

MYSTICISM & MAGICK OF
Aleister
Crowley



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Mysticism & Magick of Aleister Crowley

A Guide to the Rituals of Thelema

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I - Mysticism

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A Note

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This book is intentionally "not" the work of Frater Perdurabo. Experience shows that his writing is too concentrated, too abstruse, too occult, for ordinary minds to apprehend. It is thought that this record of disjointed fragments of his casual conversation may prove alike more intelligible and more convincing, and at least provide a preliminary study which will enable the student to attack his real work from a standpoint of some little general knowledge and understanding of his ideas, and of the form in which he figures them.

Part II, "Magick," is more advanced in style than Part I; the student is expected to know a little of the literature of the subject, and to be able to take an intelligent view of it. This part is, however, really explanatory of Part I, which is a crude outline sketch only.

If both parts are thoroughly studied and understood, the pupil will have obtained a real grasp of all the fundamentals and essentials of both Magick and Mysticism.

I wrote this book down from Frater Perdurabo's dictation at the Villa Caldarazzo, Posilippo, Naples, where I was studying under him, a villa actually prophesied to us long before we reached Naples by that Brother of the A.'.A.'. who appeared to me in Zurich. Any point which was obscure to me was cleared up in some new discourse (the discourses have consequently been re-arranged). Before printing, the whole work was read by several persons of rather less than

average intelligence, and any point not quite clear even to them has been elucidated.

May the whole Path now be plain to all!

Frater Perdurabo is the most honest of all the great religious teachers. Others have said: "Believe me!" He says: "*Don't* believe me!" He does not ask for followers; would despise and refuse them. He wants an independent and self-reliant body of students to follow out their own methods of research. If he can save them time and trouble by giving a few useful "tips," his work will have been done to his own satisfaction.

Those who have wished men to believe in them were absurd. A persuasive tongue or pen, or an efficient sword, with rack and stake, produced this "belief," which is contrary to, and destructive of, all real religious experience.

The whole life of Frater Perdurabo is now devoted to seeing that you obtain this living experience of Truth for, by, and in yourselves!

SOROR VIRAKAM (Mary d'Este Sturges).

Preliminary Remarks

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Existence, as we know it, is full of sorrow. To mention only one minor point: every man is a condemned criminal, only he does not know the date of his execution. This is unpleasant for every man. Consequently every man does everything possible to postpone the date, and would sacrifice anything that he has if he could reverse the sentence.

Practically all religions and all philosophies have started thus crudely, by promising their adherents some such reward as immortality.

No religion has failed hitherto by not promising enough; the present breaking up of all religions is due to the fact that people have asked to see the securities. Men have even renounced the important material advantages which a well-organized religion may confer upon a State, rather than acquiesce in fraud or falsehood, or even in any system which, if not proved guilty, is at least unable to demonstrate its innocence.

Being more or less bankrupt, the best thing that we can do is to attack the problem afresh without preconceived ideas. Let us begin by doubting every statement. Let us find a way of subjecting every statement to the test of experiment. Is there any truth at all in the claims of various religions? Let us examine the question.

Our original difficulty will be due to the enormous wealth of our material. To enter into a critical examination of all

systems would be an unending task; the cloud of witnesses is too great. Now each religion is equally positive; and each demands faith. This we refuse in the absence of positive proof. But we may usefully inquire whether there is not any one thing upon which all religions have agreed: for, if so, it seems possible that it may be worthy of really thorough consideration.

It is certainly not to be found in dogma. Even so simple an idea as that of a supreme and eternal being is denied by a third of the human race. Legends of miracle are perhaps universal, but these, in the absence of demonstrative proof, are repugnant to common sense.

But what of the origin of religions? How is it that unproved assertion has so frequently compelled the assent of all classes of mankind? Is not this a miracle?

There is, however, one form of miracle which certainly happens, the influence of the genius. There is no known analogy in Nature. One cannot even think of a "super-dog" transforming the world of dogs, whereas in the history of mankind this happens with regularity and frequency. Now here are three "super-men," all at loggerheads. What is there in common between Christ, Buddha, and Mohammed? Is there any one point upon which all three are in accord?

No point of doctrine, no point of ethics, no theory of a "hereafter" do they share, and yet in the history of their lives we find one identity amid many diversities.

