

ELIPHAS LEVI—MAGICIAN AND MYSTIC.

BY HENRY RIDGELY EVANS.

I.

THE greatest cabalist and occultist of modern times was Alphonse Louis Constant, who published his elucidations of the mysteries of magic under the Hebraistic pseudonym of Eliphas Levi Zahed. He was born in Paris about the year 1809. His father, a shoemaker, in a small way of business, and apparently in the poorest circumstances, resided in an obscure street of the metropolis. Eliphas Levi received a free education at the seminary of Saint Sulpice, and made great proficiency in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew. He was destined for the priesthood, but eventually abandoned the idea, owing to his liberal views. His renunciation of an ecclesiastical career was followed by an elopement with a beautiful young girl of sixteen. This union was unfortunately an unhappy one. After the death of his two children, his wife abandoned him forever. He sought consolation in books of a mystical character, and gave himself up to the pursuit of the occult sciences. In the year 1853, Levi went to London, where his reputation as a magician had preceded him, and where he performed his celebrated ceremonial evocation of the shade of Apollonius of Tyana, described by him in his work on magic, which the reader may believe or not, according to his previous training as mystic or scientific man. In London, Levi made the acquaintance of Lord Lytton, the author; and, says Arthur Edward Waite, an expounder of the magician's doctrines, "the absolute identity between the mysterious *vril* of 'the Coming Race' and the universal force of the Astral Light, is conclusive as to the great novelist's acquaintance with the works of his cabalistic contemporary. . . . Among the papers at Knebworth [Lord Lytton's home] there is a letter from M. Constant on the existence of a universal force, and the requisite condi-

tions of its employment for the evocation of spiritual visions and presences."

Eliphas Levi is best known by his extraordinary works on ceremonial magic and occultism: *Le Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*, *L'Histoire de la Magie*, *La Clef des Grands Mystères*, *La Philosophie Occulte*, and *La Science des Esprits*. He died in 1875 at Paris. Madame Gebhard, a pupil of the occultist, has left us a pen-picture of him: "He was of a short and corpulent figure; his face was kind and benevolent, beaming with good nature, and he wore a long grey beard which covered nearly the whole of his breast. His apartment resembled a bric-à-brac shop, with specimens of the most beautiful and rare old china, tapestry, and valuable paintings. In one of the rooms there was an alcove in which stood a bed covered with a gorgeous quilt of red velvet heavily embroidered with gold; the curtains were also of red velvet bordered with massive gold fringe, and a red velvet step stood before this magnificent couch, having a soft cushion also of red and gold on the top of it. . . . He lived a quiet and retired life, having few friends. . . . His habits . . . were simple, but he was no vegetarian. He had a wonderful memory, and a marvellous flow of language, his expressions and illustrations being of the choicest and rarest character."

Eliphas Levi was laid in state upon his gorgeous couch after his decease. Upon his breast reposed a large crucifix, for he died reconciled with the Roman Catholic faith, though secretly repudiating many of its dogmas, or rather, I should say, interpreting the symbology of the Church in fashion to suit his peculiar ideas. His body was viewed by many men of note, admirers of his bizarre genius.¹

II.

The writings of Levi have largely influenced the present school of the occult in France and elsewhere. Madame Blavatsky drew much of her inspiration from the pages of the French thaumaturge. She knew little or nothing of Sanskrit, but she read and spoke French with considerable fluency. Alphonse Louis Constant apostrophies the occult as follows (*Le Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie*):

"Behind the veil of all the hieratic and mystical allegories of ancient dogmas, behind the shadows and fantastic ordeals of all initiations, beneath the seal of all sacred writings, amidst the ruins of Nineveh or of Thebes, on the crumbling stones of ancient tem-

