

INTRODUCTION

This book has had a strange fate. It is one of the masterworks of the late Aleister Crowley, completed at the end of the First World War, in March of 1918, when the Central Powers were crumbling. On several occasions it was attempted to publish it; twice before it was actually set to print. The last time, the printing was completed in England, but the author's death on December 1st of 1947 intervened, and the edition was not issued.

This is one of Crowley's greatest and deepest books, into which he put his very blood. There is no better way to show the why and how the book was written than to let the author explain it himself. We quote from his as yet unpublished Confessions:

"Liber Aleph, the Book of Wisdom or Folly, was intended to express the heart of my doctrine in the most deep and delicate dimensions. It is the most tense and intense book that I have ever composed. The thought is so concentrated, and, if I may use the word, nervous, that both to write then, and to read now, involved and involves an almost unbearable strain. I remember how I used to sit at my desk night after night — it was the bitterest winter that had been known in New York for many years, but even if the central heating had been the flames of Hell itself, I doubt whether I should have been warm. Night after night I sat, all through, rigid as a corpse, and icier; the whole of my life concentrated in two spots: the small section of my brain which was occupied in the work, and my right wrist and fingers. I remember with absolute clearness that my consciousness appeared to start from a perfectly dead forearm.

"The book is written in prose, yet there is a formal circumscription more imminent than anything which would have been possible in poetry. I limited myself by making a point