Buddha was born a Prince, and died a beggar.

Mohammed was born a beggar, and died a Prince.

Christ remained obscure until many years after his death.

Elaborate lives of each have been written by devotees, and there is one thing common to all three -- an omission. We hear nothing of Christ between the ages of twelve and thirty. Mohammed disappeared into a cave. Buddha left his palace, and went for a long while into the desert.

Each of them, perfectly silent up to the time of the disappearance, came back and immediately began to preach a new law.

This is so curious that it leaves us to inquire whether the histories of other great teachers contradict or confirm.

Moses led a quiet life until his slaying of the Egyptian. He then flees into the land of Midian, and we hear nothing of what he did there, yet immediately on his return he turns the whole place upside down. Later on, too, he absents himself on Mount Sinai for a few days, and comes back with the Tables of the Law in his hand.

St. Paul (again), after his adventure on the road to Damascus, goes into the desert of Arabia for many years, and on his return overturns the Roman Empire. Even in the legends of savages we find the same thing universal; somebody who is nobody in particular goes away for a longer or shorter period, and comes back as the "great medicine man"; but nobody ever knows exactly what happened to him.

Making every possible deduction for fable and myth, we get this one coincidence. A nobody goes away, and comes back a somebody. This is not to be explained in any of the ordinary ways.

There is not the smallest ground for the contention that these were from the start exceptional men. Mohammed

would hardly have driven a camel until he was thirty-five years old if he had possessed any talent or ambition. St. Paul had much original talent; but he is the least of the five. Nor do they seem to have possessed any of the usual materials of power, such as rank, fortune, or influence.

Moses was rather a big man in Egypt when he left; he came back as a mere stranger.

Christ had not been to China and married the Emperor's daughter.

Mohammed had not been acquiring wealth and drilling soldiers.

Buddha had not been consolidating any religious organizations.

St. Paul had not been intriguing with an ambitious general.

Each came back poor; each came back alone.

What was the nature of their power? What happened to them in their absence?

History will not help us to solve the problem, for history is silent.

We have only the accounts given by the men themselves.

It would be very remarkable should we find that these accounts agree.

Of the great teachers we have mentioned Christ is silent; the other four tell us something; some more, some less.

Buddha goes into details too elaborate to enter upon in this place; but the gist of it is that in one way or another he got hold of the secret force of the World and mastered it.

Of St. Paul's experiences, we have nothing but a casual illusion to his having been "caught up into Heaven, and seen and heard things of which it was not lawful to speak."

Mohammed speaks crudely of his having been "visited by the Angel Gabriel," who communicated things from "God."

Moses says that he "beheld God."

Diverse as these statements are at first sight, all agree in announcing an experience of the class which fifty years ago would have been called supernatural, to-day may be called spiritual, and fifty years hence will have a proper name based on an understanding of the phenomenon which occurred.

Theorists have not been at a loss to explain; but they differ.

The Mohammedan insists that God is, and did really send Gabriel with messages for Mohammed: but all others contradict him. And from the nature of the case proof is impossible.

The lack of proof has been so severely felt by Christianity (and in a much less degree by Islam) that fresh miracles have been manufactured almost daily to support the tottering structure. Modern thought, rejecting these miracles, has adopted theories involving epilepsy and madness. As if organization could spring from disorganization! Even if epilepsy were the cause of these great movements which have caused civilization after civilization to arise from barbarism, it would merely form an argument for cultivating epilepsy.

Of course great men will never conform with the standards of little men, and he whose mission it is to

overturn the world can hardly escape the title of revolutionary. The fads of a period always furnish terms of abuse. The fad of Caiaphas was Judaism, and the Pharisees told him that Christ "blasphemed." Pilate was a loyal Roman; to him they accused Christ of "sedition." When the Pope had all power it was necessary to prove an enemy a "heretic." Advancing to-day towards a medical oligarchy, we try to prove that our opponents are "insane," and (in a Puritan country) to attack their "morals." We should then avoid all rhetoric, and try to investigate with perfect freedom from bias the phenomena which occurred to these great leaders of mankind.