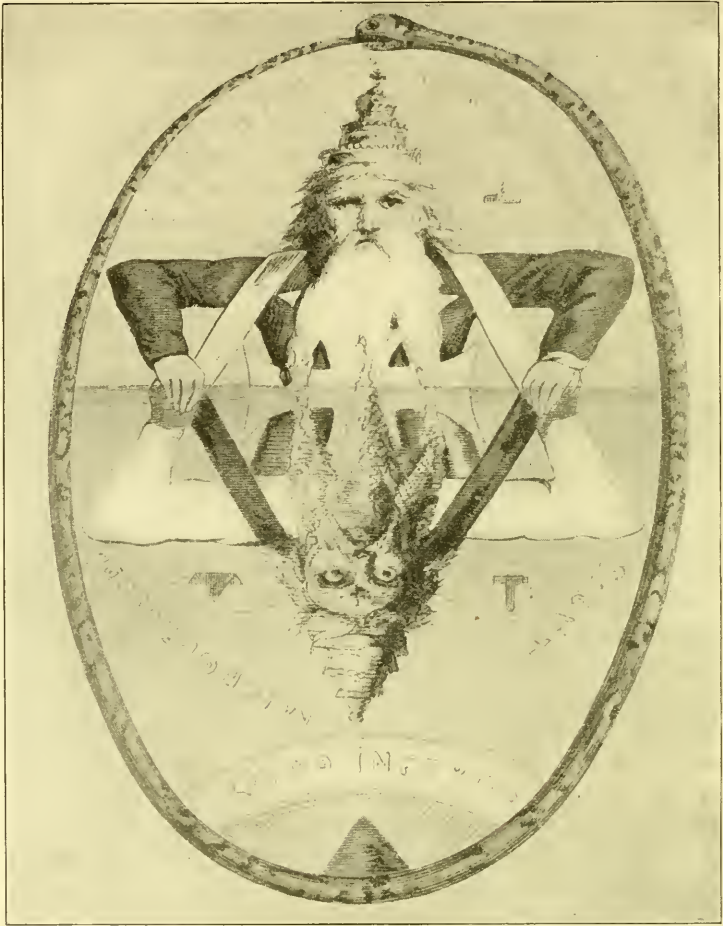
¹ *The Mysteries of Magic: a Digest of the Writings of Eliphas Levi*. London, 1886.

ples, and on the scorched visage of the sphinx of Assyria or Egypt, in the monstrous or marvellous paintings which translate for the faithful of India the sacred pages of the Vedas, in the strange emblems of our old alchemical works, in the initiatory ceremonies adopted by all secret societies, we find the traces of a doctrine which is everywhere the same and everywhere carefully concealed. Occult philosophy seems to have been the nurse and godmother of all intellectual forces, the key of all divine obscurities, and the absolute mistress of society, in those ages when it was exclusively reserved for the education of priests and of kings. . . . Magic is the traditional science of the secrets of Nature which comes to us from the Magi. It unites in a single science all that is most certain in philosophy and most infallible and eternal in religion. . . . Yes, the supreme and absolute science is magic, the science of Abraham and Orpheus, of Confucius and Zoroaster. Its doctrines were engraved on stone tables by Enoch and Trismegistus. Moses purified and *re-veiled* them—this is the sense of the word *reveal*—when he made the holy Cabala the exclusive heritage of the people of Israel and the inviolable secret of its priests.”

Levi claims in the *Dogme et Ritual*, according to his best commentator, to be “in possession of a secret which has once, at least, revolutionised the world; he claims to have discovered a force by which all miracles divine and diabolical have been, and may still be, performed, to possess the key of prophecies, to have traced the exoteric doctrines of all theogonies to one primal and universal dogma. He has recovered the claviculæ of Solomon, and has ‘opened without difficulty every door of the ancient sanctuaries where absolute truth seemed to slumber’; he has unraveled the transcendent secrets which mediæval adepts concealed under the more or less equivocal expressions of the *Magnum Opus*, the philosopher’s stone, the quadrature of the circle, the universal medicine, and the transmutation of metals. He has discovered, in fine, ‘the secret of human omnipotence and of indefinite progression’—he is, in one word, the master of the absolute.”

Gigantic claim! The Mahatmas of Thibet pale away into insignificance before the little French magician. Levi has surrounded his teachings with enigmas and mysteries. What is his Great Arcanum? A thaumaturgical symbol of Trithemius, described in the *Histoire de la Magie*, is declared by him to contain the final secret and indicible formula of the Great Arcanum. “This figure is composed of two triangles—one white and one black—which are joined at the base. Beneath the inverted apex of the black triangle

there is a fool crouching, painfully twisting his head, and looking with a grimace of terror at his own image reflected in the obscurity of the black triangle, while a man in knightly garments, in the vigor of maturity, with a steady glance and a strong yet pacific at-



SYMBOLICAL FIGURE.
(From Levi's *Haute magie*.)

titude of command, is balanced on the apex of the white triangle, within which are the letters of the divine tetragram."

Levi gives the following exoteric explanation of the above device: "The wise man depends on the fear of the true God, while the fool is crushed by his terror of the false god made in his own

image." Its esoteric significance is as follows, says Waite: "Uninitiated humanity creates God by a blackened, magnified, and distorted resemblance of itself which it reflects on the illimitable background of stupidity and ignorance, then it crouches and shivers in the presence of the monstrous phantom. The adept also creates God, not however, by reflecting his likeness on infinity, but the conception of his power and knowledge, figured by a symbol. This conception is reflected on the white triangle, that is, on the unknown world enlightened by the analogies of science. The initiate is represented as poised above this triangle, not only because the hypothesis which he has formed becomes the source of his intellectual and moral stability, but because the creation of this hypothesis is a theurgic act, and the intellect is above that which it creates. The initiate is, therefore, God for the profane, he is the actual finite deity who stands on earth for the hypothetical, infinite God, and he has the right of life and death over any particular conception of divinity which may at any time dominate the crowd of men.

