crowley on this page shows him in the regalia of a mystic order and his hands and thumbs are bent in the form of a secret sign used by devil-worshippers, the thumbs representing the horns of the devil.