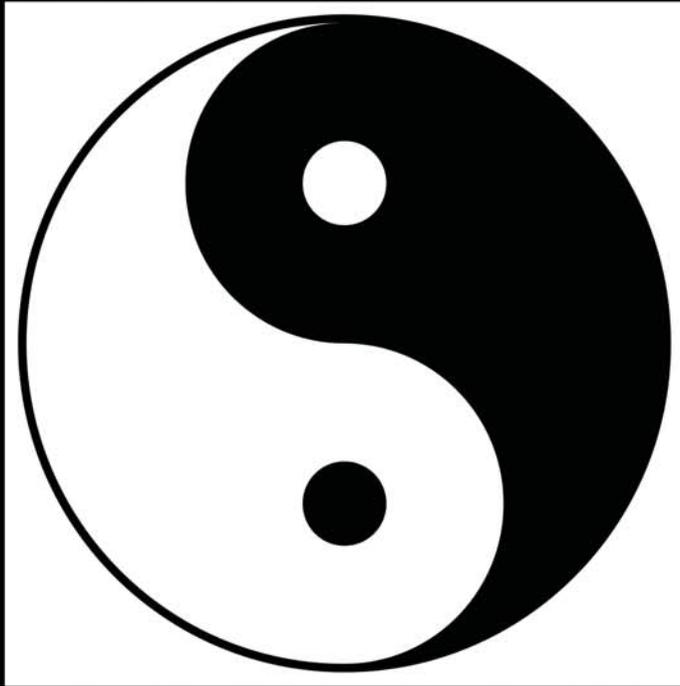


FUNDAMENTAL
SYMBOLS
THE UNIVERSAL SCIENCE
OF SACRED SCIENCE



RENE GUENON

BERSERKER

BOOKS



FUNDAMENTAL SYMBOLS OF
SACRED SCIENCE

Posthumous compilation established and presented by Michel
Vâlsan

RENÉ GUÉNON

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PRELIMINARY STUDY

RENE GUÉNON, THE LAST METAPHYSICIAN OF THE WEST

I discovered Guénon more than twenty years ago when I came across the Spanish version of his *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*. Once I got over my initial astonishment and a certain indignation at the treatment that Western thought deserved in the work of this author, who was unknown to me, I began to delve with growing admiration into the new spiritual continent that his books opened up before my eyes. It was a dazzling experience, like the 'thaumázein' in which Plato and Aristotle (and now also Heidegger) saw the origin of philosophy¹.

Many years later, I discovered that Luc Benoist had experienced a similar impression: "I opened at random a book signed by the unknown name of René Guénon. From the very first pages, I felt that it would give me what I was looking for. It was the messenger of happiness; I had understood, and for some, understanding is happiness"⁽²⁾.

Suddenly, under the sole influence of Guénon's books, the countless readings I had devoured on hierological and Eastern philosophical topics since adolescence were intellectually organised and prioritised in my mind. I tried, with little success, to convey to others the intellectual reasons for my fascination in an analytical study of that book, which even today—after the publication of his *complete works*, including his posthumous books—remains a key work for understanding Guénonian thought³.

From that moment on, I devoted my greatest efforts to searching for his books first and then for the remaining issues of the magazine he edited until his death, *Etudes Traditionnelles*. After Guénon's death in 1950, having read all his works, I successively acquired the five posthumous books, the last of which appeared in 1966; in total, 23 volumes and more than three hundred articles, many of them collected in the posthumous work.

When *Initiation et réalisation spirituelle*, the first of his books published after his death, appeared in 1952, I wrote a new article entitled *Theory and Practice of Metaphysical Realisation* in the magazine *Logos* of the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters of Buenos Aires, which left me with a feeling of frustration, not only because of the indifference of the

¹M. Heidegger: *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* (What is Philosophy?) (Translated from German by Kostas Axelos and Jean Beaufret), Paris, Gallimard, 3rd edition, 1957, p. 42 ff.