The end of magic is thus the *creation of the gods* and the evolution of the Deific conception in the *élite* of humanity. From the Christian standpoint all this is outrageous blasphemy, but it is the outcome of Eliphas Levi's philosophy. If any proof were wanting it would be supplied by the following passage (*La Clef des Grands Mystères*, p. 219): "'Jehovah is he who overcomes nature (understand human nature to be included) as we tame a rebellious horse and make it proceed where we will.' This is the absolute, indicible, theurgic secret. Here Jehovah cannot mean the all-creating God, to whom everything that exists must be necessarily in complete subjection, and who cannot be described as overcoming by force what lies in the hollow of his hand. Jehovah here is the God-creating man, the self conqueror, who by the *création de soi même* has power over the chaos of human passion and over the blind forces of nature. The Great Magiç Arcanum is thus in its primary phase the secret of the power of a completely emancipated mind over the slaves of superstition and ignorance. The unique Athanor, the philosophic and moral alchemy, is the transmutation of darkness into light, in the intellectual order, of gross matter into gold refined, of ignorance into knowledge, of dead substances into substances quickened by the energies of veritable life, of the mere animal into conscious man, and of man into God. 'The stone becomes a plant, the plant an animal, the animal a man, and man greatens into Deity.'" "The secret agent of the *magnum opus* . . . is magnetised electricity." This force Levi usually terms the *astral*

light—a name which he borrowed from St. Martin and the French mystics of the eighteenth century. We have seen it exploited by Lord Lytton, in his occult novels, *A Strange Story* and *Zanoni*. It is an important factor in modern Theosophy and hermetism, and is closely related to the “radiant matter” of chemists and the “ether” of physicists. “Astral light is the universal agent, the universal plastic mediator, the common receptacle of vibrations of motion and of the phantoms of form.” It is likewise the *Od* of Baron von Reichenbach; “it is the great *Thelesma* of *Hermes Trismegistus*, and the control of this force constitutes the great arcana of practical magic. It heats, illuminates, attracts, repels, vivifies, destroys, coagulates, separates, crushes, and gathers all things under the stimulus of powerful wills; it is a perpetual and transformable vibration. Its cabalistic figure, represented by the Serpent of Theogonies, is:

“*Od* = +

“*Od* = —

“*Aour* = ∞.”

Says Arthur Edward Waite: “The preservation of the images of all forms in the universal agent which is the mirror of visions, supplies the author [Levi] with his natural explanation of all kinds of apparitions, including those which are seen in necromantic evocations. . . The Great Magic Agent, like the *Arcanum* by means of which it is directed, is, at least in one of its phases, a moral one. The power which is promised to the emancipated and enlightened mind is dominion over *Azoth*, the domain of *Magnesia*, the secret of quickening the dead substances of the alchemical symbolists. But, unlike electricity, steam, etc., this mysterious *Azoth* cannot be directed by a man of science working in secret and possessing only his knowledge and his instruments. He must form the magic chain; he must be able to set in motion and direct a current of enthusiasm in unenlightened humanity. It is not, therefore, primarily a physical force. The hopes, the fears, the caprices, the weaknesses, the imaginations of the crowd, in a word, its *FREE-WILL*, these are the monster to be conquered, these are the blind force which equally lends itself to good or evil.”

The Great *Arcanum* is the secret of will-power over the minds of men and the plastic substances of nature. In the *Astral Light*, visions and phantoms may be conjured up, but they are not entities.

Says Levi: “In virtue of the great magical dogma of the hierarchy and of universal analogy, the possibility of real evoca-

tions may be cabalistically demonstrated; as to the phenomenal reality of the result of magical operations conscientiously accomplished, it is a question of experience; *in our own case we have established it, and we place it in the power of our readers to renew and confirm our experiences.* [The italics are mine.]

“There are evocations of intelligence, evocations of love, and evocations of hatred. There are two kinds of necromancy—the necromancy of light and the necromancy of darkness, evocation by prayer, pantacle, and perfumes, and evocation by blood, imprecations, and sacrileges. We have practised the first only, and we advise no one to devote himself to the second. It is certain that the images of the departed appear to the magnetised persons who evoke them; it is equally certain that they never unveil to them any mysteries of the life beyond. They are beheld just as they would still be in the memory of persons who have known them.

“When the evoked spectres reply to those who address them, it is always by signs, or by an interior and imaginary impression, never with a voice which really strikes on the ears, and this is easily comprehensible—how should a shadow speak? With what instrument could it make the air vibrate by striking it in such a manner as to cause distinguishable sounds?

