

## THE OLD AND THE NEW MAGIC.

BY THE EDITOR.

THE very word magic has an alluring sound, and its practice as an art will probably never lose its attractiveness for people's minds. But we must remember that there is a difference between the old magic and the new, and that both are separated by a deep chasm, which is a kind of color line, for though the latter develops from the former in a gradual and natural course of evolution, they are radically different in principle and the new magic is irredeemably opposed to the assumptions upon which the old magic rests.

The old magic is sorcery, or, considering the impossibility of genuine sorcery, the attempt to practise sorcery. It is based upon the pre-scientific world-conception, which in its primitive stage is called animism, imputing to nature a spiritual life analogous to our own spirit, and peopling the world with individual personalities, spirits, ghosts, goblins, gods, devils, ogres, gnomes, and fairies. The old magic stands in contrast to science; it endeavors to transcend human knowledge by supernatural methods and is based upon the hope of working miracles by the assistance of invisible presences or intelligences, who according to this belief could be forced or coaxed by magic into an alliance. The savage believes that the evil influence of the powers of nature can be averted by charms or talismans and their aid procured by proper incantations, conjurations, and prayers.

The world-conception of the savage is long-lingering, and its influence does not subside instantaneously with the first appearance of science. The Middle Ages are still full of magic, and the belief in it has not died out to this day.

Goethe introduces the belief in magic into the very plot of Faust. In his despair at never finding the key to the world-problem in science, which, as he thinks, does not offer what we need, but

useless truisms only, Faust hopes to find the royal road to knowledge by supernatural methods. He says :

“ Therefore, from Magic I seek assistance,  
That many a secret perchance I reach  
Through spirit-power and spirit-speech,  
And thus the bitter task forego  
Of saying the things I do not know, —  
That I may detect the inmost force  
Which binds the world, and guides its course ;  
Its germs, productive powers explore,  
And rummage in empty words no more ! ”

The old magic found a rival in science and has in all its aspects, in religion as well as in occultism, in mysticism and obscu-



SAUL AND THE WITCH OF ENDOR. (After Schnorr von Carolsfeld.)

rantism, treated science as its hereditary enemy. It is now succumbing in the fight, although its last vestiges which prove toughest in their survival, viz., the notions of an animistic God-conception and an animistic soul-conception, are still haunting the minds of ultra-conservative people. In the meantime a new magic has originated and taken the place of the old magic, performing miracles as wonderful as those of the best conjurers of former days, nay, more

wonderful; yet these miracles are accomplished with the help of science and without the least pretense of supernatural power.

The new magic originated from the old magic when the belief in sorcery began to break down, viz., in the eighteenth century, which is the dawn of rationalism and marks the epoch since which mankind has been systematically working out a scientific world-conception.

Magic originally means priestcraft, being that which characterises the Magi, the Iranian priests. It is probable that the word



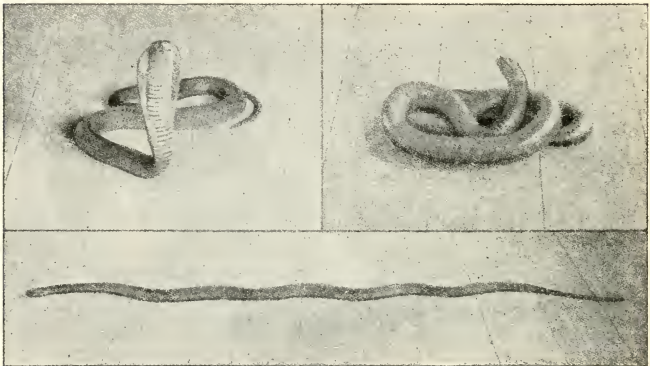
MOSES AND AARON PERFORMING THE MIRACLE OF THE SERPENTS BEFORE PHARAOH  
(After Schnorr von Carolsfeld.)

is very old, being handed down to us from the Greeks and Romans who had received it from the Persians. But they in their turn owe it to the Babylonians, and the Babylonians to the Assyrians, and the Assyrians to the Sumero-Akkadians.

*Imga* in Akkad meant priest, and the Assyrians changed the word to *maga*, calling their high-priest *Rab-mag*; and considering the fact that the main business of priests in ancient times consisted in exorcising, fortune-telling, miracle-working, and giving out oracles, it seems justifiable to believe that the Persian term, which in its

Latin version is *magus*, is derived from the Chaldæan and is practically the same; for the connotation of a wise man endowed with supernatural powers has always been connected with the word *magus*, and even to-day magician means wizard, sorcerer, or miracle-worker.

