
INTRODUCTION

LELAND'S MAGIC

Charles Godfrey Leland (1824–1903) was fascinated by magic and Witchcraft all his life. The work that you now hold in your hands is the most beautiful fruit that fell from the tree of his fascination. That tree bore other fruit in Leland's many published works. It still casts long shadows, even today, on modern Witchcraft and Paganism.

The roots of the tree of Leland's fascination with magic reach deep down into the soil of his earliest infancy. Here is how he tells the story in his *Memoirs*:

I should mention that my first nurse in life was an old Dutch woman named Van der Poel. I had not been born many days before I and my cradle were missing. There was a prompt outcry and search, and both were soon found in the garret or loft of the house. There I lay sleeping, on my breast an open Bible, with, I believe, a key and knife, at my head lighted candles, money, and a plate of salt. Nurse Van der Poel explained that it was done to secure my rising in life – by taking me up to the garret. I have since learned from a witch that the same is still done in exactly the same manner in Italy, and in Asia. She who does it must be, however, a *strega* or sorceress (my nurse was reputed to be one), and the child thus initiated will become deep in darksome lore, an adept in *occulta*, and a scholar.¹

So, indeed, it came to pass with Leland. He was “reading *Paracelsus* at an age when most boys, if they read at all, are deep in

1 Leland, *Memoirs* (1894): 4.