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978-1-108-06203-9 - The History of Magic: Including a Clear and Precise Exposition of Its Procedure, Its Rites and Its Mysteries

Éliphas Lévi Translated by Arthur Edward Waite

Excerpt

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THE HISTORY OF MAGIC

INTRODUCTION

MAGIC has been confounded too long with the jugglery of mountebanks, the hallucinations of disordered minds and the crimes of certain unusual malefactors. There are otherwise many who would promptly explain Magic as the art of producing effects in the absence of causes; and on the strength of such a definition it will be said by ordinary people—with the good sense which characterises the ordinary, in the midst of much injustice—that Magic is an absurdity. But it can have no analogy in fact with the descriptions of those who know nothing of the subject; furthermore, it is not to be represented as this or that by any person whomsoever: it is that which it is, drawing from itself only, even as mathematics do, for it is the exact and absolute science of Nature and her laws.

Magic is the science of the ancient magi; and the Christian religion, which silenced the counterfeit oracles and put a stop to the illusions of false gods, does, this notwithstanding, revere those mystic kings who came from the East, led by a star, to adore the Saviour of the world in His cradle. They are elevated by tradition to the rank of kings, because magical initiation constitutes a true royalty; because also the great art of the magi is characterised by all adepts as the Royal Art, as the Holy Kingdom—*Sanctum Regnum*. The star which conducted the pilgrims is the same Burning Star which is met with in all initiations. For alchemists it is the

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sign of the quintessence, for magicians it is the Great Arcanum, for Kabalists the sacred pentagram. Our design is to prove that the study of this pentagram did itself lead the magi to a knowledge of that New Name which was to be exalted above all names and to bend the knees of all beings who were capable of adoration. Magic, therefore, combines in a single science that which is most certain in philosophy, which is eternal and infallible in religion. It reconciles perfectly and incontestably those two terms, so opposed on the first view—faith and reason, science and belief, authority and liberty. It furnishes the human mind with an instrument of philosophical and religious certitude as exact as mathematics, and even accounting for the infallibility of mathematics themselves.

An Absolute exists therefore in the realms of understanding and faith. The lights of human intelligence have not been left by the Supreme Reason to waver at hazard. There is an incontestable truth; there is an infallible method of knowing that truth; while those who attain this knowledge, and adopt it as a rule of life, can endow their will with a sovereign power which can make them masters of all inferior things, all wandering spirits, or, in other words, arbiters and kings of the world.

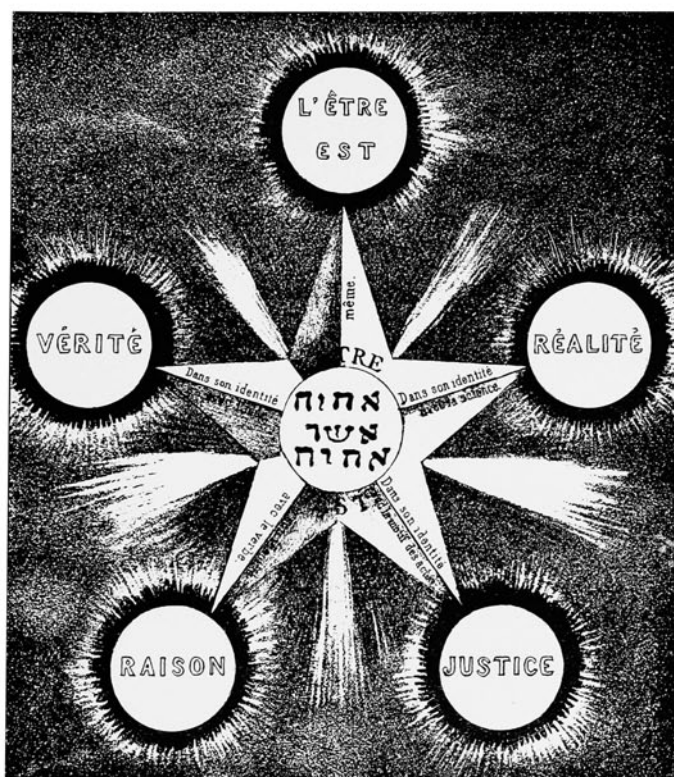
If such be the case, how comes it that so exalted a science is still unrecognised? How is it possible to assume that so bright a sun is hidden in a sky so dark? The transcendental science has been known always, but only to the flowers of intelligence, who have understood the necessity of silence and patience. Should a skilful surgeon open at midnight the eyes of a man born blind, it would still be impossible to make him realise the nature or existence of daylight till morning came. Science has its nights and its mornings, because the life which it communicates to the world of mind is characterised by regular modes of motion and progressive phases. It is

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THE PENTAGRAM OF THE ABSOLUTE

Facing p. 2

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the same with truths as it is with radiations of light. Nothing which is hidden is lost, but at the same time nothing that is found is absolutely new. The seal of eternity is affixed by God to that science which is the reflection of His glory.