“Electric touches on the part of the apparitions are nevertheless experienced, and these contacts sometimes seem to be produced by the hands of the phantoms; this phenomenon, however, is wholly subjective, and the power of imagination, acting in concert with the occult force which we call the Astral Light, is its sole and only cause. This is proved by the fact that the spirits, or at least the spectres which pretend to be such, touch us certainly sometimes, but we never can touch them, which is one of the most alarming adjuncts of apparitions, for the visions seem occasionally so real that we cannot without agitation feel the hand pass through what appears to be a body and yet encounter no resistance.

“There is no proof that spirits really leave the superior spheres to communicate with us, and the very contrary is probable. We evoke the reminiscences contained in the Astral Light, which is the common reservoir of universal magnetism. It is in this light that the Emperor Julian beheld the manifestation of his gods, but old, ill, and decrepit—fresh proof of the influence of current and accredited opinions on the reflections of this same magic agent which *causes tables to speak and answers by taps on the walls.*” [Italics are mine.]

It will be seen from the above that Eliphas Levi was an op-

ponent of the doctrines of modern spiritualism, so far as the reality of médiumistic manifestations are concerned. He strongly condemns spiritualism in his works as a species of Black Magic. In his own magical experiments he advocates the use of the pentagram and other symbols as potent talismans in conjuring up phantasms in the Astral Light. "The pentagram," he says, "expresses the mind's domination over the elements and it is by this sign that we bind the demons of the air, the spirits of fire, the spectres of water, and the ghosts of earth. It is the Star of the Magi, the burning star of the Gnostic schools, the sign of intellectual omnipotence and autocracy. . . . If it be asked how a sign can exercise that immense power over spirits which is claimed for the pentagram, we

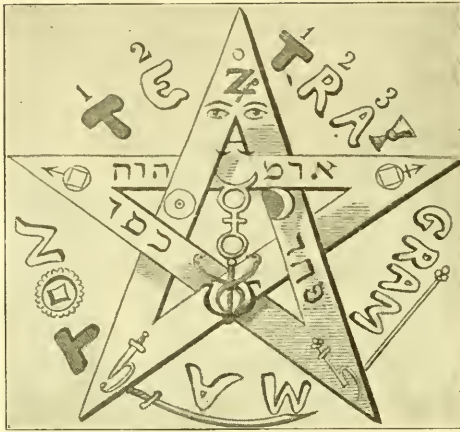


FIGURE OF THE PENTAGRAM.

(From Levi's work *Dogme et rituel de la haute magie.*)

and will over ignorance and weakness. . . . The pentagram was traced by the old magicians on the threshold of the door, to prevent evil spirits from entering, and good ones from going out. . . . The double triangle of Solomon, forming the six-pointed star, is the sign of the Macrocosmos, but it is less powerful than the Pentagram, the microcosmic sign."

inquire in turn why the Christian world bows before the sign of the cross. The sign by itself is nothing, it derives its strength from the doctrine it symbolises, and of which it is the Logos. Now a sign which epitomises by signification all the occult forces of nature, and which has always manifested to elementary and other spirits a power superior to their own, naturally strikes them with fear and respect, and enforces their obedience by the empire of knowledge

III.

Levi gives us in his various books the ceremonies, vestments, perfumes, characters, figures, and instruments to be used in magical operations, which rites, he declares, "have nothing *fantastic or ar-*

bitrary about them; they have been transmitted to us from antiquity, etc."

The following is Levi's account of his thaumaturgical experience in London. It reads like some conjuration in an ancient Egyptian temple, and is related in perfect good faith. Did he dream it, or was it a vision under hypnotic conditions? He says:

"In the spring of the year 1854, I repaired to London to escape from internal disquietude, and to devote myself, without distraction, to study. I had letters of introduction to persons of distinction, and to those seeking communications from the supernatural world. Of the latter I met with several, and, amidst much affability, I discovered in them a fund of indifference and triviality. They immediately required of me the performance of prodigies, as from a charlatan. I was not a little discouraged, for, to speak truly, so far from being disposed to initiate others into the mysteries of ceremonial magic, I had always dreaded its delusions and weariness for myself. Moreover, such ceremonies require a paraphernalia which is expensive and difficult to collect. I immersed myself, therefore, in the study of the supreme cabala, and thought no further of English adepts, when one day, on returning to my hotel, I found a note in my room. This note enclosed half of a card transversely divided, and on which I at once recognised the character of Solomon's seal, with a tiny slip of paper, on which was written in pencil: 'To-morrow at 3 o'clock, in front of Westminster Abbey, the other half of this card will be given you.' I kept this singular appointment. A carriage was waiting at the place; I held unaffectedly my portion of the card in my hand; a footman approached and made a sign to me, opening the carriage-door as he did so. Within there was a lady in black whose face was concealed by a thick veil; she motioned me to a seat beside her, displaying the other part of the card I had received. The door was shut, the carriage rolled away, and the lady raising her veil, I saw that my appointment was with an elderly person, who beneath her grey eyebrows had bright black eyes of preternatural fixity. 'Sir,' she began, with a strongly-marked English accent, 'I am aware that the law of secrecy is rigorous among adepts; a friend of Sir B. L., who has seen you, knows that you have been asked for phenomena, and that you have declined to gratify curiosity. It is possible that you do not possess the necessary materials; I can show you a complete magical cabinet, but I must require of you, first of all, the most inviolable secrecy. If you do not guarantee this on your honor, I will give orders for you to be driven home.' I made the

