

# Weird Tales

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*Cagliostro, St. Germain, Murrell, and Others*

# SORCERY PAST *and* PRESENT

By MARGUERITE LYNCH ADDIS

**B**ROUGHT up to date by some unprejudiced historian, the annals of sorcery might perhaps include names surprizing to the average reader. The world, however, now considers itself grown up, and a large number of taxpayers who in earlier days would have been seized as sorcerers and escorted to the stake, there to become a total loss, are now tolerantly relegated to whichever of the various ologies and isms they seem to belong, and allowed to flourish or not, as circumstances and the finances of their clients permit.

This is a very different state of affairs from the eager credulity which led to so many witch-burnings in the Middle Ages, or the pitiable materialism of a later date, which explained the unexplainable by the rather feeble assertion that it didn't exist, and which smugly dismissed quite cred-

ible evidence to the contrary as evidence of drunkenness, lunacy—or anything, in short, except evidence of things beyond its philosophy — and which rather suggested the bluster which struggles to camouflage fear.

But even in the days when astrology, palmistry, crystal-gazing — all the means of divination—were regarded as sorcery, and quite as compromising as direct connivance with Beelzebub, and when an accusation of dabbling in these mysteries often meant death; then, as now, people hurried to consult their favorite sorcerer. Only they went at night, usually.

Whether or not the famous sorcerers of history really possessed the powers credited to them, they all seem to have fallen down lamentably in respect of defending themselves, or even of avoiding a painful and igno-

minious death. Nor was sorcery in high life more innocuous to its devotees than to humbler persons.

Gilles de Retz, or de Rais, one-time Marshal of France, and commander in the field with Joan of Arc, lost his life on this account, although his high connections used their influence to ensure the more dignified charge of heresy against him.

Outwardly a devout dignitary of the Church, he was said to practise the Black Art privately, and is sometimes mentioned as the original of Bluebeard, but except for the color of his beard, which actually appeared blue in certain lights, there is little in history to identify him with that alarming gentleman. His reputed victims were not a succession of beautiful but sadly inquisitive brides, but innocent infants, whose blood he required in his scientific researches for the Elixir of Life. S. R. Crockett has given a vivid picture of him in his novel, *The Black Douglas*, which is based on this sanguinary legend. It is related that Gilles de Retz caused to be kidnaped and murdered more than eight hundred children, the discovery of whose bones in a tower of his château at Champtoce ultimately led to his conviction. Mr. Crockett tells us that werewolves aided de Retz in these nocturnal kidnapings, resuming their normal form of servants at the château during the daytime.

Apropos of this, Elliott O'Donnell, in his book on werewolves, gives directions for the attaining of lycanthropy, or werewolfery. He quotes the proper incantation in full, and the ingredients for the enchanted salve to be rubbed on the body of the candidate, and even the locality most favorable for the ceremony. Where wolves abound, one might experiment with this curious spell, but in the event of success, the appearance of a lone wolf in a district hitherto free

of them might be productive of unpleasant consequences.

Returning to Gilles de Retz, readers of *The White Company* will remember that the wife of the French warrior Du Guesclin, the Lady Tiphaine, foretold the future of the young Sir Nigel, in one of her prophetic trances. This lady, known to her contemporaries as a "fairy woman" by right of these trances and other supernormal traits, was an ancestress of Gilles de Retz.

In the year 1440, de Retz was hanged — some say burned — at Nantes, after a full confession. Later, it was officially stated that he was innocent of the crimes imputed to him, and his memory reinstated, but public opinion remained prejudiced against him, and in any case it was a little late for de Retz to profit much by it.

Others even more highly placed were not more fortunate. The Earl of Mar, a brother of James III of Scotland, was accused of employing the arts of witches and sorcerers to shorten the king's days, and he was summarily bled to death in his own apartment, without even the semblance of a trial.

Janet Douglas, Lady Glamis, also suffered for the same offense, and was executed in 1573. Glamis Castle (now belonging to the family of the Duchess of York) has ever been the scene of weird happenings, and its very walls are saturated with legend. Apparitions are legion there: it is only reasonable to suppose that the ill-fated Janet Douglas stalks among them.

The fate of the witches and sorcerers with whom these two luckless plotters connived is unknown; we are free to assume that they were perhaps so fortunate as to die in their beds.

It seems not to have occurred to our forebears that magic (other than the strictly divinatory kind) could be used for any other purpose than the

confusion of their enemies, by which they themselves often benefited so obviously that there was not much hope of concealing their connection with it. It is scarcely to be wondered at that magicians practised their art by stealth, and shivered, even if they did not blush, to find it fame. Certainly one does not hear much of either witches or sorcerers being fêted or entertained in a social sense until a much later period.