² Luc Benoist: *Art du monde, la spiritualité du métier*, Paris, Gallimard, 1941; quoted by Paul Séranf in his book *René Guénon*, Paris, La Colombe, 1953, p. 17.

³ See *Episteme*, no. 2, April 1948, pp. 59-61.

assumed readers, but rather to experience the intimate conviction of the unfinished nature of my attempt to make Guénon known in Argentina. I do not know whether my long-delayed intention to write a complete study on Guénon was due to the circumstances of Argentine academic life, which often leads us down intellectual paths different from those we intimately desire to follow, or whether—as Guénon has repeatedly warned—it is impossible to systematise metaphysics without fundamentally distorting it.

Two years later (in 1954), the Spanish version of *Theosophism: History of a Pseudo-Religion* appeared, and a couple of years ago, *The Crisis of the Modern World*. None of the three books by Guénon published in Argentina (the only ones translated into our language) included the slightest information about the author and his work. This omission is all the more serious since each of these works corresponds to a different aspect of Guénon's production.

This widespread ignorance of Guénon's work in Argentine intellectual circles extends to academic circles and, even more surprisingly, to our philosophy departments⁴. This unusual situation is not exceptional, but rather a particular case of a very general phenomenon that can be observed throughout the world.

THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

Far less dangerous and compromising than facing an adversary of Guénon's erudition and penetrating intelligence in the field of controversy is to draw a veil of silence over his name and work. The slogan seems to have been not to discuss him and, of course, not to quote him either. This has been the most common attitude of those who had an obligation to express their opinion on an intellectual work accomplished over thirty years.

⁴ As an exception, the philosophy journal *Arké* (Volume I, No. ⁽⁹⁾ 2-3), published by the Faculty of Philosophy of the National University of Córdoba, published an essay by Rodolfo Martínez Espinosa—an unknown figure in academic circles—entitled *René Guénon, Sign of the Times* 15 years ago.

A professor of ancient philosophy told one of his students that "Guénon was a second-rate Orientalist". Could this *boutade* have been motivated by the ego of the "specialist" wounded by Guénonian criticism of the "Greek miracle"? Perhaps the explanation is much simpler: his ignorance. Let us remember that Guénon repeatedly explained why he was not a "philosopher", nor a "historian of religions", much less an "Orientalist".

There are many reasons for this ongoing hostility towards the man and his work, some of which are personal and others general. The former cannot have been numerous or significant, because those who knew him praised his natural kindness and generosity without reservation and, moreover, he spent the last twenty years of his life in voluntary exile in Cairo. Let us look at some of the general reasons:

1) His relentless criticism of Western civilisation and, in particular, of the modern world, which was intolerable to the representatives of 'modernism'. Despite the passive resistance of official Orientalists, his works devoted to the analysis of the modern world influenced two authors: Daniel Rops and Ananda Coomaraswamy. The former wrote a book whose title reveals Guénonian influence, *A World Without a Soul*, and the latter an essay entitled *Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge*, originally published in *Isis* XXIV, Part 4, 1943, and later collected in the volume entitled *The Bugbear of Literacy* (London, Dennis Dobson Ltd., 1947). In an unpublished work entitled *The Crisis of the Modern World: Heidegger and Guénon*, we put forward the hypothesis of Guénon's influence on Heidegger, based on the striking coincidences between the ideas expressed by the former in his aforementioned books and the concepts formulated by the latter in *The Age of the World Image*, a work included in *Holzwege*.

2) His denunciation of the scientism of our time—which he called "the realm of quantity"—as a result of the abnormal (not to say "monstrous," he added) nature of Western civilisation.

3) His studies on contemporary neo-spiritualism, especially on theosophy and spiritualism

4) His spiritual aristocracy reflected in the thesis that the salvation of the West requires the formation of an intellectual elite, which would provoke the reaction of those who have

⁵We are aware that our hypothesis is difficult to prove because, as is well known, Heidegger does not usually mention his sources, except when he uses them to reinterpret them, as is the case with his references to the pre-Socratics or Plato, for example.

