



**THE DOCTRINE OF
TRANSCENDENTAL
MAGIC**

ELIPHAS LEVI

The Doctrine of Transcendental Magic

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The Doctrine of Transcendental Magic , E. Levi
Jazzybee Verlag Jürgen Beck
86450 Altenmünster, Loschberg 9
Germany

ISBN: 9783849606459

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The Doctrine of Transcendental Magic

INTRODUCTION

BEHIND the veil of all the hieratic and mystical allegories of ancient doctrines, behind the darkness and strange ordeals of all initiations, under the seal of all sacred writings, in the ruins of Nineveh or Thebes, on the crumbling stones of old temples and on the blackened visage of the Assyrian or Egyptian sphinx, in the monstrous or marvellous paintings which interpret to the faithful of India the inspired pages of the Vedas, in the cryptic emblems of our old books on alchemy, in the ceremonies

practised at reception by all secret societies, there are found indications of a doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere carefully concealed. Occult philosophy seems to have been the nurse or god-mother of all intellectual forces, the key of all divine obscurities and the absolute queen of society in those ages - when it was reserved exclusively for the education of priests and of kings. It reigned in Persia with the Magi, who perished in the end, as perish all masters of the world, because they abused their power; it endowed India with the most wonderful traditions and with an incredible wealth of poesy, grace and terror in its emblems; it civilized Greece to the music of the lyre of Orpheus; it concealed the principles of all sciences, all progress of the human mind, in the daring calculations of Pythagoras; fable abounded in its miracles, and history, attempting to estimate this unknown power, became confused with fable; it undermined or consolidated empires by its oracles, caused tyrants to tremble on their thrones and governed all minds, either by curiosity or by fear. For this science, said the crowd, there is nothing impossible, it commands the elements, knows the language of the stars and directs the planetary courses; when it speaks, the moon falls blood-red from heaven; the dead rise in their graves and mutter ominous words, as the night wind blows through their skulls. Mistress of love or of hate, occult science can dispense paradise or hell at its pleasure to human hearts; it disposes of all forms and confers beauty or ugliness; with the wand of Circe it changes men into brutes and animals alternately into men; it disposes even of life and death, can confer wealth on its adepts by the transmutation of metals and immortality by its quintessence or elixir, compounded of gold and light.

Such was Magic from Zoroaster to Manes, from Orpheus to Apollonius of Tyana, when positive Christianity, victorious at length over the brilliant dreams and titanic aspirations of

the Alexandrian school, dared to launch its anathemas publicly against this philosophy, and thus forced it to become more occult and mysterious than ever. Moreover, strange and alarming rumours began to circulate concerning initiates or adepts; they were surrounded every where by an ominous influence, and they destroyed or distracted those who allowed themselves to be beguiled by their honeyed eloquence or by the sorcery of their learning. The women whom they loved became Stryges and their children vanished at nocturnal meetings, while men whispered shudderingly and in secret of bloodstained orgies and abominable banquets. Bones had been found in the crypts of ancient temples, shrieks had been heard in the night, harvests withered and herds sickened when the magician passed by. Diseases which defied medical skill appeared at times in the world, and always, it was said, beneath the envenomed glance of the adepts. At length a universal cry of execration went up against Magic, the mere name became a crime and the common hatred was formulated in this sentence: "Magicians to the flames!" - as it was shouted some centuries earlier: "To the lions with the Christians!" Now the multitude never conspires except against real powers; it does not know what is true, but it has the instinct of what is strong. It remained for the eighteenth century to deride both Christians and Magic, while infatuated with the disquisitions of Rousseau and the illusions of Cagliostro.

Science, notwithstanding, is at the basis of Magic, as at the root of Christianity there is love, and in the Gospel symbols we find the Word Incarnate adored in His cradle by Three Magi, led thither by a star - the triad and the sign of the microcosm - and receiving their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, a second mysterious triplicity, under which emblem the highest secrets of the Kabbalah are allegorically contained. Christianity owes therefore no hatred to Magic,

but human ignorance has ever stood in fear of the unknown. The science was driven into hiding to escape the impassioned assaults of blind desire: it clothed itself with new hieroglyphics, falsified its intentions, denied its hopes. Then it was that the jargon of alchemy was created, an impenetrable illusion for the vulgar in their greed of gold, a living language only for the true disciple of Hermes.

