

THE REVIVAL OF MAGICK

By THE MASTER THERION.

(Continued from last month.)

It is in this somewhat dry disquisition, bordering as it does, I am afraid, on metaphysics, that is to be sought the reason for the revival of magick. Unless this explanation were first given, it might seem a mere phenomenon of folly, an hysterical exacerbation due to over-civilization.

But assuming that irrefutable form of idealism which contents itself with the demonstration that, knowledge being a function of the mind, as the materialists not merely concede, but insist, the universe as we know it is equivalent to the contents of that mind; and assuming also that the mind contains a power able to control thought; then there is no absurdity in asserting that mind may be the master of matter. And the empirical rules laid down by the magicians of old may prove to some extent of use in practice.

Such rules are in fact the inheritance of the Magi. This is not the place to discuss the disputed cases of the Rosicrucians, of the Comte de St. Germain, of Cagliostro, and others whose names will readily occur. The periods in which they lived are obscure, and the controversies sterile. But it is at least evident that some valid tradition lurked somewhere, for within the memory of living men are Eliphaz Levi and his pupil Bulwer Lytton. Now it is not philosophical to suppose that Levi was an upstart genius, though he does claim to have "forced an answer from the ancient oracles" and indeed to have reconstituted magick. I do not believe this to be strictly true; I believe that Levi had living masters. But that Levi first translated ancient ideas into modern terms is undeniable. Moreover, the influence of this great master was enormous, even in spheres external to his particular orb. The revival of French Literature with Baudelaire, Balzac, Gautier, Verlaine, de Banville, d'Anrevilly, Haraucourt, Rollinat, the de Goncourts and a dozen other names of the first rank, was in a sense his work. It was he that formulated the philosophical postulates that made their art possible and triumphant. Such sentences as this: "A pure style is an aureole of holiness" may pass as the very canon of art. His reconciliations of right and duty, liberty and obedience, are cardinal to the gate of modern thought. I do not hesitate to assert that very soon "The Key of the Mysteries" will be recognized as the very incarnation of the spirit of his time.

In this book Levi offered to the Church a way out of the difficulties raised by the advance of Science. That she rejected it was her suicide; just as Napoleon's disdain of his political philosophy was written large in letters of blood at Wörth, Gravelotte, Metz and Sedan.

However, the few capable of initiation took Levi to their hearts; and from that hour the revival of magick has never been in doubt. At the moment almost of Levi's death the Theosophical Society was founded; and Blavatzky's debt to the French Adept is the greatest of all her obligations. In England Anna Kingsford—a mere megaphone for Edward Maitland—was at work; also there was Mr. S. L. Mathers, a considerable magician who subsequently fell, and was smashed beyond recognition; and, in the nineties, the giant figure of Allan Bennett.

In magical literature itself we find, as is to be

expected, a reflection of these facts. Ever since Christian Rosencreutz there is nothing serious and first-hand, until Eliphaz Levi. The magical tradition was the basis of gracious fables like Undine, and of frivolities like the Rape of the Lock and its source the Comte de Gabalis. Sometimes it is treated more seriously, as in Lewis' "Monk," and Mrs. Shelley's "Frankenstein." There are legends of Cagliostro, too, in Dumas' *Memoirs of a Physician*, and there is the "Diable Boiteux" and the "Diable Amoureux." Nor let ever be forgotten that terrible and true magical apologue "La peau de chagrin."

Casanova gives an admirable view of the matter, and Thackeray copies him cleverly enough in "Barry Lyndon." But it is all hearsay.

Eliphaz Levi comes up stage, and says plainly to the world: "I myself did such and such an operation of magick in such and such a time and place."

He wears a mask illegible enough, it is true; but we have at least oratio recta and not oratio obliqua. For which we who remember bitter schooldays thank God, and prefer Levi to Livy!

In his footsteps if Bulwer Lytton did not follow, it was because of his public career. He comes near it. Every one within even the widest ripple that is caused on the water of society when the Stone of the Wise is thrown therein knew that Sir Philip Derval's laboratory was an accurate description of Lytton's own magical cabinet. It was clear to all ripe intelligence that in "Zanoni" the author was seriously expounding his own beliefs, discussing his own problems, justifying his own career. In the "Strange Story" he recounts incidents surely seen with his own eyes.

Read his account of the evocation of a demon, and his other of an ordeal, and compare them with the stories of Levi. Observe how the ancient directness revives in them, and contrast them with the sneering rubbish of the courtly abbé who wrote the Comte de Gabalis.

It is evident where the truth lies. And now let us turn to the evidence of men yet living.

III.

Allan Bennett was born at the time of the Franco-Prussian war. His father, an engineer, died when he was a young child, and his mother brought him up a strict Catholic.

When he was about 8 years old he happened to hear that if you repeated the "Lord's Prayer" backwards, the Devil would come. This enterprising infant at once set himself to learn it backwards, and, when letter-perfect, went into the garden and said it. Something—the Devil or one of his angels—did appear, and the child ran screaming in terror to the house.

We hear of nothing else of the same kind for a long while, and the same startlingly sporadic success is true of his first step in mysticism. When he was about 18, without any premonitory symptom, he was suddenly caught up into the trance called Shivadarshana. We cannot stop here to describe this; suffice it to say that it is the highest attainment in this line, save perhaps one, possible to man.

Its effect upon him was catastrophic; he realized instantly and without any doubt that no other state was worthy of a moment's thought, and he unhesitatingly abandoned all, if perchance he might discover