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GRIMOIRES

by Margaret Bruce

Every school-child who has whiled away an idle hour or two in the fantasy world of occult fiction knows that a Grimoire is the book of spells that no self-respecting sorcerer would be without. In spite of its deliciously sinister ring the word "grimoire" is merely a derivation from the old French word for "grammar" or "text-book". Most people today, self-professed "occultists" in particular, are totally blind to the magic that surrounds them. For their benefit we shall consider as Grimoires only those books dealing with ritual and spells.

The earliest known magical writings that have survived to the present day seem to be those of Ancient Egypt. The Westcar and Ebers Papyri are two of the best known, but one must not forget the collection of writings popularly called "The Book of The Dead". The title is a misnomer based on the fact that the greatest number of spells, prayers and rituals from this amazing collection were discovered in tombs, sarcophagi and mummy wrappings. "The Book of The Dead", more correctly called "The coming forth by Day" is concerned with ensuring the safe passage of the deceased through the Hall of Judgement and his subsequent safe arrival in the Dwelling Place of the Gods. Although funerary rites of any civilization are ostensibly for the benefit of the departed, their true psychological function is to provide therapy for the bereaved. Although the Ancient Egyptian magical papyri survive in libraries and museums throughout the World their meaning had been forgotten, even by the Egyptians, long before the completion of the Temples of Abu Simbal. It is only since the comparatively recent translation of the Rosetta Stone that scholars have been able to restore in part a knowledge of hieroglyphics. Oddly enough, a few fragments of the Ancient Egyptian rituals were adopted by the early Christians and have come to us via the Copts so that the dying glimmer of their magic can still be glimpsed in the Catholic Mass and the Liturgy.

Some of the silliest Grimoires are those collections of superstitious ramblings compiled by the Mediaeval scholars who seemed to accept as gospel, the travellers' tales recorded by credulous Greek intellectuals. Albertus Magnus, in his 16th century treatise on the "occult virtues" of Stones, Herbs and animals quotes some of the most far-fetched of these superstitions. Plagiarists have been doing the same thing right through the ages and a considerable quantity of this material has been published ad nauseum by charlatans of every nationality. Serious writers like Agrippa quote the Munchausian yarns of Galen, Pliny, Dioscorides and company for what they are worth and della Porta, whose 1658 edition of "Natural Magick" is the least "mystical" book of its kind, casts healthy doubt on the less credible Platonic fairy tales. Porta, being of scientific disposition and intending to enlighten the intelligent rather than bamboozle the ignorant, quotes his sources of information and is not afraid to prove, by practical experiment, the futility of the majority of superstitious practices. It seems an impossibility that, in this Plastic Age, human credulity should be so widespread yet it is a fact that the discarded rubbish of Mediaeval Superstition is more eagerly sought after than ever before.

More deserving of the appellation "Grimoire" are those collections of folk spells and charms compiled by the few "Wise Men" and "Wise Women" who had mastered the art of writing. Such people acted as midwife, undertaker, doctor and psychologist and were interested only in recording recipes and charms that produced solid practical results. This is why a real Grimoire deals with the basic essentials of life. You will find healing charms, cake recipes, love charms and gardening hints. Never a word about "Psychic Development" or "Meditation". This is because people who can see that the baking of a cake is just a slightly simpler magical feat than invoking an Angel are already psychically developed.

This ability to see and comprehend the magic of everyday experiences is most important. Anyone who mentally divides the Universe into "Natural" and "Supernatural" cannot comprehend, much less make use of, the art of magic. This point is stressed over and over again in every genuine system of practical magic and yet only a rare minority of students ever really grasp it. They are attracted to the literature of occultism by the romantic possibility that it may offer them escape, power, love, riches, adventure and all at the wave of a wand. Most pathetic of all, they tend to become "students" of a craft that demands intelligence, dexterity, determination and personality when it is all too apparent that they have none of these qualities.

The Grimoires that attract this type of person are such books as "The Key of Solomon", "The Grimorium Verum", "The Heptameron", "The Book of The Sacred Magic of Abra Melin" and Barrett's "Magus". Even if he could sift the few fragments of valuable material from these Qabalistically slanted works, he is still probably quite unprepared to make practical use of them and will be wasting his time.

The rare morsels of magic that are of any use are not excursions into escapism but are the practical application of sane principles in order to achieve a pre-determined result. "The Key of Solomon", which exists in various MS versions in the British Museum and the Paris Arsenal Library shows several methods for altering the level of consciousness and, like all rituals which depend for results upon intensive mind conditioning, stresses the importance of the preparation which includes prayer, fasting abstinence and mental discipline. Few occult students are attracted by hard work so most of them simply copy out the hackneyed Talismanic Symbols and carry these around in the ludicrous belief that this is going to achieve something.