⁶ See, in particular, his books *Le règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, Paris, Gallimard, 1945, and *La crise du monde moderne*, Paris, Gallimard, 1946.

⁷ See his books *L'erreur spirite*, Second edition, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1952, and *Le théosophisme. Histoire d'une pseudo-religion*, Paris, Editions Traditionnelles, 1965.

been fascinated by industry, technology and scientific dissemination through the mass media⁸.

5) His criticism of official Orientalism and its methods (scholarship, historical method and philology), considered to distort authentic Eastern thought.

6) His studies on traditional Freemasonry (which lost its *operative* character in the 18th century to become *speculative* Freemasonry), in which he harshly criticised the progressivism and cult of reason that prevails in modern Masonic organisations⁹.

7) His studies on the esoteric aspects of Christianity¹⁰ and his thesis that the Catholic Church could become the appropriate means for the West to rediscover traditional transcendent principles. His preaching for Catholicism to recover its lost metaphysical (esoteric) dimension provoked reactions in Catholic modernism to the point of forcing him to interrupt his work in the Catholic magazine *Regnabit!*¹¹.

8) His studies on the traditional symbolism of the East and West—later collected in his books *The Symbolism of the Cross* and *Fundamental Symbols of Sacred Science*—were incomprehensible to the people of an era that had lost its "symbolic mentality".

⁸ See *Orient et Occident*, Paris, Les Editions Véga, 1948.

⁹ See *Studies on Freemasonry and Companionship* (2 volumes), Paris, Editions Traditionnelles, 1964.

¹⁰ See *Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme chrétien*, Paris, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1954.

¹¹ Cornelis and Léonard (*La Gnose éternelle*, Librairie Arthème Fayard, Paris, 1959, p. 85) assert that Guénon's 'traditionalism' is a 'vague rationalism', heir to the 'philosophical systems' of the 18th and 19th centuries. No one else criticised rationalism and Western "philosophical systems" more harshly than he did. Furthermore, chapter XXXI of *Le règne de la quantité et les signes des temps* is devoted to distinguishing between "traditionalism" and "tradition". Not only have the authors mentioned failed to understand Guénon, but it seems that they have not even read him.

LIFE AND DEATH OF A GURU

In an unpublished text from 1927, the surrealist René Daumal wrote: "René Guénon, I know nothing of your human life." He was "one of those infinitely rare beings who never say 'I,'" confessed his friend González Truc¹².

I believe that it was only in 1951—through Paul Chacornac's article *La vie simple de René Guénon*¹³—that some circumstances of his life became known that, until then, had not transcended the circle of his friends. Only two articles were published in "obscure magazines"¹⁴ during his lifetime.

Who was René Guénon? He was not an *Orientalist*, even though no one knew Eastern thought better than he did, nor was he a *historian of religions*, despite having conducted a profound analysis of religion since his first book and revealed in all his work an unusual mastery of hierological topics. nor was he a *sociologist* or *philosopher of history*, as might be inferred from the books he devoted to the analysis of the modern world, nor even an *occultist*, as those who have read him obliquely claim. We could call him a metaphysician, provided that—as Chacornac says and he himself clarified several times—this term is not assigned the meaning it has in Western philosophy textbooks. Better still, it can be said that he was a 'guru' — as Coomaraswamy¹⁵said — or 'a great jñānin', as Marco Palis¹⁶proposed to call him.

A servant of truth, Guénon affirmed time and again that, from a metaphysical point of view, individualities do not count, and he remained faithful to this principle throughout his life: the man withdrew to make way for the work, because "only knowledge matters". G. Remond describes him thus: "I found myself face to face with a frail, very thin man — thin as a harp, Saadi would have said — very white, with very blue eyes, dressed simply in a tunic and slippers, extremely refined but very silent"¹⁷.