required promise, and have kept it faithfully by not divulging the name, quality, or abode of the lady, whom I soon recognised as an initiate, not actually of the first degree, but still of a most exalted



INSTRUMENTS USED IN MAGIC INCANTATIONS.

The lamp, sword, wand, and pruning-hook. (From Levi's *Haute Magie*.)

grade. We had several long conversations, during which she insisted always on the necessity of practical experiences to complete initiation. She showed me a collection of vestments and magical

instruments, even lending me certain curious books which I was in want of; in a word, she determined me to attempt at her house the experience of a complete evocation, for which I prepared myself during twenty-one days, scrupulously observing the rules laid down in the Ritual.

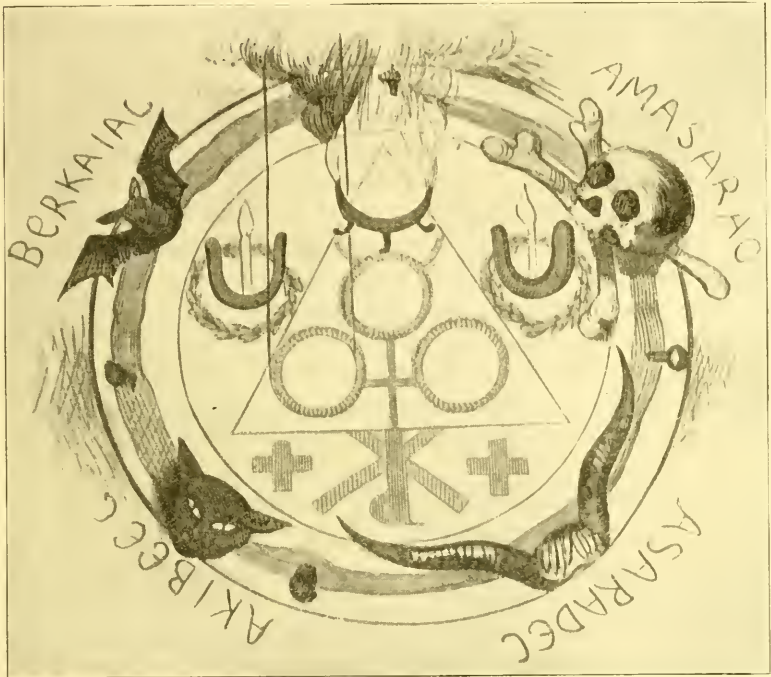
“All was completed on the 24th of July; it was proposed to evoke the phantom of the divine Apollonius, and to interrogate it about two secrets, one of which concerned myself, while the other interested the lady. The latter had at first counted on assisting at the evocation with a trustworthy person, but at the last moment this person proved timorous, and, as the triad or unity is rigorously prescribed in magical rites, I was left alone. The cabinet prepared for the evocation was situated in a turret; four concave mirrors were hung within it, and there was a kind of altar whose white marble top was surrounded with a chain of magnetic iron. On the marble the sign of the Pentagram was engraved and gilded; the same symbol was drawn on a new white sheep-skin stretched beneath the altar. In the middle of the marble slab there was a small copper brazier with charcoal of alder and laurel wood, while a second brazier was placed before me on a tripod. I was vested in a white robe very similar to those worn by Catholic priests, but longer and more ample, and I wore upon my head a chaplet of vervain leaves entwined about a golden chain. In one hand I held a new sword, and in the other the Ritual. I set alight the two fires with the requisite and prepared materials, and I began, at first in a low voice, but rising by degrees, the invocations of the Ritual; the flame invested every object with a wavering light, and finally went out. I set some more twigs and perfumes on the brazier, and when the flame started up again, I distinctly saw before the altar a human figure larger than life, which dissolved and disappeared. I recommenced the evocations, and placed myself in a circle which I had already traced between the altar and the tripod; I then saw the depth of the mirror which was in front of me, but behind the altar, grow brighter by degrees, and a pale form grew up there, dilating and seeming to approach gradually. Closing my eyes, I called three times on Apollonius, and, when I reopened them, a man stood before me wholly enveloped in a winding-sheet, which seemed to me more grey than white; his form was lean, melancholy, and beardless, which did not quite recall the picture I had formed to myself of Apollonius. I experienced a feeling of intense cold, and when I opened my lips to interrogate the apparition, I found it impossible to utter a sound. I therefore placed my hand