The transcendental science, the absolute science is assuredly Magic, though the affirmation may seem utterly paradoxical to those who have never questioned the infallibility of Voltaire—that marvellous smatterer who thought that he knew so much because he never missed an opportunity for laughter instead of learning. Magic was the science of Abraham and Orpheus, of Confucius and Zoroaster, and it was magical doctrines which were graven on tables of stone by Enoch and by Trismegistus. Moses purified and re-veiled them—this being the sense of the word reveal. The new disguise which he gave them was that of the Holy Kabbalah—that exclusive heritage of Israel and inviolable secret of its priests.¹ The mysteries of Eleusis and of Thebes preserved among the Gentiles some of its symbols, but in a debased form, and the mystic key was lost amidst the apparatus of an ever-increasing superstition. Jerusalem, murderer of its prophets and prostituted over and over again to false Assyrian and Babylonian gods, ended by losing in its turn the Sacred Word, when a Saviour, declared to the magi by the holy star of initiation, came to rend the threadbare veil of the old temple, to endow the Church with a new network of legends and symbols—ever concealing from the profane and always preserving for the elect that truth which is the same for ever.

¹ The word signifies reception, and in Rabbinical Hebrew it denotes doctrine so communicated—that is to say, by a tradition handed down or received from the past. John Reuchlin specifies it as symbolical reception, signifying that the doctrine is not comprised simply in its surface meaning. He says further that it is of Divine Revelation, and that it belongs primarily to the life-giving contemplation of God. This is in the universal sense, but it is concerned also with secret teaching respecting particular things, meaning things manifest—*contemplatio formarum separatarum*.

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It is this that the erudite and ill-starred Dupuis should have found on Indian planispheres and in tables of Denderah; he would not have ended by rejecting the truly catholic or universal and eternal religion in the presence of the unanimous affirmation of all Nature, as well as all monuments of science throughout the ages.¹ It was the memory of this scientific and religious absolute, of this doctrine summarised in a word, of this word alternately lost and recovered, which was transmitted to the elect of all antique initiations. Whether preserved or profaned in the celebrated Order of the Temple, it was this same memory handed on to secret associations of Rosicrucians, Illuminati and Freemasons which gave a meaning to their strange rites, to their less or more conventional signs, and a justification above all to their devotion in common, as well as a clue to their power.

That profanation has befallen the doctrines and mysteries of Magic we have no intention to deny; repeated from age to age, the misuse itself has been a great and terrible lesson for those who made secret things unwisely known. The Gnostics caused the Gnosis to be prohibited by Christians, and the official sanctuary was closed to high initiation. The hierarchy of knowledge was thus compromised by the intervention of usurping ignorance, while the disorders within the sanctuary were reproduced in the state, for, willingly or otherwise, the king always depends from the priest, and it is towards the eternal *adytum* of divine instruction that earthly powers will ever look for consecration and for energy to insure their permanence.

¹ The reference is to *L'Origine de tous les Cultes, ou Religion Universelle*, 12 vols. in 8vo, together with an atlas in 4to. Paris, 1794. The work endeavoured to shew the unity of dogma under the multiplicity of symbols and allegories. In other words, it explained religion by astronomy, the cultus in the light of the calendar, mysteries of grace by means of natural phenomena. An abridgment in a small volume appeared about 1821. The Table of Denderah or Dendra was a great zodiac sculptured on the ceiling of the portico belonging to the Temple at that place, which was the ancient Tentyrio.

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The key of science has been thrown to children; as might have been expected, it is now, therefore, mislaid and practically lost. This notwithstanding, a man of high intuitions and great moral courage, Count Joseph de Maistre, who was also a resolute catholic, acknowledging that the world was void of religion and could not so remain, turned his eyes instinctively towards the last sanctuaries of occultism and called, with heartfelt prayers, for that day when the natural affinity which subsists between science and faith should combine them in the mind of a single man of genius. "This will be grand," said he; "it will finish that eighteenth century which is still with us. . . . We shall talk then of our present stupidity as we now dilate on the barbarism of the Middle Ages."

The prediction of Count Joseph de Maistre is in course of realisation; the alliance of science and faith, accomplished long since, is here in fine made manifest, though not by a man of genius. Genius is not needed to see the sun, and, moreover, it has never demonstrated anything but its rare greatness and its lights inaccessible to the crowd. The grand truth demands only to be found, when the simplest will be able to comprehend it and to prove it also at need. At the same time that truth will never become vulgar, because it is hierarchic and because anarchy alone humours the bias of the crowd. The masses are not in need of absolute truths; were it otherwise, progress would be arrested and life would cease in humanity; the ebb and flow of contrary ideas, the clash of opinions, the passions of the time, ever impelled by its dreams, are necessary to the intellectual growth of peoples. The masses know it full well, and hence they desert so readily the chair of doctors to collect about the rostrum of mountebanks. Some even who are assumed to be concerned in philosophy, and that perhaps especially, too often resemble the children playing at charades, who hasten to turn out those who know

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the answer already, lest the game should be spoiled by depriving the puzzle of the questions of all its interest.