The Abra Melin system is a translation by S. L. McGregor Mathers of a MS in the Paris Arsenal Library and, although abounding in the usual omissions and mistakes, is a singularly complete volume. In this instance, the period of preparation and complete withdrawal from mundane affairs is given as six months. Again, many people claim to have made use of this system and, as usual, not one has bothered with the essential period of preparation. Human beings, as a crowd, are a pretty unscrupulous and greedy bunch, all too eager to grab as much as they can get for as little effort and expense as possible. Ordinary mortals simply want these benefits to be worldly advantages. The occult layabout goes even farther and imagines himself to be entitled to all the material benefits plus a free bonus of Power too great for Mere Humans. The Talismanic Symbols of Abra Melin are in the form

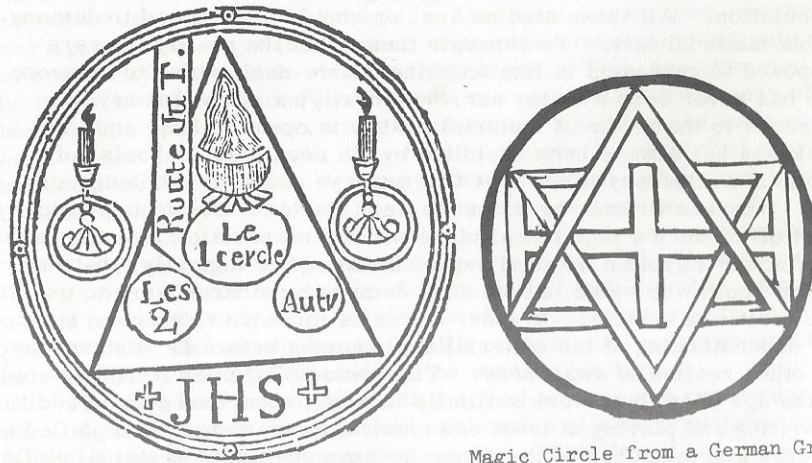
of squares divided into compartments and filled in with Words of Power. The Six Moons of preparation is devoted to the making and cataloguing of these symbols and culminates in the Invocation that binds the concepts which they represent. These concepts, called "demons" in the archaic phraseology of the Grimoire, manifest themselves from the very beginning of the retirement which makes it rather essential to complete the whole business once it has been commenced. The fact that nearly all the classical Grimoires are written at a mystical magical level tends to perpetuate the dangerous misconception that magic and common mundane existence are separate concepts with no relationship. This has led to the artificial intellectual practice of not only regarding "occultism" as a rather specialist study but also separating this vague field into further arbitrary categories. The result is an unhealthy preoccupation with Qabalistic Theory, Esoteric Philosophy and Arcane Speculation. All these studies are, or should be, related to demonstrable material fact. To separate them from the reality they are supposed to represent is like teaching double-declutching to someone who has never seen a motor car. Naturally, a study that never descends to the realm of material reality is open to abuse and this weakness has always been exploited by the countless "schools" of Esoteric Philosophy of the type that purveys esoteric gobbledygook.

Whereas Grimoires in the Western Esoteric tradition tend to start off on such a high moral plane that actual practice is unthinkable, the Ancient Egyptian magical papyri insist, quite logically, that the callow youth who wants to command demons must first learn to use his own brain and muscle. In other words he must have complete control and understanding of his material environment before he ventures into the other realms of awareness. The average Egyptian Neophyte could, by the age of twelve, work skillfully in wood, stone and clay in addition to writing and playing at least one musical instrument. If he failed to observe and make use of the magic in these seemingly material skills he was considered of little use in the Temple. Many self-styled present day "adepts" have little or no manual skill and couldn't knock a recognisable tune out of a comb and paper. Their sole grounds for claiming "adeptship" appears to be the ability to avoid work whilst reciting the attributes of the Sephiroth right through the four Worlds. Impressive - but as useful as being able to spit through the holes in a tennis racket.

Every Grimoire, whether it be the sophisticated "Art Almadel" and "Lemegeton" from the Key of Solomon or else a heterogeneous mixture of Dutch, German and Colonial folk magic like the "Egyptian Secrets" of the pseudo Albertus Magnus, has a little bit of wisdom and a great deal of folly. All these books are traps for the superstitious, text-books for professional charlatans and, more often than not, a disappointment to those who cling to the age old belief that somewhere there is a book with all the answers.

The real Grimoire is written in the scrolls of the Akasha and it is called The Book of Life. It is meant to be lived - not looked at. Even this plainly written volume is more of a mystery than it should be to those who, like Pope, accept the pompous and arrogant dogma that "the true study of mankind is man". In practical Magick the real study is the relationship of self to Nature. Once we stop thinking of ourselves

as units of mankind and come to regard ourselves as aspects of the Universal Whole we are at the beginning of Magick. Unlike the dreamer who ascends to the Aethyrs and explores the levels of awareness in order to escape his physical and practical inadequacies the real magician is more purposeful. When he ventures into the primordial Chaos, it is not to succumb to his dreams but to capture them and drag them screaming and protesting into the cold light of day. Subduing them with a Word of Power and chaining them with Symbols of their Servitude he strikes them with the Wand of Intelligence and transforms them from amorphous dream visions into tangible reality. A Grimoire whose experiments do not culminate in this ultimate material manifestation is totally useless except as a study in psychopathology.



Magic Circle from a German Grimoire dated 1407.

Magic Circle from the Grimoire called "Sanctum Regum"

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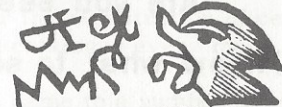
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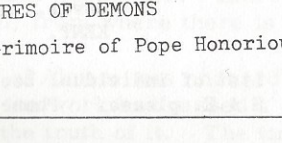
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mar. de camp.



SIGNATURES OF DEMONS
(From the Grimoire of Pope Honorius)