on the sign of the Pentagram and directed the point of the sword towards the figure, adjuring it mentally by that sign not to terrify me in any manner, but to obey me. The form thereupon became indistinct, and immediately after disappeared. I commanded it to return, and then felt, as it were, an air pass by me, and something having touched me on the hand which held the sword, the arm was immediately benumbed as far as the shoulder. Conjecturing that the weapon displeased the spirit, I set it by the point near me, and within the circle. The human figure at once reappeared, but I experienced such a complete enervation in all my limbs, and such a sudden exhaustion had taken possession of me, that I made two steps to sit down. I had scarcely done so when I fell into a deep coma, accompanied by dreams of which only a vague recollection remained when I recovered myself. My arm continued for several days benumbed and painful. The figure had not spoken, but it seemed to me that the questions I was to ask it had answered themselves in my mind. To that of the lady, an inner voice replied, 'Dead!' (it concerned a man of whom she was seeking news). As for myself, I wished to learn whether reconciliation and forgiveness were possible between two persons who were in my thoughts, and the same interior echo impiteously answered, 'Dead!'

"Here I narrate facts as they actually occurred, I impose faith on no one. The effect of this experience on myself was incalculable. I was no more the same man; something from the world beyond had passed into me. I was neither gay nor depressed any longer, but I experienced a singular attraction towards death without, at the same time, being in any way tempted to suicide. I carefully analysed what I had experienced, and, in spite of a keenly-felt nervous antipathy, I twice repeated, at an interval of a few days only, the same experiment. The phenomena which then occurred differed too little from the former to require their addition to this narrative. But the consequence of these further evocations was for me the revelation of two cabalistic secrets, which, if universally known, might change in a short period the basis and laws of society at large.

"Am I to conclude from this that I have really evoked, seen, and touched the great Apollonius Tyanæus? I am neither so far hallucinated as to believe it, nor sufficiently unserious as to affirm it. The effect of the preparations, the perfumes, the mirrors, the pantacles, is a veritable intoxication of the imagination, which must act strongly on a person already nervous and impressionable. I

seek not to explain by what physiological laws I have seen and touched; I assert solely that I have seen and that I have touched, that I saw clearly and distinctly, without dreaming, which is sufficient ground for believing in the absolute efficacy of magical ceremonies. I look upon the practice, however, as dangerous and objectionable; health, both moral and physical, would not long withstand such operations, if once they become habitual. The old lady I speak of, and whom, subsequently, I had cause to complain



GOETIC CIRCLE.

Used in evocations of black magic and pacts. (From Levi's *Haute magie*.)

of, was a case in point, for, in spite of her denials, I do not doubt that she continually practised necromancy and goëtic magic.¹ She at times talked complete nonsense, at others yielded to insane fits of passion, whose object could be scarcely determined. I left London without revisiting her, but I shall faithfully keep my promise to say nothing whatsoever which may disclose her identity, or give even a hint about her practices, to which she doubtless de-

¹ The term "goëtic magic" was invented by Porphyry. It signifies "black magic" or "unlawful sorcery."

voted herself unknown to her family, which, as I believe, is numerous, and in a very honorable position.”¹

IV.

Immersed as he was in the fantastic dreams of the Illuminati, the disciples of the Rosy Cross, and the cabalists, Eliphas Levi was nevertheless a thinker of considerable originality and profundity. We must separate the wheat from the chaff, the thread of virgin gold from the vast mass of quartz in his writings. He has a vigorous and fascinating style. The following fragments, garnered from his philosophy, will doubtless interest the reader, as they have deeply interested me.

Eliphas Levi, as has been said, largely influenced occult thought in France. Occultism to-day in France is represented by a society known as the *Groupe Indépendent d'Études Ésotériques*. It has over a thousand members, some two hundred branches and correspondents. It embraces members of the following associations: *Ordre Martiniste*; *Ordre Kabbalistique de la Rose-Croix*; *Église Gnostique*, *Société Alchimique de France*. The membership is free. Dr. G. Encausse, whose pseudonym is *Papus*, was a few years ago (and perhaps still is) the President of the Esoteric Group, also President of the Supreme Council of the Martinists. He is the author of sixteen books on magic and hermetism.

FRAGMENTS FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF LEVI.

IMMORTALITY.