¹²González Truc: *Souvenirs et perspectives sur René Guénon*, in the journal *Etudes Traditionnelles*, triple issue (293-294-295), p. 332.

¹³This work, published in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, op. cit., was later developed into the book *La vie simple de René Guénon*, Paris, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1958. To date, it remains the best study of Guénon's life.

¹⁴Luc Benoist: *Perspectives générales*, in *Etudes Traditionnelles*, op. cit., p. 262.

¹⁵Ananda Coomaraswamy: *The Bugbear of Literacy*, op. cit., p. 64.

¹⁶Marco Pallis: *René Guénon et le Bouddhisme*, *Etudes Traditionnelles*, op. cit., p. 308.

¹⁷G. Remond, in *L'Egypte Nouvelle*, 1 February 1952 (quoted by Chacornac, in *La vie simple de René Guénon*, p. 115).

The life of the man who would take the Arabic name Abdel Wahed Yahia (meaning "servant of the One") began on 15 November 1886. His parents, who were devout Catholics, had him baptised in the Church of Saint Saturninus; on 7 June 1897, he took his first communion. From childhood, he had delicate health, and perhaps because of this, his aunt, a teacher at a school in Blois, taught him to read and write. At the age of twelve, he entered a secondary school run by priests, where he studied for three years. In 1902, he entered the Augustin-Thiéry College as a rhetoric student. Several times awarded as the best student in his class, while studying philosophy in 1903, the Society of Sciences and Letters of Blois awarded him a new prize. Struggling with poor health, he graduated from secondary school that same year. The following year, he enrolled in a special mathematics course, earning the highest award: a medal from the institution's alumni association¹⁸. On the advice of his teachers, he went to Paris with the intention of obtaining a degree in Mathematics, but his fragile health prevented him from attending university regularly, and he abandoned his studies for good in 1906.

From the moment he arrived in Paris, and for twenty-five years, Guénon lived in a small flat, far from the noise and crowds, at 51 Rue Saint-Louis-en-L'Île. Led by a friend, he joined the Hermetic School, directed by Dr Gérard Encausse, better known by his pseudonym Papus. From that year (1906) until 1909, he explored the dead ends of various neo-spiritualist organisations. At the end of his experience, he published an article in the magazine *La Gnose* entitled *Gnosis and Neo-Spiritualist Schools*, whose conclusions can be summarised in this succinct judgement: the error of neo-spiritualism consists in not transcending the phenomenal level and in transferring the materialistic methods and principles of ordinary science to a pseudo-spiritual plane.

In his aforementioned book *La vie simple de René Guénon* (p. 36), Chacornac recounts that, after his break with occultism, he was admitted to a Masonic lodge, where he remained until 1914. In 1909, he had joined the Gnostic Church, where he was consecrated bishop under the name 'Palingenius', and around the same year, he met two men who would play an important role in his intellectual development: Léon Champrenaud and Albert de Pourvoirville. The former, a lecturer at Papus' school, had left the Hermetic School early on, and the latter had received Taoist initiation under the name *Matgioi*.

¹⁸Guénon's mathematical ability is reflected not only in his books—especially the one he devoted to the study of *The Principles of Infinitesimal Calculus*—but also in the rigour and precision of his style.

At that time, Guénon founded the magazine *La Gnose*, which, from issue 4 onwards, would receive the support of Champrenaud and Matgioi. This magazine published what appears to have been Guénon's first work, *The Demiurge* (much later republished by the magazine *Etudes Traditionnelles* in its June 1951 issue). Many of his books, *The Symbolism of the Cross*, *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, and *The Principles of Infinitesimal Calculus*, were previously published as articles in *La Gnose*, a magazine that ceased publication in 1912.

Where had Guénon acquired the knowledge that made him a great metaphysician at the age of twenty-three? André Préau attributed his precocious metaphysical training to oral teachings received directly from Eastern masters¹⁹, which Chacornac confirmed in his aforementioned book.