In primitive society religion is magic, and priests are magicians. The savage would think that if the medicine-man could not work miracles, there would be no use for religion. Religion, however, does not disappear with the faith in the medicine man's power. When magic becomes discredited by science, religion is purified. We must know, though, that religious reforms of this kind are not accomplished at once but come on gradually in slow



THE EGYPTIAN SNAKE NAJA HAJE MADE MOTIONLESS BY PRESSURE UPON THE NECK  
(Reproduced from Verworn after photographs.)

process of evolution, first by disappointment and then in exultation at the thought that the actualities of science are higher, nobler, and better than the dreams of superstition, even if they were possible, and thus it appears that science comes to fulfil, not to destroy.

While the belief in, and the practice of, magic are not entirely absent in the civilisation of Israel, we find that the leaders of orthodox thought had set their face against it, at least as it appeared in its crudest form, and went so far as to persecute sorcerers with fire and sword.

We read in the Bible that when the Lord "multiplied his signs" in Egypt, he sent Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh to turn

their rods into serpents, that the Egyptian magicians vied with them in the performance, but that Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods, demonstrating thus Aaron's superiority. It is an interesting fact that the snake charmers of Egypt perform to-day a similar feat, which consists in paralysing a snake so as to render it motionless. The snake then looks like a stick but is not rigid.

Exorcism is first replaced by prayer, and prayer together with other religious exercises (such as fasts, ecstasies, trances, visions, asceticism, with its various modes of self-mortification) are practised for the purpose of attaining supernatural powers. A higher religion is not attained until the sphere of religion is discovered in



MODERN SNAKE CHARMERS. (From Brehm.)

practical morality and prayer is changed into vows. Then supplications of the deity to attain one's will are surrendered for the moral endeavor of self-control, disciplining the will to comply with the behests of the moral ought.

How tenacious the idea is that religion is and must be magic, appears from the fact that even Christianity shows traces of it. In fact, the early Christians (who, we must remember, recruited their ranks from the lowly in life) looked upon Christ as a kind of magician, and all his older pictures show him with a magician's wand in his hand. The resurrection of Lazarus, the change of water into wine, the miracle of the loaves and fishes, are according to the no-

tions of those centuries performed after the fashion of sorcerers, and the main thing in early Christianity is Christ's alleged claim to the power of working miracles. The last injunction which Jesus gives to his disciples according to St. Mark (xvi. 15-18) is this :

"Go ye into all the world, and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptised shall be saved ; but he that believeth not shall be damned. And these signs shall follow them that believe ; in my name shall they cast out devils ; they shall speak with new tongues ; they shall take up serpents ; and if they drink any deadly thing, it shall not hurt them ; they shall lay hands on the sick, and they shall recover."

It is apparent that Christianity in the days when this was written bore a strong resemblance to what is now called Christian



CHRIST WITH THE WAND.

From a Christian Sarcophagus.<sup>1</sup>

science, faith cure, or mental-healing ; for the author of the above-quoted passage, the importance of which in the New Testament canon cannot be underrated, implies that any Christianity in which "these signs" are absent must be regarded as spurious.

Traces of the religion of magic are still prevalent to-day, and it will take much patient work before the last remnants of it are swept away. The notions of magic still hold in bondage the minds of the uneducated and half-educated, and even the leaders of prog-

<sup>1</sup> Reproduced from Mrs. Jameson's and Lady Eastlake's *History of Our Lord*, London, 1872. Longmans, Green & Co., Vol. I., pp. 347 and 349.

ress feel themselves now and then hampered by ghosts and superstitions. Thus Goethe makes Faust say at the end of his career :

“Not yet have I my liberty made good :  
 So long as I can't banish magic's fell creations  
 And totally unlearn the incantations.  
 Stood I, O Nature, as a man in thee,  
 Then were it worth one's while a man to be.  
 And such was I ere I with the occult conversed,  
 And ere so wickedly the world I cursed.”

To be a man in nature and to fight one's way to liberty is a much more dignified position than to go lobbying to the courts of the celestials and to beg of them favors. At the beginning of the drama Faust had turned agnostic and declared that we cannot know anything worth knowing, saying :

“That which we do not know is dearly needed ;  
 And what we need we do not know.”

And in another place :

“I see that nothing can be known.”

