

THE SKETCH
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Aleister Crowley's "Rite of Artemis."

reviewed by Raymond Radclyffe.

A certain number of literary people know the name of Aleister Crowley as a poet. A few regard him as a magician. But a small and select circle revere him as the hierophant of a new religion. This creed Captain Fuller, in a book on the subject extending to 327 pages, calls "Crowleyanity." I do not pretend to know what Captain Fuller means. He is deeply read in philosophy, and he takes Crowley very seriously. I do not quite see whither Crowley himself is driving; but I imagine that the main idea in the brain of this remarkable poet is to plant Eastern Transcendentalism, which attains its ultimate end in Samadhi, in English soil under the guise of Ceremonial Magic.

Possible the average human being requires and desires ceremony. Even the simplest Methodist uses some sort of ceremony, and Crowley, who is quite in earnest in his endeavour to attain such unusual conditions of mind as are called ecstasy, believes that the gateway to Ecstasy can be reached through Ceremonial Magic. He has saturated himself with the magic of the East—a very real thing, in tune with the Eastern mind. He is well read in the modern metaphysicians, all of whom have attempted to explain the unexplainable.

He abandons these. They appeal only to the brain, and once their jargon is mastered they lead nowhere; least of all to Ecstasy. He goes back upon ceremony, because he thinks that it helps the mind to get outside itself. He declares that if you repeat an invocation solemnly and aloud, "expectant of some great and mysterious result," you will experience a deep sense of spiritual communion.

He is now holding a series of *séances*.

I attended at the offices of the *Equinox*. I climbed the interminable stairs. I was received by a gentleman robed in white and carrying a drawn sword.

The room was dark; only a dull-red light shone upon an altar. Various young men, picturesquely clad in robes of white, red, or black, stood at different points round the room, illumined by a tiny lamp hung high on the cornice.

A brother recited "the Banishing Ritual of the Pentagram" impressively and with due earnestness. Another brother was commanded to :purify the Temple with water." This was done. Then we witnessed the "Consecration of the Temple with Fire," whereupon Crowley, habited in black, and accompanied by the brethren, led "the Mystic Circumambulation." They walked round the altar twice or thrice in a sort of religious procession. Gradually, one by one, those of the company who were mere onlookers were beckoned into the circle. The Master of Ceremonies then ordered a brother to "bear the Cup of Libation." The brother went round the room, offering each a large golden bowl full of some pleasant-smelling drink. We drank in turn. This over, a stalwart brother strode into the centre and proclaimed "The Twelffold Certitude of God." Artemis was then invoked by the greater ritual of the Hexagram. More Libation. Aleister Crowley read us the "Song of Orpheus" from the *Argonauts*.

Following upon this song we drank our third Libation. and then the brothers led into the room a draped figure, masked in that curious blue tint we mentally associate with Hectate. The lady, for it was a lady, was enthroned on a seat high above Crowley himself. By this time the ceremony had grown weird and impressive, and its influence was increased when the poet recited in solemn and reverent voice Swinburne's glorious first chorus from "Atalanta," that begins "When the hounds of spring." Again a libation; again an invocation to Artemis. After further ceremonies, Frater Omnia Vincam was commanded to dance "the dance of Syrinx and Pan in honour of our lady Artemis." A young poet, whose verse is often read, astonished me by a graceful and beautiful dance, which he continued until he fell exhausted in the middle of the room, where by the way, he lay until the end. Crowley then made supplication to the goddess in a beautiful and unpublished poem. A dead silence ensued. After a long pause, the figure enthroned took a violin and played—played with passion and feeling, like a master. We were thrilled to our very bones. Once again the figure took the violin, and played an *Abendlied* so beautifully, so gracefully, and with such intense feeling that in very deed most of us experienced that Ecstasy which Crowley so earnestly seeks. Then came a prolonged and intense silence, after which the Master of Ceremonies dismissed us in these words—"By the Power in me vested, I declare the Temple closed."

So ended a really beautiful ceremony—beautifully conceived and beautifully carried out. If there is any higher form of artis-

tic expression than great verse and great music I have yet to learn it. I do not pretend to understand the ritual that runs like a thread of magic through these meetings of the AA. I do not even know what the AA is. But I do know that the whole ceremony was impressive, artistic, and produced in those present such a feeling as Crowley must have had when he wrote:

So shalt thou conquer Space, and lastly climb
The walls of Time;
And by the golden path the great trod
Reach up to God!