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” has been said by Eternal Wisdom. Purity of heart therefore purifies intelligence, and rectitude of will makes for precision in understanding. Whosoever prefers truth and justice before all things shall have justice and truth for his reward, because supreme Providence has endowed us with freedom in order that we may attain life; and very truth, all its exactitude notwithstanding, intervenes only with mildness, never does outrage to tardiness or violence to the errors of our will when it is beguiled by the allurements of falsehood.

It remains, however, according to Bossuet, that antecedent to anything which may please or repel our senses, there is a truth, and it is by this that our conduct should be governed, not by our appetites. The Kingdom of Heaven is not the empire of caprice, either in respect of man or God. “A thing is not just because it is willed by God,” said St. Thomas, “but God wills it because it is just.” The Divine Balance rules and necessitates eternal mathematics. “God has made all things with number, weight and measure”—here it is the Bible speaking.¹ Measure an angle of creation, make a proportionally progressive multiplication, and all infinity shall multiply its circles, peopled by universes, passing in proportional segments between the extending symbolical arms of your compass. Suppose now that, from whatever point of the infinite above you, a hand holds another compass or square, then the lines of the celestial triangle will meet of necessity those of the compass of science and will form therewith the mysterious star of Solomon.²

¹ *Sed omnia in mensura, et numero, et pondere disposuisti*: “But Thou hast ordered all things in measure and number and weight.”—WISDOM, xi. 21.

² The conventional Hexagram presents in pictorial symbolism the root doctrine of the Hermetic Emerald Tablet: “That which is above is equal to that which is below.” It is the sign of the interpenetration of worlds.

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“With what measure you mete, it shall be measured to you again,” says the Gospel. God does not strive with man that He may crush man by His grandeur, and He never places unequal weights in His balance. When He would test the strength of Jacob, He assumes the form of man; the patriarch withstands the onset through an entire night; at the end there is a blessing for the conquered and, in addition to the glory of having sustained such a struggle, he is given the national title of Israel, being a name which signifies—Strong against God.¹

We have heard Christians more zealous than instructed hazarding a strange explanation of the dogma concerning eternal punishment by suggesting that God may avenge infinitely an offence which itself is finite, because if the offender is limited the grandeur of the offended being is not. An emperor of the world might, on the strength of a similar pretext, sentence to death some unreasoning child who had soiled accidentally the hem of his purple. Far otherwise are the prerogatives of greatness, and St. Augustine understood them better when he said that “God is patient because He is eternal.” In God all is justice, seeing that all is goodness; He never forgives after the manner of men, for He is never angered like them; but evil being, by its nature, incompatible with good, as night is with day, as discord is with harmony, and the liberty of man being furthermore inviolable, all error is expiated and all evil punished by suffering proportioned thereto. It is vain to invoke the help of Jupiter when our cart is stuck in the mud; unless we take pick and shovel, like the waggoner in the fable, Heaven will not draw us out of the rut. Help yourself and God will help you. In such a reasonable

¹ According to the *Zohar*, Pt. I., fol. 21a, 21b, it was with the guardian angel of Esau that Jacob wrestled at the place which he named Peniel. The angel could not prevail against Jacob because the latter derived his strength from the Supreme Light, *Kether*, and from *Chokmah*, which is the second hypostasis. He therefore smote Jacob on the right thigh, which signifies the seventh *Sephira*, or *Netsach*.

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and wholly philosophical way is explained the possible and necessary eternity of punishment, with still a narrow way open for man to escape therefrom—being that of toil and repentance.¹

It is by conformity with the rules of eternal power that man may unite himself to the creative energy and become creator and preserver in his turn. God has not limited narrowly the number of rounds on Jacob's ladder of light. Whatsoever Nature has constituted inferior to man is thereby to him made subject: it is for man to extend his domain in virtue of continual ascent. Length and even perpetuity of life, the field of air and its storms, the earth and its metallic veins, light and its wondrous illusions, darkness and the dreams thereof, death and its ghosts—all these do therefore obey the royal sceptre of the magi, the shepherd's staff of Jacob and the terrible wand of Moses. The adept becomes king of the elements, transmuter of metals, interpreter of visions, controller of oracles, master of life in fine, according to the mathematical order of Nature and conformably to the will of the Supreme Intelligence. This is Magic in all its glory. But is there anyone who in these days will dare to give credence to such words? The answer is—those who will study loyally and attain knowledge frankly. We make no attempt to conceal truth under the veil of parables or hieroglyphical signs; the time has come when everything should be told, and we propose to tell everything. It is our intention, in short, to unveil that ever secret science which, as we have indicated, is hidden behind the shadows of ancient mysteries, which the Gnostics betrayed clumsily, or rather disfigured unworthily, which is recognised dimly under the darkness shrouding the pretended crimes of Templars, which is

¹ The more usual argument of high orthodox theology in the Latin school is that a sin against the Infinite Being is one of infinite culpability. If it were suggested in rejoinder that it must be one of infinite inconsequence, so far as that Being is concerned, it might not be more reasonable than the argument, but it would do less outrage to logic.