But now Faust is converted to science again, having found out that the study of nature is not a useless rummage in empty words. However, in the first and second decade of the nineteenth century the rationalism of the eighteenth century waned, not to make room for a higher rationalism, but to suffer the old bugbears of ghosts and hobgoblins to reappear in a reactionary movement. Progress does not pursue a straight line, but moves in spirals or epicycles. Periods of daylight are followed by nights of superstition. Faust (expressing here Goethe's own ideas) continues :

“Now fills the air so many a haunting shape,  
 That no one knows how best he may escape.  
 What though the day with rational splendor beams,  
 The night entangles us in webs of dreams.  
 By superstition constantly ensnared,  
 It spooks, gives warnings, is declared.  
 Intimidated thus we stand alone.  
 The portal jars, yet entrance is there none.”

The aim of man is his liberty and independence. As soon as we understand that there are not occult powers or spooks that must be conciliated by supplications and appeased, but that we stand in nature from which we have grown in constant interaction between our own aspirations and the natural forces regulated by law, we shall have confidence in our own faculties, which can be increased by investigation and a proper comprehension of conditions, and we shall no longer look beyond but around. Faust says :

" A fool who to the Beyond his eyes directeth  
 And over the clouds a place of peers detecteth.  
 Firm must man stand and look around him well,  
 The world means something to the capable."

This manhood of man, to be gained by science through the conquest of all magic, is the ideal which the present age is striving to attain, and the ideal has plainly been recognised by leaders of human progress. The time has come for us "to put away childish things," and to relinquish the beliefs and practices of the medicine-man.

But while magic as superstition and as fraud is doomed, magic as an art will not die. Science will take hold of it and permeate it with its own spirit changing it into scientific magic which is destitute of all mysticism, occultism, and superstition, and comes to us as a witty play for recreation and diversion.

It is an extraordinary help to a man to be acquainted with the tricks of prestidigitators,<sup>1</sup> and we advise parents not to neglect this phase in the education of their children. The present age is laying the basis of a scientific world-conception, and it is perhaps not without good reasons that it has produced quite a literature on the subject of modern magic.

It might seem that if the public became familiar with the methods of the magicians who give public entertainments, their business would be gone. But this is not the case. As a peep behind the scenes and a knowledge of the machinery of the stage only help us to appreciate scenic effects, so an insight into the tricks of the prestidigitator will only serve to whet our appetite for seeing him perform his tricks. The prestidigitator will be forced to improve his tricks before an intelligent audience; he will be obliged to invent new methods, but not to abandon his art.

Moreover, it is not the trick alone that we admire, but the way in which it is performed. Even those who know how things can be made to disappear by sleight of hand, must confess that they always found delight in seeing the late Alexander Hermann, whenever he began a *soirée*, take off his gloves, roll them up and make them vanish as if into nothingness.

It is true that magic in the old sense is gone; but that need not be lamented. The coarseness of Cagliostro's frauds has given way to the elegant display of scientific inventiveness and an adroit use of human wit.

<sup>1</sup> It seems that the anglicised form "prestidigitator" is preferable to the French word *prestidigitateur*.



Cagliostro, whose real name was Joseph Balsamo, was the last great magician in the old sense of the word. We may admire his genius and the fertility of his inventions, as we give credit to the cunning of a pickpocket, a highwayman, or a burglar. Though a brilliant mind, he was a pretender who began his career with forgery and ended his days (no one knows how) in a dungeon of the Roman Inquisition. The genius with which he practised his art was deserving of a better treatment, but he was a freemason, and



THE CONJURER. (By Prof. W. Zimmer.)

in those days that was a crime at Rome incurring the penalty of death.<sup>1</sup>

Modern mediums are harmless successors of Cagliostro with analogous though considerably diminished pretensions; but their tactics have changed utterly; they try to shield themselves by disavowing all claims to the possession of magic, and concealing their tricks under the guise of a student's modesty. They play the part of inquirers and pretend to be confronted with phenomena not yet

<sup>1</sup>Cagliostro was actually condemned to death by his judges, members of the Inquisition, not for the frauds which he practised on the credulous, but as a freemason. The Pope commuted the sentence to imprisonment for life and had him deported to the fortress of San Leon. It is not likely that he received good treatment, for his wardens feared him on account of his supposed magical powers. His death seems to have occurred August 26, 1795.

explained, inviting the people to investigate certain psychological problems that seem physically inexplicable.

Modern magic begins with a number of brilliant prestidigitators, men like Jonas, Androletti, Carlotti, Pinetti, Katerfelto, Jacob Meyer (called Philadelphia), Rollin, the older Cosmus, Torrini, etc., all contemporaries of Cagliostro; but their fame was eclipsed by Jean Eugene Robert Houdin (1805-1871) who was followed by Robert Heller, the younger Cosmus, Robertson, Pepper, Bellachini, Mellini, Agaston, Becker, Lorgie, Rönner, Roberth, various members of the Basch, and no fewer of the Hermann families, Kellar, Maskelyne, and others.