Extraordinary fact! Among the sacred records of the Christians there are two texts which the infallible Church makes no claim to understand and has never attempted to expound: these are the Prophecy of Ezekiel and the Apocalypse, two Kabalistic Keys reserved assuredly in heaven for the commentaries of Magian Kings, books sealed as with seven seals for faithful believers, yet perfectly plain to an initiated infidel of the occult sciences. There is also another work, but, although it is popular in a sense and may be found everywhere, this is of all most occult and unknown, because it is the key of the rest. It is in public evidence without being known to the public; no one suspects its existence and no one dreams of seeking it where it actually is. This book, which may be older than that of Enoch, actually has never been translated, but is still preserved unmutilated in primeval characters, on detached leaves, like the tablets of the ancients. The fact has eluded notice, though a distinguished scholar has revealed, not indeed its secret, but its antiquity and singular preservation. Another scholar, but of a mind more fantastic than judicious, passed years in the study of this masterpiece, and has merely suspected its plenary importance. It is, in truth, a monumental and extraordinary work, strong and simple as the architecture of the pyramids, and consequently enduring like those - a book which is the summary of all sciences, which can resolve all problems by its infinite combinations, which speaks by evoking thought, is the inspirer and moderator of all

possible conceptions, and the masterpiece perhaps of the human mind. It is to be counted unquestionably among the very great gifts bequeathed to us by antiquity; it is a universal key, the name of which has been explained and comprehended only by the learned William Postel; it is a unique test, whereof the initial characters alone plunged into ecstasy the devout spirit of Saint-Martin, and might have restored reason to the sublime and unfortunate Swedenborg. We shall recur to this book later on, for its mathematical and precise explanation will be the complement and crown of our conscientious undertaking.

The original alliance between Christianity and the Science of the Magi, once demonstrated fully, will be a discovery of no second-rate importance, and we do not doubt that the serious study of Magic and the Kabbalah will lead earnest minds to a reconciliation of science and dogma, of reason and faith, heretofore regarded as impossible.

We have said that the Church, whose special office is the custody of the Keys, does not pretend to possess those of the Apocalypse or of Ezekiel. In the opinion of Christians the scientific and magical Clavicles of Solomon are lost, which notwithstanding, it is certain that, in the domain of intelligence, ruled by the Word nothing that has been written can perish. Whatsoever men cease to understand exists for them no longer, at least in the order of the Word, and it passes then into the domain of enigma and mystery. Furthermore, the antipathy and even open war of the Official Church against all that belongs to the realm of Magic, which is a kind of personal and emancipated priesthood, is allied with necessary and even with inherent causes in the social and hierarchic constitution of Christian sacerdotalism. The Church ignores Magic – for she must either ignore it or perish, as we shall prove later on; yet she does not recognize the less that her mysterious Founder

was saluted in His cradle by Three Magi – that is to say, by the hieratic ambassadors of the three parts of the known world and the three analogical worlds of occult philosophy. In the School of Alexandria, Magic and Christianity almost joined hands under the auspices of Ammonius Saccas and of Plato; the doctrine of Hermes is found almost in its entirety in the writings attributed to Dionysius the Areopagite; Synesius outlined the plan of a treatise on dreams, which was annotated subsequently by Cardan, and composed hymns that might have served for the liturgy of the Church of Swedenborg, could a church of the illuminated possess a liturgy. With this period of fiery abstractions and impassioned warfare of words there must be connected also the philosophic reign of Julian, called the Apostate because in his youth he made unwilling profession of Christianity. Everyone is aware that Julian had the misfortune to be a hero out of season of Plutarch, and that he was, if one may say so, the Don Quixote of roman Chivalry; but what most people do not know is that he was one of the illuminated and an initiate of the first order: that he believed in the unity of God and in the universal doctrine of the Trinity; that, in a word, he regretted nothing of the old world but its magnificent symbols and its too gracious images. Julian was not a pagan; he was a Gnostic allured by the allegories of Greek polytheism, who had the misfortune to find the name of Jesus Christ less sonorous than that of Orpheus. The Emperor paid in his person for the academical tastes of the philosopher and rhetorician, and after affording himself the spectacle and satisfaction of expiring like Epaminondas with the periods of Cato, he had in public opinion, by this time fully Christianized, but anathemas for his funeral oration and a scornful epithet for his ultimate memorial.