“On matters which our science cannot in this life ascertain we can only reason by hypotheses. Humanity can know nothing of the superhuman, since the superhuman is that which exceeds the scope of humanity; the phenomena of decomposition which accompany death seem to protest in the name of science against this innate necessity of faith in another life which has brought forth so many dreams. Science, nevertheless, must take account of the want, for Nature, which does nothing without object, does not endow beings with desires that are not to be satisfied. Science, therefore, though necessarily ignorant of, must, at least, suppose the existence of things which are beyond her, and cannot put in question the continuity of life after the phenomenon called death, since no abrupt interruption is found in the *magnum opus* of Nature, which, according to the philosophy of Hermes, never proceeds by jumps.

“The immortality of the soul is cabalistically proved by anal-

¹ *The Mysteries of Magic*, pp. 309-313.

ogy, which is the one doctrine of the universal religion, as it is the key of science and the inviolable law of Nature. Death, in fact, can no more be an absolute end than birth is a real beginning. What we call death is birth into a new life. Nature does not unmake what she has made in the order of the necessary progressions of existence, and she cannot belie her own fundamental laws. Birth proves the pre-existence of the human individual, since nothing is produced from nothing, and death proves immortality, as being can no more cease to be than nothing can cease to be nothing. Being and nonentity are two absolutely irreconcilable ideas, with this difference, that the wholly negative notion of nothingness is derived from the very conception of existence, whose antithesis cannot even be understood as an absolute negation, whilst the idea of being cannot even be compared with that of nonentity, to say nothing of being derived from it.

“Pythagoras believed above all things in the immortality of the soul and the eternity of life. The perpetual succession of the seasons, of days and nights, of sleeping and waking, sufficiently explained to him the phenomenon of death. The individual immortality of the human soul consisted according to him in the persistence of memory. . . .

“But the immortality of the soul, being one of the most consoling doctrines of religion, must be reserved for the aspirations of faith, and, consequently, never will be proved by facts accessible to the examination of science. Who indeed can be assured beforehand of his eternal destiny? Life here below appears to be a school in which we learn how to live. It is to be concluded from this that we shall live elsewhere. This is a dramatic farce which precedes the grand mystery.”

THE GREAT ARCANUM OF DEATH, OR SPIRITUAL TRANSITION.

“We are saddened frequently, by remembering that the most beautiful life must end, and the approach of that terrible unknown called death embitters the joys of existence. Why are we born if existence must be so brief? Why bring up children, who must die, with so much care? This is what human ignorance asks in its most frequent and sorrowful doubts. This also is what the human embryo might vaguely demand at the approach of that birth which is about to usher it into an unknown world by despoiling it of its conserving envelope. In studying the mystery of birth, we shall find the key to the great secret of death.

“Cast by the laws of Nature into the womb of a woman, the

incarnated spirit slowly wakes therein, and laboriously creates for itself those organs which will be indispensable later on, but which in proportion to their growth increase its inconvenience in its present situation. The most blissful period in the embryo's life is that when, under the simple chrysalid form, it weaves about it the membrane which serves it as an asylum, and floats with it in a nourishing and preserving fluid. Then it is free and impassible, it shares in the universal life, and receives the impression of the memories of Nature which later on will determine the configuration of its body, and the individuality of its appearance. This happy age may be called the childhood of the embryo.

“Its adolescence follows, the human form becomes distinct and the sex is determined; a motion takes place in the maternal egg, which is like the vague yearnings of the period which succeeds childhood. The placenta which is the exterior but real body of the fœtus, feels something unknown germinating within it and which tends already towards escape by breaking through it. The child at this time enters more distinctly into the dream-life. Its brain, inverted as if it were a mirror of the mother's, reproduces the imaginations of the latter so forcibly, that it communicates their form to its own members. The mother is then for it what God is for us, an unknown, invisible Providence, towards which it aspires, even to the identification of itself with all that she desires. It depends on her, lives by her, but sees her not, it cannot even understand her, and could it philosophise it might possibly deny the personal existence and intelligence of that being, who for it is as yet only a necessary prison and a preserving environment. Little by little, however, this slavery troubles it, it grows restless, suffers, worries, and feels that its life is ending. An hour of anguish and convulsion comes, its bonds drop off, it feels itself sliding into the gulf of the unknown. This comes to pass, a painful sensation contracts it, it heaves a final sob, which changes into a first cry—it is dead to the embryonic life, it is born into human life!

“In the embryonic period it seemed to it that the placenta was its body, and it was actually its special embryonic body, useless in another stage and rejected as refuse at the moment of birth. Our body in human life is like a second envelope which is useless to the third life, and for this reason we reject it at the moment of our second birth. Human life compared with the celestial is truly embryonic. When evil passions destroy us, Nature has a miscarriage, and we are born prematurely into eternity and are exposed to that terrible dissolution which St. John calls the second death.