In 1912, two fundamental events took place in his life: he got married and received Islamic initiation. The testimony of this conversion is recorded in the dedication of his book *The Symbolism of the Cross*²⁰: "To the venerated memory of ESH-SHEIKH ABD-ER-RAHMÁN ELISH EL-KEBIR El-Alim El-Malkí El-Maghribí, to whom I owe the first idea for this book" (the book was published in 1931, but the date of his initiation is known from a letter).

Coming from a traditionally Catholic family, being a member of that religion himself, and having stated that the Catholic Church is the only religious institution in the West that could serve as the basis for a spiritual recovery of the West, one wonders why he converted to Islam. On the other hand, his work is based on unanimous and timeless tradition, but when he had to resort to specific traditional data, he drew more frequently on Hindu tradition than on others. Why, then, did he not choose Hinduism?

The motivations behind his decision—like so many other attitudes in his life—have remained obscure. Chacornac and Sérant believed that Islam was closer to Guénon than Taoism or Hinduism and that it represented for him a kind of middle ground between Western *softness* and Eastern *rigour*. Moreover, an insurmountable obstacle to his conversion to Hinduism may have been the institution of castes.

Forced to earn a living, between 1914 and 1919 he taught at various institutions, mainly as a professor of philosophy. In 1922—he had already published two books, *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* and *Theosophism*—he met Paul Chacornac, who recounted his

¹⁹ In an article devoted to Guénon published in the Indian magazine *Sayakarnataka* in April 1934, entitled *Eastern Knowledge and Western Research*.

²⁰ René Guénon: *Le symbolisme de la croix*, Paris, Les Editions Véga. 1950 (2nd edition).

impressions: "One morning we saw a very tall, thin, dark-skinned man enter our shop on Quai-Saint Michel²¹ a very tall, thin, dark-skinned man, who appeared to be about 30 years old, dressed in black, with the classic look of a French university student. His elongated face, emphasised by a thin moustache, was brightened by his singularly blue and penetrating eyes, which gave the impression of seeing beyond appearances." (Op. cit., pp. 63-64).

When Chacornac went to Guénon's house to acquire neo-spiritualist books and pamphlets that Guénon wanted to get rid of, he described it as follows: "The interior was extremely simple, perfectly matching the simplicity of the man himself." On one of the walls was a painting of an Indian woman, and above the fireplace was a strange Masonic clock; a piano and a large bookcase filled with books completed the décor.

González Truc's image of him from the same period is: "sitting on a *pouffe* in front of the fireplace, his tall stature and long face giving him an oriental air perfectly suited to his philosophy". His conversation was serious, without ever being boring; on the contrary, it was fascinating. Guénon tinged it with grave irony or restrained enthusiasm. In his company, "one imperceptibly abandoned this world to enter the true world, passing from *representation* to *principle*"²².

From 1924 to 1929, Guénon lived off his philosophy lessons. In 1925, the archaeologist and Christian symbolist Louis Charbonneau-Lassay introduced him to the magazine *Regnabit*, edited by R. P. Anizan. That same year, he gave his first and only lecture at the Sorbonne on *Eastern Metaphysics*, the text of which would not be published until 1939²³.

Since 1928, he has been a regular contributor to the magazine *Voile d'Isis*, published by Chacornac, which, in 1933, changed its name to *Etudes Traditionnelles*, which it has retained to this day, publishing without interruption. *Voile d'Isis* defined itself as a "monthly magazine of high science" whose purpose was "the study of Tradition and ancient and modern spiritual movements"; *Etudes Traditionnelles* defined its objective as "the study of the Perpetual and Unanimous Tradition revealed both by the dogmas and rites of orthodox religions and by the universal language of initiatory symbols".

²¹ Opposite the *bouquinistes*, the Chacornac bookshop is still located in this picturesque Parisian neighbourhood.

