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MAGIC SURVIVES

SOME MODERN CASES

MOSTLY SUGGESTION

Ridicule is the most powerful antidote to sorcery, and many a disgruntled magician of old must have experienced defeat at its hands, says the Sydney, "Telegraph."

Yet a vague hankering after the mysteries which sorcery promises is latent in the soul of even the twentieth century sceptic.

The jaded modern seeks thrills of these old beliefs—which explains why Black Magic, as recently alleged to be exploited by Aleister Crowley, finds many willing participants.

A few years ago, when detectives in New York raided a Black Magic cult, they found elderly men and women capering around in leopard skins and theatrical "tights," singing a chant (in cracked falsettos), to raise an "elemental" (a spirit). They were dancing within a Magic Circle, and "incense" was burning—including mosquito sticks, blocks of camphor, and sulphur candles. To most of us such mumbo-jumbo invites ridicule; but there is actually extant a ritual of both Black and White Magic, handed down by tradition. It is still practised by devotees, "desperately anxious to believe something." And belief is the essence of all such ancient lore.

Obviously the ritual—the solemn invocations, the sacrifice of animals, the burning of mystic herbs, the drawing of circles, drinking blood, and reciting prayers backwards—is a device to get the participant into such a state of dread, hysteria, and expectancy, that he or she is ready to see or experience anything even the hallucination of a "Spirit's" presence.

It is pure auto-suggestion, similar to the more primitive magic of "pointing a bone" or casting a spell to bring slow death. If the victim believes in this latter magic he really auto-suggests himself to death.

COUNTER-SPELL.

Elinor Mordaunt, the Australian traveler, tells a striking tale of how such magic was once neutralized by counter-suggestion. In Kenya (Equatorial Africa) a native sorceress put a curse on the head-man of a tribe for reporting a brawl. The head-man had already lost two children because of a curse, and in fear of his life was about to leave the district.

With her brother (the local physician) the authoress faked a counter-magic. A small image he had whittled at school was enclosed in a glass phial that had held liver pills. Amid solemn avowal of the power of this magic, in the presence of the whole tribe at dawn, the god in the liver-pill shrine was buried under the floor of the head-man's hut. All curses uttered against the head-man (the natives were told) thus boomeranged back on the invoker.

Next day the sorceress and her husband fled in deadly terror, and the head-man was still alive in 1931, when Miss Mordaunt revisited Kenya.

While auto-suggestion plays a great part in magic, it is occasionally shrewdly helped out by more material aids. It is often averred that when a white man takes a Malay woman for mistress, the latter can put a magic spell on him, so that as soon as he deserts her he wastes away, and will die unless he returns.

The truth in such legends is that the women secretly load their white lords' food with increasing doses of arsenic. Tolerance is quickly established, and the arsenic does no harm while the administration is kept up. When the man leaves, he dies swiftly of arsenic-deprivation, just as a voluntary arsenic addict does when he tries to give up the drug.

MATERIAL MAGIC.

This may be labelled a material form of magic. Today in white civilisations such tricks have passed—in harmless form—to the stage conjurer. But the latter has dropped all the incantation and hocus-pocus, and, wonderful as his illusions are, the believer in old-fashioned magic scorns them.

Yet if an expert illusionist like Long Tack Sam cared to perform a few tricks to a "circle" of mystics half-crazed with preliminary terrifying ritual, and if those present believed the conjurer wielded occult powers, he could make them believe anything.

To believers of this type, the burning of incense, the mutter of gibberish, the tracing of pentagrams, and the "sacrifice" of animals are potent magic; but in a world of such actual magic as wireless television, flying, imprisoned lightning, and electric eyes, such mumbo-jumbo is intrinsically ridiculous.