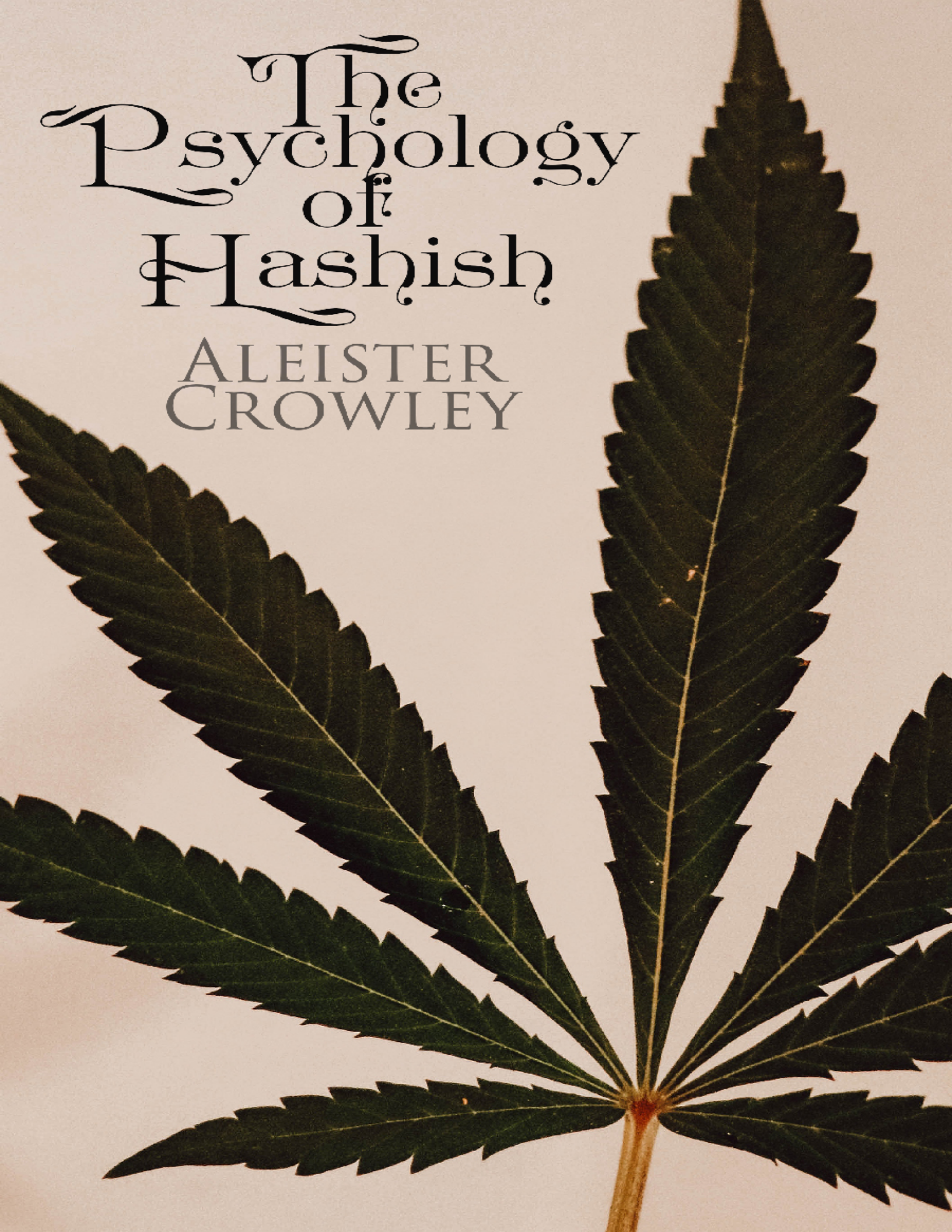


# The Psychology of Hashish

ALEISTER  
CROWLEY



**Aleister Crowley**

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e-artnow, 2021

Contact: [info@e-artnow.org](mailto:info@e-artnow.org)

EAN 4064066499754

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# Chapter I

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*“The girders of the soul, which give her breathing, are easy to be unloosed... Nature teaches us, and the oracles also affirm, that even the evil germs of matter may alike become useful and good.”*

— ZOROASTER.