The old magic still continues to haunt the minds of the uncultured, and will resist all exposés and explanations, until it is replaced by modern magic. For this reason we believe that the spread of modern magic and its proper comprehension are an important sign of progress, and in this sense the feats of our Kellars and Hermanns are a work of religious significance. They are instrumental in dispelling the fogs of superstition by exhibiting to the public the astonishing but natural miracles of the art of legerdemain; and while they amuse and entertain they fortify the people in their conviction of the reliability of science.

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While the performance of magical tricks is an art, the observation of them and also their description is a science, presupposing a quick and critical eye of which very few people are possessed; and scientists by profession are sometimes the least fit persons to detect the place and mode of the deception.

How differently different persons watch the same events becomes apparent when we compare Professor Zöllner's reports of spiritualistic séances with those of other more critical witnesses. Professor Zöllner, for instance, writes (*Wissenschaftliche Abhandl.* Vol. III, p. 354) in his description of one of the experiments with Mr. Slade that Professor Fechner's chair was lifted up about half a foot above the ground, while Mr. Slade touched the back of it lightly with his hand, and he emphasises that his colleague after hovering some time in the air, was suddenly dropped with great noise. The event as thus described is mystifying. However, when we carefully compare Professor Fechner's account, we come to the conclusion that the whole proceeding is no longer miraculous, but could be repeated by prestidigitators. Fechner writes that at the request of Mr. Slade, he himself (Professor Fechner), who was slim and light, took the place of Professor Braune. Mr. Slade turned round to

Professor Fechner and bore his chair upward in a way which is not at all inexplicable by the methods of legerdemain. Professor Fechner does not mention that he hovered for some time in the air, but



PROFESSOR ZÖLLNER AND SLADE. (From Willmann.)

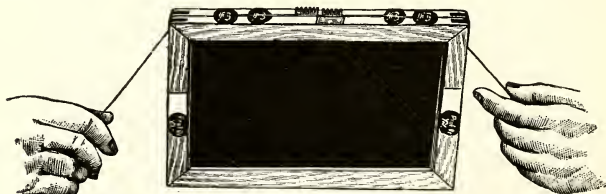
it is obvious that Mr. Slade made the two professors change seats because he would scarcely have had the strength to lift up the heavy Professor Braune.

Similarly, the accounts of the famous painter Gabriel Max,

who also attended some of Slade's séances with Zöllner, make the performances of the medium appear in a less wonderful light.

Mr. Carl Willmann, a manufacturer of magical apparatus at Hamburg, and the author of several books on modern magic, publishes a circumstantial description of Professor Zöllner's double slates used in séances with Mr. Slade, which are now in possession of Dr. Borchardt of Hamburg, who bought them with other objects of interest from the estate of the deceased Professor Zöllner. The seals of these plates are by no means so intact as not to arouse the suspicion that they have been tampered with. To a superficial inspection they appear unbroken, but the sealing wax shows vestiges of finger marks, and Mr. Willmann has not the slightest doubt that they were opened underneath the seal with a thin heated wire and that the seal was afterwards again attached to its place.

Professor Zöllner, the most famous victim of the bold medium, lacked entirely the necessary critique and became an easy prey of



THE OPENING OF SLADE'S SLATE BY MEANS OF A HEATED WIRE.  
(After Willmann.)

fraud. One of his colleagues, a professor of surgery in the University of Leipsic, had entered upon a bet with Professor Zöllner that a slate carefully sealed and watched by himself could not be written upon by spirits; he had left the slate in Professor Zöllner's hands in the confidence that the latter would use all the necessary precautions. Professor Zöllner, however, not finding Mr. Slade at home, saw nothing wrong in leaving the sealed slate at the medium's residence and thus allowing it to pass for an indefinite time out of his own control, thinking that the seals were a sufficient protection. It goes without saying that his colleague at once cancelled the bet and took no more interest in the experiment.

The foot and hand prints which Mr. Slade produced were apparently made from celluloid impressions which could easily be carried about and hidden in the pocket. This explains why these

vestiges of the spirits were not of the size of Mr. Slade's hands or feet.

Mr. Willmann calls attention to the fact that the foot-prints as published by Professor Zöllner were made from feet whose stockings had been removed but a few moments before, for they still show the meshes of the knitting which quickly disappear as soon as the skin of the foot grows cold. Professor Zöllner did not see such trifles, and yet they are important, even if it were for the mere purpose of determining whether the spirits wear stockings made in Germany or America.