²² *Souvenirs et perspectives de René Guénon*, article published by González Truc in the aforementioned special issue of the journal *Etudes Traditionnelles*, p. 342.

²³ René Guénon: *La métaphysique orientale*, Paris, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1939. My annotated translation of this work will soon be published by EUEDEBA.

In 1930, he left for Egypt on a mission to search for Sufi texts. Having adapted to the customs and traditions of his new homeland and speaking Arabic fluently, everyone knew him by his new name, Sheik Abdel Wahed Yahia²⁴. In Cairo, he published articles in the magazine *El Marifah* (Knowledge), which he wrote in Arabic. In 1928, he was widowed; in 1934, he remarried, this time to the eldest daughter of Sheikh Mohammed Ibrahim. From the white house where he lived, Chacornac recounts, the great pyramids could be seen; in his study, the phrase "Allah is Allah and Mohammed is his Prophet" was written in Arabic. The small room that served as his prayer room faced Mecca.

Dr Abdel Halim Mahmoud recounts in his book, written in Arabic, *The Muslim Philosopher René Guénon or Abdel Wahed Yahia*, his encounter with Guénon in a mosque: "He began to murmur as if to himself and to shake; little by little, his words became audible and his movements intensified. Finally, he sank, until he was engulfed, in the '*dhikr*'²⁵. I had to wake him up; then, a violent shiver shook him. I thought he was returning from distant and unknown regions." (Y. Chacornac, op. cit., p. 108.)

In 1948, at his request, he obtained Egyptian nationality and a year later had the joy of seeing his first son born (he already had two daughters). In December 1950, Dr Katz, his doctor and friend, treated him for ulcerations on his right leg. Once that problem was overcome, symptoms of aphasia and apraxia appeared, and a few days later, serious heart problems. On 7 January 1951, at 11 p.m., after repeating several times "*En-nafs jalas*" (The soul is leaving!), Guénon died; his last words were: Allah, Allah!

Dr Katz was unable to explain what had caused his death, as none of his organs were particularly diseased. "His soul departed mysteriously," he said. Far from his native France, from his friends in Paris, in an intellectual milieu that did not seem to understand him very well, this Christian convert to Islam died in Cairo, where he had spent the last twenty years of his life. In the Darassa cemetery (in his father-in-law's tomb), Guénon's body lies on the sand, "with his face turned towards Mecca"²⁶.

²⁴Guénon was a polyglot; in addition to Arabic and French, he was fluent in Sanskrit, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, English, German, Spanish, Russian and Polish.

²⁵ *Dhikr* is the incessant remembrance of God; together with *fikr* (meditation), they constitute the two phases of the Sufis' inner prayer.

²⁶Lucien Méroz: *René Guénon ou La sagesse initiatique*, Paris, Plon, 1962, p. 225.

The SIGNS OF THE TIMES

Guénon used to say that he did not exist; so great was his desire to fade away behind his work that he considered it his own only insofar as it conveyed universal metaphysical ideas. In a letter to Schuon, he humbly wrote: "I have no other merit than that of having expressed, as best I could, some traditional ideas."

Although the choice and development of his themes always had a metaphysical intention, I believe that the order of their publication obeyed the *cyclical conditions* that he lucidly detected during his lifetime. Therefore, if we examine the themes of his books and articles from a metaphysical perspective, we will notice, behind the circumstantial appearance of the titles, a secret thread that unites them mysteriously but firmly. From this point of view, three major themes can be discovered in Guénon's work:

1) criticism of the modern world; 2) metaphysical doctrine; and 3) symbolic studies. We will begin with the first, which we have entitled "the signs of the times".

taking up an expression that appears in the title of one of his books. Although the historian and literary critic González Truc claimed authorship of the central idea of the book *The Crisis of the Modern World*, I believe that the seed of the works in which he carried out his tremendous critique of the contemporary age was already implicit in the *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*²⁷. In the conclusion to this book, he even issues a serious warning to the West about the imminent risk of self-annihilation to which it is increasingly exposed, showing the possible paths to its salvation: 1) that the West return to the metaphysical sources of its own tradition; 2) that the East, in order to save it, assimilate it willingly or by force. The third possibility is that the West will disappear, plunged into the worst barbarism.