Comparable to the Alf Laylah wa Laylah itself, a very Tower of Babel, partaking alike of truth both gross and subtle inextricably interwoven with the most fantastic fable, is our view of the Herb — Hashish — the Herb Dangerous. Of the investigators who have pierced even for a moment the magic veil of its glamour ecstatic many have been appalled, many disappointed. Few have dared to crush in arms of steel this burning daughter of the Jinn; to ravish from her poisonous scarlet lips the kisses of death, to force her serpent-smooth and serpent-stinging body down to some infernal torture-couch, and strike her into spasm as the lightning splits the cloud-wrack, only to read in her infinite sea-green eyes the awful price of her virginity — black madness.

Even supreme Richard Burton, who solved nigh every other riddle of the Eastern Sphinx, passed this one by. He took the drug for months “with no other symptom than increased appetite,” and in his general attitude to hashish-intoxication (spoken of often in the “Nights”) shows that he regards it as no more than a vice, and seems not to suspect



that, vice or no, it had strange fruits; if not of the Tree of Life, at least of that other Tree, double and sinister and deadly....

Nay! for I am of the Serpent's party: Knowledge is good, be the price what it may.

Such little fruit, then, as I may have culled from her autumnal breast (mere unripe berries, I confess!) I hasten to offer to my friends.

And lest the austerity of such a goddess be profaned by the least vestige of adornment I make haste to divest myself of whatever gold or jewelry of speech I may possess, to advance, my left breast bare, without timidity or rashness, into her temple, my hoped reward the lamb's skin of a clean heart, the badge of simple truthfulness and the apron of Innocence.

In order to keep this paper within limits, I may premise that the preparation and properties of *Cannabis indica* can be studied in the proper pharmaceutical treatises, though, as this drug is more potent psychologically than physically, all strictly medical account of it, so far as I am aware, have been hitherto both meagre and misleading. Deeper and clearer is the information to be gained from the brilliant studies by Baudelaire, unsurpassed for insight and impartiality, and Ludlow, tainted by admiration of de Quincey and the sentimentalists.<sup>1</sup>

My contribution to the subject will therefore be strictly personal, and so far incomplete; indeed in a sense valueless, since in such a matter personality may so largely outweigh all other factors of the problem. At the same time I must insist that my armour is more complete in several

directions than that of my predecessors, inasmuch as I possess the advantage not only of a prolonged psychological training, a solid constitution, a temperament on which hashish acts by exciting perception (*Sañña*), quite unalloyed by sensation (*Vedana*) and a perfect scepticism; but also of more than an acquaintance with ceremonial drunkenness among many nations and with the magical or mystical processes of all times and all races. It may fairly be retorted upon me that this unique qualification of mine is the very factor which most vitiates my results. However...

With the question of intoxication considered as a key to knowledge let me begin, for from that side did I myself first suspect the existence of the drug which (as I now believe) is some sublimated or purified preparation of *Cannabis indica*.

# Chapter II

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*“Labour thou around the Strophalos of Hecate.”*

— ZOROASTER.

In 1898-1899 I had just left Cambridge and was living in rooms in Chancery Lane, honoured by the presence of Allan Bennett (now Bhikkhu Ananda Metteyya) as my guest.

Together for many months we studied and practised Ceremonial Magic, and ransacked the ancient books and MSS. of the reputed sages for a key to the great mysteries of life and death. Not even fiction was neglected, and it was from fiction that we gathered one tiny seed-fact, which (in all these years) has germinated to the present essay.

Through the ages we found this one constant story. Stripped of its local and chronological accidents, it usually came to this — the writer would tell of a young man, a seeker after the Hidden Wisdom, who, in one circumstance or another, meets an adept; who, after sundry ordeals, obtains from the said adept, for good or ill, a certain mysterious drug or potion, with the result (at least) of opening the gate of the Other-world. This potion was identified with the *Elixir Vitæ* of the physical Alchemists, or one of their “Tinctures,” most likely the “White Tincture” which transforms the base metal (normal perception of life) to silver (poetic conception), and we sought it by fruitless attempts to poison ourselves with every drug in (and out of) the Pharmacopoeia.