Let us pass over the petty minds and small matters of the Bas-Empire, and proceed to the Middle Ages Stay,

take this book! Glance at the seventh page, then seat yourself on the mantle which I am spreading, and let each of us cover our eyes with one of its corners Your head swims, does it not, and the earth seems to fly beneath your feet? Hold tightly, and do not look right or left The vertigo ceases: we are here. Stand up and open your eyes, but take care before all things to make no Christian sign and to pronounce no Christian words. We are in a landscape of Salvator Rosa, a troubled wilderness which seems resting after a storm. There is no moon in the sky, but you can distinguish little stars gleaming in the brushwood, and may hear about you the slow flight of great birds, which seem to whisper strange oracles as they pass. Let us approach silently that crossroad among the rocks. A harsh, funereal trumpet winds suddenly, and black torches flare up on every side. A tumultuous throng is surging round a vacant throne: all watch and wait. Suddenly they cast themselves on the ground. A goat-headed prince bounds forward among them; he ascends the throne, turns, and assuming a stooping posture, presents to the assembly a human face, which everyone comes forward to salute and to kiss, their black taper in their hands. With a hoarse laugh he recovers an upright position, and then distributes gold, secret instructions, occult medicines and poisons to his faithful bondsmen. Meanwhile, fires are lighted of fern and alder, piled up with human bones and the fat of executed criminals. Druidesses, crowned with wild parsley and vervain, immolate unbaptized children with golden knives and prepare horrible love-feasts. Tables are spread, masked men seat themselves by half-nude females, and a Bacchanalian orgy begins; there is nothing wanting but salt, the symbol of wisdom and immortality. Wine flows in streams, leaving stains like blood; obscene advances and abandoned caresses begin. A little while, and the whole assembly is beside itself with drink and wantonness, with crimes and singing. They rise, a disordered throng, and

form infernal dances Then come all legendary monsters, all phantoms of nightmare; enormous toads play inverted flutes and thump with paws on flanks; limping scarabaei mingle in the dance; crabs play the castanets; crocodiles beat time on their scales; elephants and mammoths appear habited like Cupids and foot it in the ring: finally, the giddy circles break up and scatter on all sides Every yelling dancer drags away a dishevelled female Lamps and candles formed of human fat go out smoking in the darkness Cries are heard here and there, mingled with peals of laughter, blasphemies and rattlings in the throat. Come, rouse yourself: do not make the sign of the cross! See, I have brought you home. You are in your bed, not a little worn out, possibly a trifle shattered, by your night's journey and its orgy; but you have beheld that of which everyone talks without knowledge; you have been initiated into secrets no less terrible than the grotto of Triphonius; you have been present at the Sabbath. It remains for you now to preserve your wits, to have a wholesome dread of the law, and to keep at a respectful distance from the Church and her faggots.

Would you care, as a change, to behold something less fantastic, more real and also more truly terrible? You shall assist at the execution of Jacques de Molay and his accomplices or his brethren in martyrdom Be not misled, however; confuse not the guilty and the innocent! Did the Templars really adore Baphomet? Did they offer a shameful salutation to the buttocks of the goat of Mendes? What was actually this secret and potent association which imperilled Church and State, and was thus destroyed unheard? Judge nothing lightly; they are guilty of a great crime; they have exposed to profane eyes the sanctuary of antique initiation. They have gathered again and have shared the fruits of the tree of knowledge, so that they

might become masters of the world. The judgement pronounced against them is higher and far older than the tribunal of pope or king: "On the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die," said God Himself, as we read in the Book of Genesis.

What then is taking place in the world, and why do priests and potentates tremble? What secret power threatens tiaras and crowns? A few bedlamites are roaming from land to land, concealing, as they say, the Philosophical Stone under their ragged vesture. They can change earth into gold, and they are without food or lodging! Their brows are encircled by an aureole of glory and by a shadow of ignominy! One has discovered the universal science and goes vainly seeking death to escape the agonies of his triumph: he is the Majorcan Raymond Lully. Another heals imaginary diseases by fantastic remedies, belying beforehand that proverb which enforces the futility of a cautery on a wooden leg: he is the marvellous Paracelsus, always drunk and always lucid, like the heroes of Rabelais. Here is William Postel writing naively to the fathers of the Council of Trent, proclaiming that he has discovered the absolute doctrine, hidden from the foundation of the world, and is longing to share it with them. The Council heeds not the maniac, does not vouchsafe to condemn him, but proceeds to examine the grave questions of efficacious grace and sufficing grace. He whom we behold perishing poor and abandoned is Cornelius Agrippa, less of a magician than any, though the vulgar persist in regarding him as a more potent sorcerer than all because he was sometimes a cynic and mystifier. What secret do these men bear with them to their tomb? Why are they wondered at without being understood? Why are they condemned unheard? Why are they initiates of those terrific secret sciences of which the Church and society are afraid? Why are they acquainted with things of which others know

nothing? Why do they conceal what all men burn to know? Why are they invested with a dread and unknown power? The occult sciences! Magic! These words will reveal all and give food for further thought! De omni re scribili et quibusdum aliis.

