FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Body, Mind & Spirit

American Folk Magick: Charms Spells & Herbals
Silver RavenWolf
Llewellyn Publications
978-1-56718-720-5
(March 31, 1999)

The author's teacher, Preston Zerbe, says "The greatest thing is belief…faith…it can be done." Well, that, and a bowl of salt, a ball of red yarn and a few drops of dragon blood. Written by a practicing witch, this is a self-help book for those who have always wanted to cast a spell instead of just a dirty look. Contradictory, unscholarly, and often outrageous, American Folk Magick first attempts to trace the history of magical practices imported from Europe and its meshing with Native American rituals and cures. Many of the author's sources are verbal, often second-hand, and documentation is not footnoted or even cited by name. The bibliography contains 44 documents, ten of which are from the self-same Llewellyn Publications.

The interesting parts start after the history chapters when Ravenwolf describes "The Tools of the Trade." Just thinking about assembling these articles in a single cupboard in your kitchen is enough to start the pots and pans a-rattling on the shelves. Three chapters concerning healing follow, with incantations, potions, and an informed herbal. Some of the written charms are ancient and their forms and formations are reason enough to take a look at these pages.

My favorite cures, however, appear in the chapter entitled "The Fine Art of Warding and General Magick." "Warding" is a term that means protective magic. Here, there are incantations to stop "Cross Dogs" in their tracks and (wow!) "To Put Out a Fire When You Haven't Any Water." Finally, there is a truly evocative section on cursing and banishing. This one, for example, is performed with a knife and a loaf of bread:

(Name) strolled through a red forest
And in the red forest there was a red barn
In the red barn there was a red table,
surrounded by red straw

On the red table lay a red knife
Beside the red knife was a loaf of red bread
Cut the red bread
The evil attached to (name) is dead.
Say dead.
Now be it so.

Serious spells by a witch who takes herself seriously. Enough to make my blood run cold. Sign me ‘staff.’

H. Shaw Cauchy