TOWARD the middle of the Eighteenth Century the Comte St. Germain was to dazzle a sophisticated Paris, not alone with his magical mysteries, but with his social fascinations. Old enough to have known better (if we credit his assertion that he had lived two thousand years by the aid of his secret Elixir of Life), he allowed himself to become a lounge lizard at the court of Louis XV of France, where he was spoiled by ladies, acclaimed by the intelligentsia as master-musician and linguist, and entrusted with secret missions by the king himself. The Comte was in demand, too, with the alchemists, who sought to learn his secret process of removing flaws from diamonds, and of transmuting the baser metals into gold. If he had contented himself with his brilliant social successes, and the beauty salves and pastes which the fair ladies of the court lauded as youth-renewing, he might have manifested the ability of at least one sorcerer to keep out of trouble. Wizards, however, seem unable to keep out of politics, and the accomplished Comte was no exception, and was obliged to flee to England in 1760, in consequence. According to his pupil, the no less famous Balsamo, or Cagliostro, he founded Freemasonry in Germany, after a prolonged visit to Russia. The Landgrave Charles of Hesse studied secret sciences under him. He is said to have died at Schleswig near the end of the Eight-

eenth Century, but people solemnly swore to having seen him in Paris as late as 1889. He maintained to the end the mystery of his origin, nor can authorities agree, to this day, whether he was Italian, Spanish or Polish.

Of his pupil, Cagliostro, more is definitely known. It is pretty well established that he was born at Palermo in 1743, although he, like the Comte St. Germain, claimed to have lived many centuries by the use of the Elixir of Life. Dumas' novel, *Memoirs of a Physician*, is based on his life, and Dumas makes of him a fascinating figure; sinister, but the reverse of ignoble. The novelist, of course, took liberties with facts, but he represents the sorcerer as extremely handsome, and of extraordinary cultivation. His wife, Lorenza Feliciani, is also considerably whitewashed by Dumas, if we may believe the historians, who between them have not left the poor woman a shred of character, although they all concede her remarkable beauty.

Carlyle calls the sorcerer a "dusky, bull-necked, mastiff-faced, sinister-looking individual" with a "greasy, prophetic, bulldog face." According to him, Cagliostro was a supremely vulgar charlatan, given credence only by the most ignorant, but it is difficult to reconcile this description of him with the undoubted vogue he had for a long time among people more than a little fastidious. Carlyle, in his *Miscellanies*, gives a detailed account of the Diamond Necklace affair, in which Cagliostro was implicated, and which caused the hapless Marie Antoinette so much anguish. He, also, could not keep his fingers out of politics, and it was this, together with his attempts to establish what he called Egyptian Freemasonry, that finally led to his imprisonment in the Bastille, where he was separated from his wife by only a few cells, although neither was aware of

this circumstance. Later, in England, he was moved to write his famous letter in which he declared that Frenchmen needed only one thing to make them the most favored of mankind. This one thing was, he explained, the certainty of sleeping unmolested in their beds when they were innocent. He became the fashion in England, as in France. His love philters, beauty lotions and predictions (many of which were fulfilled) caused his house to be besieged at all hours of the day and night, and whenever he showed himself he was sure of an ovation. All this did not prevent his book on Egyptian Freemasonry from being publicly burnt, and he finally died a prisoner in the fortress-prison of St. Leo in 1795.

It is refreshing to turn to a magician who, with a little license, may almost be called a contemporary, since he died as late as 1860, and—unique distinction!—died in his own bed, in his own home, at the very hour foretold by himself.

Cunning Murrell, of Hadleigh, England, was the seventh son of a seventh son, and on these grounds alone, according to his biographer, Arthur Morrison, would have felt justified in considering himself a born sorcerer. He had, however, a very complete system of divination, in which he himself implicitly believed, and when the exercise of his "lawful magic arts" (his own expression) once resulted in the unexpected exposure of his own daughter as the witch who had been causing trouble to the animal and human population

of Hadleigh, he seems to have entertained no question of his own infallibility as a wizard, but at once proceeded to exorcise the unfortunate lady. Twenty-five years ago Cunning Murrell's son was living, and very willing to tell what he knew of his father's powers, which were still deeply venerated in Hadleigh.

The late Lord Lytton could have in all modesty styled himself a sorcerer, by ancient standards, and in certain of his writings, especially *The House and the Brain*,\* he allows some of his magical erudition to leak out. Sax Rohmer's book, *The Romance of Sorcery*, crowns several hitherto unsuspected persons with sorcerous laurels.

From all of which it may be concluded that sorcery is a much less dangerous art than formerly, and also much more lucrative. Edicts of Louis XIV of France and George II of England abolished all criminal procedure on the subject of sorcery and witchcraft in their dominions, which was undoubtedly the beginning of brighter days for the sorcerers.

That these particular days are still brighter for them, none can doubt who read the personal columns of the newspapers, and even if we no longer stick pins in the wax effigies of our enemies for their undoing, or direct the Evil Eye upon our neighbors' livestock, there are few of us who can conscientiously affirm that they have never bribed a modern sorcerer to lift the veil of the future for us;—and is not this the very essence of sorcery?

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