But what, as a fact, was this Magic? What was the power of these men who were at once so proud and so persecuted? If they were really strong, why did they not overcome their enemies? But if they were impotent and foolish, why did people honour them by fearing them? Does Magic exist? Is there an occult knowledge which is in truth a power and works wonders comparable to the miracles of authorized religions? To these two palmary questions we make answer by an affirmation and a book. The book shall justify the affirmation, and the affirmation is this: There was and there still is a potent and real Magic; all that is said of it in legend is true after a certain manner, yet - contrary to the common course of popular exaggeration - it falls below the truth. There is indeed a formidable secret, the revelation of which has once already transformed the world, as testified in Egyptian religious tradition, summarized symbolically by Moses at the beginning of Genesis. This secret constitutes the fatal Science of Good and Evil, and the consequence of its revelation is death. Moses depicts it under the figure of a Tree which stands in the midst of the Terrestrial Paradise, is in proximity to the Tree of Life and is joined at the root thereto. At the foot of this tree is the source of the four mysterious rivers; it is guarded by the sword of fire and by the four symbolical forms of the Biblical sphinx, the Cherubim of Ezekiel Here I must pause, and I fear that already I have said too much. I testify in fine that there is one sole, universal and imperishable dogma, strong as supreme reason; simple, like all that is great; intelligible, like all that is universally and absolutely true; and this dogma is the parent of all others. There is also a science

which confers on man powers apparently superhuman. They are enumerated thus in a Hebrew manuscript of the sixteenth century:

“Hereinafter follow the powers and privileges of him who holds in his right hand the Clavicles of Solomon, and in his left the Branch of the Blossoming Almond. ALEPH. – He beholds God face to face, without dying. and converses familiarly with the seven genii who command the entire celestial army. BETH. – He is above all griefs and all fears. GHIMEL. – He reigns with all heaven and is served by all hell. DALETH. – He rules his own health and life and can influence equally those of others. HE. – He can neither be surprised by misfortune nor overwhelmed by disasters, nor can he be conquered by his enemies. VAU. – He knows the reason of the past, present and future. ZAIN. – He possesses the secret of the resurrection of the dead and the key of immortality.

Such are the seven chief privileges, and those which rank next are these:

CHETH. – To find the Philosophical Stone. TETH. – To possess the Universal Medicine. IOD. – To know the laws of perpetual motion and to prove the quadrature of the circle. CAPH. – To change into gold not only all metals but also the earth itself, and even the refuse of the earth. LAMED. – To subdue the most ferocious animals and have power to pronounce those words which paralyse and charm serpents. MEM. – To have the ARS NOTORIA which gives the Universal Science. NUN. – To speak learnedly on all subjects, without preparation and without study.

These, finally, are the seven least powers of the Magus:

SAMECH. - To know at a glance the deep things of the souls of men and the mysteries of the hearts of women. AYIN. - To force Nature to make him free at his pleasure. PE. - To foresee all future events which do not depend on a superior free will, or on an undiscernible cause. TSADE. - To give at once and to all the most efficacious consolations and the most wholesome counsels. KOPH. - To triumph over adversities. RESH. - To conquer love and hate. SHIN. - To have the secret of wealth, to be always its master and never its slave. To enjoy even poverty and never become abject or miserable. m TAU. - Let us add to these three septenaries that the wise man rules the elements, stills tempests, cures the diseased by his touch and raises the dead!

But certain things have been sealed by Solomon with his triple seal. It is enough that the initiates know; as for others, whether they deride, doubt or believe, whether they threaten or fear, what matters it to science or to us?"

Such actually are the issues of occult philosophy, and we are in a position to meet the charge of insanity or the suspicion of imposture when we affirm that these privileges are real. To demonstrate this is the sole end of our work on occult philosophy. The Philosophical Stone, the Universal Medicine, the transmutation of metals, the quadrature of the circle and the secret of perpetual motion are neither mystifications of science nor dreams of delusion. They are terms which must be understood in their proper sense; they formulate the varied applications of one and the same secret, the several aspects of a single operation, which is defined in a more comprehensive manner under the name of the Great Work. Furthermore, there exists in Nature a force which is immeasurably more powerful than steam, and a single man, who is able to adapt and direct it, might change thereby the face of the whole world. This force was

known to the ancients; it consists in a Universal Agent having equilibrium for its supreme law, while its direction is concerned immediately with the Great Arcanum of Transcendental Magic. By the direction of this agent it is possible to modify the very order of the seasons; to produce at night the phenomena of day; to correspond instantaneously between one extremity of the earth and the other; to see, like Apollonius, what is taking place on the other side of the world; to heal or injure at a distance; to give speech a universal success and reverberation. This agent, which barely manifests under the uncertain methods of Mesmer's followers, is precisely that which the adepts of the Middle Ages denominated the First Matter of the Great Work. The Gnostics represented it as the fiery body of the Holy Spirit; it was the object of adoration in the Secret Rites of the Sabbath and the Temple, under the hieroglyphic figure of Baphomet or the Androgyne of Mendes. All this will be proved.