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The accounts of travellers are as a rule full of extravagant praise of the accomplishments of foreign magicians; thus, the feats



THE SINGALESE CONJURER BEN-KI-BEY.  
(After Carl Willmann.)

of our American Indians are almost habitually greatly exaggerated. The same is true in a greater measure of fakirs and Hindu magicians. Recent accounts of a famous traveller are startling, but the problem is not whether or not what he tells is true (for only a little dose of good judgment is sufficient to recognise their impossibility), but whether or not he believes his tales himself. The problem is neither physical nor historical as to the reality of the events narrated, the problem is purely psychological as to his own state of mind.

The primitive simplicity of the methods of the Hindu jugglers and the openness of the theater where they perform their tricks is a cause of wonder to those who are not familiar with the methods of

legerdemain. Mr. Willmann, who had occasion to watch Hindu magicians, says in his book, *Moderne Wunder*, page 3: "After a careful investigation, it becomes apparent that the greatest miracles of Indian conjurers are much more insignificant than they appear in the latest reports of travellers.<sup>1</sup> The descriptions which in our days men of science have furnished about the wonderful tricks of fakirs have very little value in the shape in which they are rendered. If they, for instance, speak with admiration about the invisible growth of a flower before their very eyes, produced from the seed deposited by a fakir in a flower-pot, they prove only that even men of science can be duped by a little trick the practice of which lies without the pale of their own experience."

Eye-witnesses whose critical capacities are a safeguard against imposition relate more plausible stories. John T. McCutcheon describes the famous trick of growing a mango tree, as follows:

"The further away from India one is the greater appears the skill of these Hindu magicians. How often have we read the traveller's tales about the feats of Indian jugglers, and how eagerly we have looked forward to the time when we might behold them and be spellbound with amazement and surprise. When I first saw the India juggler beginning the preparations for the mango trick I was half prepared by the traveller's tales to see a graceful tree spring quickly into life and subsequently see somebody climb it and pick quantities of nice, ripe mangoes. Nothing of the kind happened, as will be seen by the following description of the mango trick as it is really performed.

"The juggler, with a big bag of properties, arrives on the scene and immediately begins to talk excitedly, meanwhile unpacking various receptacles taken from the bag. He squats down, pipes a few notes on a wheezy reed whistle and the show begins. From his belongings he takes a little tin can about the size of a cove oyster can, fills it with dirt and saturates the dirt with water. Then he holds up a mango seed to show that there is nothing concealed by his sleeves; counts "ek, do, tin, char," or "one, two, three, four," and imbeds the seed in the moist earth. He spreads a large cloth over the can and several feet of circumjacent ground. Then he plays a few more notes on his reed instrument and allows the seed a few minutes in which to take root and develop into a glorious shade tree. While he is waiting he unfolds some snakes from a small basket, takes a mongoose from a bag and entertains his audience with a combat between the mongoose and one of the snakes.

"Ek, do, tin, char; one, two, three, four—plenty fight—very good mongoose—biga snake—four rupee mongoose—two rupee snake—mongoose fight snake Look—gentlymans—plenty big fight.

"All this time the cloth remained peaceful and quiet, and there were no uneasy movements of its folds to indicate that the mango crop was flourishing. The juggler now turned his attention to it, however, poked his hands under the cloth, and after a few seconds of mysterious fumbling triumphantly threw off the cloth, and lo, there was a little bunch of leaves about as big as a sprig of water cress

<sup>1</sup> Referring to an account.

sticking up dejectedly from the damp earth. This was straightway deluged with some water and the cloth again thrown over it.

"Once more there was a diversion. This time an exhibition of a shell game, in which the juggler showed considerable dexterity in placing the little ball where you didn't think it would be. Still the cloth revealed no disposition to bulge skyward, and a second time the juggler fumbled under it, talking hurriedly in Hindustani and making the occasion as interesting as possible. After much poking around he finally threw off the cloth with a glad cry, and there was a mango tree a foot high, with adult leaves which glistened with moisture. When his spectators had gazed at it for awhile he pulled the little tree up by the roots, and there was a mango seed attached, with the little sprouts springing out from it.

"The trick was over, the juggler's harvest of rupees and annas began, and soon his crowd faded away. A few minutes later, from a half-hidden seat on the hotel veranda, I saw the wizard over across the street, beneath the big shade trees, folding up the mango tree and tucking it compactly into a small bag."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chicago Record, April 22, 1899.

[TO BE CONCLUDED.]