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Crowley's Magick

By Paul Brunton

The appearance of a new book (*Magick in Theory and Practice*) by Aleister Crowley recalls to memory an earlier work by that author which came for review into the hands of G.K. Chesterton some years ago. Writing in the *Daily News*, G.K.C. wittily remarked:

"We have all possible respect for Mr. Crowley's religious symbols and we do not object to his calling upon Shu at any hour of the night. Only it would be unreasonable of him to complain if his religious exercises were generally mistaken for an effort to drive away cats!"

There are several exercises in the present book whose purpose might similarly be mistaken if a neighbour overheard one practising them.

It is known that Aleister Crowley has been working on the manuscript of this book for several years, though not continuously, and that he regards it as his supreme contribution to technical or practical magic. It is not quite clear, however, why Crowley has resumed his old pseudonym of the "Master Theion."

Magick in Theory and Practice runs to the length of 436 pages and consists of four parts, each separately bound in strong paper. Before I turn to the work of the author, I would like to pass a deserved compliment to the printer.

Crowley persists in using the archaic spelling of the word "magic" throughout his books. This is undoubtedly a matter wherein he is right. "Magick" certainly upholds the wider and more philosophical connotation of the term which it possesses among the initiated. One would like to follow Aleister Crowley in restoring the true spelling of the term, but editors and printers are pontiffs whose bidding must be obeyed.

Part One of this book opens with an appropriate introductory chapter wherein the author presents his twenty-eight theorems in the science and art of Magic. The first theorem is simple but interesting: "*Every intentional act is a Magical Act.*" The

twentieth is equally interesting: "Man can only attract and employ the forces for which he is really fitted."

In a further chapter Crowley proceeds to describe his theory of the universe. His aim would appear to be a reconciliation of the Dualistic, Monistic and Nihilistic theories. His conclusion is that our true knowledge of the material universe consists principally of the concepts of pure mathematics.

The remaining chapters take up a consideration in detail of those Magical formulae which compose the rituals of the art. Thus we have the wand, the cup and the pentacle among elemental weapons; Tetragrammaton, Alhim and I.A.O. among evocative names.

I am afraid that on page 65 Crowley loses his head when he tells readers that not even God can check the Magician upon his chosen path, but must be obedient to him. The part is declared to be greater than the whole!

An unpleasant chapter on blood sacrifices contains this astonishing statement:

"For the highest spiritual working one must accordingly choose that victim which contains the greatest and purest force. A male child of perfect innocence and high intelligence is the most satisfactory and suitable victim. . . . It appears from the Magical Records of Frater Perdurabo (i.e. Aleister Crowley) that he made this particular sacrifice on an average about 150 times every year between 1912 and 1928."

This is doubtless nothing more than one of Crowley's practical jokes, though a particularly nasty one. Crowley once boasted that he had killed and ate the bodies of two native bearers in India. A prominent journal heard of this boast and sent a reporter to obtain his authentication, which was readily given. Thereupon the next issue of the journal appeared with the headline: "Crowley the Cannibal!" I regret to say that a humourless audience was completely deceived by this posturing. Crowley has a predilection for practical jokes. He holds nothing sacred, not even himself.

The choicest literary piece of *Part One* has been reserved for the final chapter. With that characteristic modesty for which he is so justly celebrated, Aleister Crowley explains that the outbreak of war in 1914 was due to the publication of his *Book of the Law* the previous year. "The intrinsic power of the truth of the Law," he adds proudly, "and the impact of the publication, were sufficient to shake the world . . . the might of this Magick burst out and caused a catastrophe to civilization."

At last we know the truth! It was not Kaiser Wilhelm; it was not the fear and suspicion among national governments which caused the war; it was none other than Aleister Crowley himself!

Part Two of this remarkable book covers some of the operations in Magical ceremonies.

Some interesting chapters on Clairvoyance and Divination close this part. A common method among the adepts is that involving fixation of sight. Crowley's method is very different. He instructs the pupil to imagine a shape resembling his own body, standing immediately in front of him. When the concentration is strong enough, he is to transfer consciousness to this "body of light" while keeping the physical eyes shut. Then one is to use the eyes of this thought-body.

Part Three inaugurates a series of appendices, which provide the reader with a variety of informative notes. We are given a glimpse of the structure of Crowley's organization, to which he mysteriously refers as the A.:A.: and to which he applied the designation in earlier days of "The Great White Brotherhood". It can be stated here, however, that the letters stand for "Atlantean Adepts".

Part Four contains a noteworthy Dictionary of Correspondences, harmonizing the Cabbala with Egyptian, Hindu and Chinese magical systems. It is reprinted from his pre-war work, *Liber 777*, which, I believe, is now wholly unobtainable. Letters, numbers, names, etc., belonging to these systems are brought into line with each other. Crowley explains that there is a natural connection between them all as well as with certain symbols.

The later chapters describe a series of rituals and incantations. I append a fair and funny sample of the kind of matter they contain:

"The Animadversion towards the Aeon.

Let the Magician, robed and armed as he may deem to be fit, turn his face towards Boleskine.

Let him strike the battery 1-3-3-3-1.

Let him describe a circle about his head, crying NUIT!

Let him touch the centre of his forehead, his mouth, and his larynx, crying AIWAZ!

Let him break into the dance, tracing a centripetal spiral widdershins, enriched by revolutions upon his axis as he passeth his quarter, until he come to the centre of the circle."

Is this Practical Magic? Or is it lunacy? Or is it just another bit of fooling on Crowley's part?

One chapter deals with the control of breath. It gives certain Hatha Yoga practices in an altered form, but their dangers can hardly have been lessened. Crowley informs us that his last birth in a physical body was Eliphas Levi, the French writer on Magic. As an interesting confirmation of this statement he tells us that Levi died six months before the birth of the author of *Magick in Theory and Practice*. I will supplement this with the information that Crowley told his friends in pre-war days that the illustrious Count Cagliostro was another earlier incarnation of his, a claim that was also made, or at any rate implied, by Mdme. Blavatsky when requested by Dr. Franz Hartmann to tell him what was her last incarnation. She went to a drawer and took out a portrait of Cagliostro, and gave him to understand that this distinguished personage had provided a sheath for her soul.

I am therefore forced to the conclusion that Aleister Crowley and H.P. Blavatsky are one and the same person. But since this theory scarcely seems tenable, the final judgment must be, in Lord Tennyson's phrase, that "someone had blundered!"