There is no difficulty in our assuming that these men themselves did not understand clearly what happened to them. The only one who explains his system thoroughly is Buddha, and Buddha is the only one that is not dogmatic. We may also suppose that the others thought it inadvisable to explain too clearly to their followers; St. Paul evidently took this line.

Our best document will therefore be the system of Buddha;¹ but it is so complex that no immediate summary will serve; and in the case of the others, if we have not the accounts of the Masters, we have those of their immediate followers.

The methods advised by all these people have a startling resemblance to one another. They recommend "virtue" (of various kinds), solitude, absence of excitement, moderation in diet, and finally a practice which some call prayer and some call meditation. (The former four may turn out on examination to be merely conditions favourable to the last.)

On investigating what is meant by these two things, we find that they are only one. For what is the state of either prayer or meditation? It is the restraining of the mind to a single act, state, or thought. If we sit down quietly and investigate the contents of our minds, we shall find that even at the best of times the principal characteristics are wandering and distraction. Any one who has had anything to do with children and untrained minds generally knows that fixity of attention is never present, even when there is a large amount of intelligence and good will.

If then we, with our well-trained minds, determine to control this wandering thought, we shall find that we are fairly well able to keep the thoughts running in a narrow channel, each thought linked to the last in a perfectly rational manner; but if we attempt to stop this current we shall find that, so far from succeeding, we shall merely break down the banks of the channel. The mind will overflow, and instead of a chain of thought we shall have a chaos of confused images.

This mental activity is so great, and seems so natural, that it is hard to understand how any one first got the idea that it was a weakness and a nuisance. Perhaps it was because in the more natural practice of "devotion," people found that their thoughts interfered. In any case calm and self-control are to be preferred to restlessness. Darwin in his study presents a marked contrast with a monkey in a cage.

Generally speaking, the larger and stronger and more highly developed any animal is, the less does it move about, and such movements as it does make are slow and purposeful. Compare the ceaseless activity of bacteria with

the reasoned steadiness of the beaver; and except in the few animal communities which are organized, such as bees, the greatest intelligence is shown by those of solitary habits. This is so true of man that psychologists have been obliged to treat of the mental state of crowds as if it were totally different in quality from any state possible to an individual.

It is by freeing the mind from external influences, whether casual or emotional, that it obtains power to see somewhat of the truth of things.

Let us, however, continue our practice. Let us determine to be masters of our minds. We shall then soon find what conditions are favourable.

There will be no need to persuade ourselves at great length that all external influences are likely to be unfavourable. New faces, new scenes will disturb us; even the new habits of life which we undertake for this very purpose of controlling the mind will at first tend to upset it. Still, we must give up our habit of eating too much, and follow the natural rule of only eating when we are hungry, listening to the interior voice which tells us that we have had enough.

The same rule applies to sleep. We have determined to control our minds, and so our time for meditation must take precedence of other hours.

We must fix times for practice, and make our feasts movable. In order to test our progress, for we shall find that (as in all physiological matters) meditation cannot be gauged by the feelings, we shall have a note-book and pencil, and we shall also have a watch. We shall then

endeavour to count how often, during the first quarter of an hour, the mind breaks away from the idea upon which it is determined to concentrate. We shall practice this twice daily; and, as we go, experience will teach us which conditions are favourable and which are not. Before we have been doing this for very long we are almost certain to get impatient, and we shall find that we have to practice many other things in order to assist us in our work. New problems will constantly arise which must be faced, and solved.

For instance, we shall most assuredly find that we fidget. We shall discover that no position is comfortable, though we never noticed it before in all our lives!

This difficulty has been solved by a practice called "Asana," which will be described later on.

Memories of the events of the day will bother us; we must arrange our day so that it is absolutely uneventful. Our minds will recall to us our hopes and fears, our loves and hates, our ambitions, our envies, and many other emotions. All these must be cut off. We must have absolutely no interest in life but that of quieting our minds.

This is the object of the usual monastic vow of poverty, chastity, and obedience. If you have no property, you have no care, nothing to be anxious about; with chastity no other person to be anxious about, and to distract your attention; while if you are vowed to obedience the question of what you are to do no longer frets: you simply obey.

There are a great many other obstacles which you will discover as you go on, and it is proposed to deal with these in turn. But let us pass by for the moment to the point where you are nearing success.