Here then are the secrets of occult philosophy, and such is Magic in history. Let us glance at it now as it appears in its books and its acts, in its Initiations and its Rites. The key of all magical allegories is found in the tablets which we have mentioned, and these tablets we regard as the work of Hermes. About this book, which may be called the keystone of the whole edifice of occult science, are grouped innumerable legends that are either its partial translation or its commentary reproduced perpetually, under a thousand varied forms. Sometimes the ingenious fables combine harmoniously into a great epic which characterizes an epoch, though how or why is not clear to the uninitiated. Thus, the fabulous history of the Golden Fleece resumes and also veils the Hermetic and magical doctrines of Orpheus; and if we recur only to the mysterious poetry of Greece, it is because the sanctuaries of Egypt and India to some extent dismay us by their

resources, leaving our choice embarrassed in the midst of such abundant wealth. We are eager, moreover, to reach the Thebaid at once, that dread synthesis of all doctrine, past, present and future; that – so to speak – infinite fable, which reaches, like the Deity of Orpheus, to either end of the cycle of human life. Extraordinary fact! The seven gates of Thebes, attacked and defended by seven chiefs who have sworn upon the blood of victims, possess the same significance as the seven seals of the Sacred Book interpreted by seven genii and assailed by a monster with seven heads, after being opened by a Lamb which liveth and was dead, in the allegorical work of St. John. The mysterious origin of Oedipus, found hanging on the tree of Cithaeron like a bleeding fruit, recalls the symbols of Moses and the narratives of Genesis. He makes war upon his father, whom he slays without knowing – tremendous prophecy of the blind emancipation of reason apart from science. Thereafter he meets with the sphinx, that symbol of symbols, the eternal enigma of the vulgar, the granite pedestal of the sciences of the sages, the voracious and silent monster whose unchanging form expresses the one dogma of the Great Universal Mystery. How is the tetrad changed into the duad and explained by the triad? In more common but more emblematic terms, what is that animal which in the morning has four feet, two at noon, and three in the evening?

Philosophically speaking, how does the doctrine of elementary forces produce the dualism of Zoroaster, while it is summarized by the triad of Pythagoras and Plato? What is the ultimate reason of allegories and numbers, the final message of all symbolisms? Oedipus replies with a simple and terrible word which destroys the sphinx and makes the diviner King of Thebes: the answer to the enigma is MAN! . . . Unfortunate! He has seen too much, and yet through a clouded glass. A little while and he will

expiate his ominous and imperfect clairvoyance by a voluntary blindness, and then vanish in the midst of a storm, like all civilizations which - each in its own day - shall divine an answer to the riddle of the sphinx without grasping its whole import and mystery. Everything is symbolical and transcendental in this titanic epic of human destinies. The two antagonistic brothers formulate the second part of the Grand Mystery, completed divinely by the sacrifice of Antigone. There follows the last war; the brethren slay one another; Capaneus is destroyed by the lightning which he defies; Amphiaraus is swallowed by the earth; and all these are so many allegories which, by their truth and their grandeur, astonish those who can penetrate their triple hieratic sense. Aeschylus, annotated by Ballanche, gives only a weak notion concerning them, whatever the primeval sublimities of the Greek poet or the ingenuities of the French critic.

The secret book of antique initiation was not unknown to Homer, who outlines its plan and chief figures on the shield of Achilles, with minute precision. But the gracious Homeric fictions replaced too soon in popular memory the simple and abstract truths of primeval revelation. Humanity clung to the form and allowed the idea to be forgotten; signs lost power in their multiplication; Magic became corrupted also at this period, and degenerated with the sorcerers of Thessaly into the most profane enchantments. The crime of Oedipus brought forth its deadly fruits, and the science of good and evil erected evil into a sacrilegious divinity. Men, weary of the light, took refuge in the shadow of bodily substance; the dream of that void which is filled by God seemed in their eyes to be greater than God Himself, and thus hell was created.

When, in the course of this work, we make use of the consecrated terms God, Heaven and Hell, let it be