“... The leaf once fallen from the branch can never be re-grafted. The aurelia becomes a butterfly, but the butterfly never returns into the chrysalis state. Nature shuts the door on all that passes and impels life forward. The same morsel of bread cannot be twice eaten and digested. Forms pass, thought remains, and never does it reassume what it has once cast aside.

“The cabalists compare the spirit to a substance which remains fluidic in the divine environment, and under the influence of the essential light, but whose exterior hardens, like a cortex exposed to the air, in the colder regions of the rational or of visible forms... The cortices of the spirit world are transparent, those of the material are opaque; bodies are only temporary cortices from which souls must be liberated.

“... The dead cannot return to earth any more than a child into its mother's womb. The human soul served, but also limited by its organs, cannot place itself in communication with the objects of the visible world except by means of these organs. The body is an envelope which is proportional to the material environment in which the soul has to abide here below. By limiting the scope of the soul, it concentrates and makes its action possible. In effect, a soul devoid of body would be everywhere, but everywhere is so inappreciable a degree that it could act nowhere; it would be lost in infinity, absorbed, and as it were, annihilated in God. Imagine a drop of fresh water enclosed in a globule and thrown into the sea; so long as the globule remains unbroken the drop of water will preserve its own nature, but if the globule be destroyed, the drop of water must be sought in the vast sea. God in creating spirits could only endow them with individual self-consciousness by providing them with an envelope which centralises their action and prevents it from being dissipated by the very fact of its limitation.

“After death the soul ascends because its envelope ascends, and its activity and consciousness are attached to its envelope, as we have said.

“... The facts of ærial suspension are possible, but for a man to live under the earth or in water is unheard of. It would be equally impossible for a soul separated from its body to remain, even for a single instant, in the heaviness of our atmosphere. Therefore the souls of the dead are not around us, as the table-turners suppose. Those whom we love may still see and appear to us, but only by mirage and reflection in the common mirror of the light. Moreover, they can no longer interest themselves in

mortal things, and are bound to us only by such of our sentiments as are sufficiently elevated to bear some conformity or analogy to their life in eternity. . . . The spirit clothes itself to come down, and strips itself to go up."

THE CABALA.

"On penetrating into the sanctuary of the cabala, one is seized with admiration at the sight of a doctrine so simple and at the same time so absolute. The necessary union of ideas and signs, the consecration of the most fundamental realities by primitive characters, the trinity of words, letters, and numbers; a philosophy simple as the alphabet, profound and infinite as the Logos; theorems more luminous and complete than those of Pythagoras; a theology which may be epitomised by counting on the fingers; an infinity which can be held in the hollow of an infant's hand; ten numerals and twenty-two letters, a triangle, a square, and a circle—such are the elements of the kabbalah, such are the primary principles of the written word, shadow of that spoken Logos which created the world.

"All truly dogmatic religions have issued from the cabala return therein; whatever is scientific and grandiose in the religious dreams of all *illuminati*—Jacob Boehme, Swedenborg, Saint Martin, and the rest—has been borrowed from the cabala; all masonic associations owe their secrets and their symbols thereto. The cabala alone consecrates the alliance of universal reason and the Divine Word; it establishes, by the counterpoise of two forces in apparent opposition, the eternal balance of existence; it reconciles reason with faith, power with liberty, knowledge with mystery; it has the keys of the present, past, and future."

[Among all mystics Eliphas Levi Zahed deserves special attention because he is the most modern one, and we can, better than in any other case, study the history of his life and comprehend the philosophical attitude which dominates his theories. The mystics of antiquity, men like Porphyry, or still further back, mystics of Egypt, Babylonia, India, or China, are too remote for psychical analysis; and while Jacob Böhme and Swedenborg hold a position of their own, they are influenced by the gnostic traditions of their religious faith, which had been repressed but not eradicated by the authorities of the church.

The human heart has a hankering after the mysterious, and this longing finds expression in mysticism. Mystic minds have a certain dislike of scientific methods. They attempt to grasp philosophical and religious truths not in clear conceptions but in symbols, not by inductive argument but by the bold flight of fancy which finds expression in sweeping deductions. They lack critical acumen, but they are possessed of a vivid poetical imagination, and thus they may, at the same time, anticipate truths of great profundity.

Eliphas Levi was not a prestidigitateur, not a trickster, but an occultist. No doubt, he attempted to perform feats of magic; but he was serious about it, and his magical experiences were the result of a genuine self-hypnotisation. He believed them himself, and we have no reason to doubt his honesty. He was not an impostor but a dreamer, a visionary prophet.

A study of the books of Eliphas Levi Zahed gives us a key to the leading principles of mystic aspirations, and our readers will be grateful to Mr. Henry Ridgely Evans for having condensed from recondite and almost inaccessible sources the views of this interesting man. Ed.]