Guénon's voice was not the only one to be heard condemning Western civilisation, but I do not believe that anyone else has uncovered the cosmological and metaphysical roots of the crisis in the modern world as he has. His analysis takes into account the two essential aspects of the problem: 1) an examination of the characteristics of modernity and the causes of decline; 2) an analysis and critique of contemporary neo-spiritualism. The first aspect is studied in *The Crisis of the Modern World, East and West* and

²⁷René Guénon: *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, Paris. Les Editions Vega, 4th edition revised and corrected by the author, 1952, pp. 303-317. In his article in *Etudes Traditionnelles* already cited, González Truc states: "I can claim a kind of circumstantial paternity of the book *The Crisis of the Modern World*".

the *Kingdom of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*; the second in *Theosophism and Spiritualist Error*.

To discover these causes, he says, we must go back to the 14th century: with the destruction of the Order of the Temple, the link connecting the West with the traditional East was lost. The West is not only a *geographical* appendage of Asia but also *ontologically* and *cosmologically*. The East is the trunk and the modern West is a branch that has been moving further and further away from it.

The East (always understood as the traditional East and not the Westernised East) is doctrinal unity, tradition, intellectuality; the West (the modern West, not the medieval West) is dispersion, rationalism, sentimentality. In his book *East and West* (already cited) —published in 1924— he begins by analysing the methods dear to the West, scholarship and philology, showing their limitations and the errors and fallacies involved in their application: the superstition of life and the ideas of evolution and continuous progress. The second part of this work is devoted to presenting solutions that culminate in the aforementioned hypothesis of the constitution of a Western elite. The second edition includes an *addendum* in which Guénon warns that the crisis is nearing its culmination²⁸.

Three years later, the theme of the crisis of Western civilisation returns in the aforementioned work *The Crisis of the Modern World*. He applies his knowledge of the theory of cosmic cycles, identifying our era as the dark age or *Kali Yuga*, also called the Iron Age, corresponding to the fourth stage of a complete cycle of human life or *Manvantara* (this expression is taken from *the Atharva Veda*). Tsong-Khaya, founder of the 'Yellow Hat' order (*Gelugpa*) — to which the Dalai Lama belongs — distinguished within the *Kali Yuga* itself a fifth cyclical stage which he called the 'Age of Increasing Corruption', corresponding to the last phase of the dark age, that is, the contemporary age, according to Guénon's opinion⁽²⁹⁾

The historical origin of *the Kali Yuga* coincides with the occurrence of major changes in almost all peoples, which took place approximately in the 6th century BC: in China, the metaphysical unity of Taoism —which is pure metaphysical doctrine — and Confucianism, its exoteric expression, appears; in Persia, a readaptation of Mazdeism takes place; in India, Buddhism is born, which, in some of its branches,

²⁸ Jean Reyor, in his article entitled *La dernière veille de la nuit*, published in the issue of *Etudes Traditionnelles* dedicated to Guénon (already cited), states that he possessed certain traditional data that led him to believe that the end of the current cycle would take place at the end of our century "or perhaps before". If Guénon's prediction were to come true, our world would disappear in a dissolution or *Pralaya* (the end of a *Manvantara* or human cycle of existence).

²⁹Marco Pallis: *René Guénon et le Bouddhisme*, in the special issue of *Etudes Traditionnelles*, already cited, p. 312.

It is a rebellion against the metaphysical principles of Hinduism, and in Greece, philosophy begins to coincide with the death of Orphism and the readaptation of traditional mysteries of an originally esoteric and metaphysical nature.

From that historic moment—the sixth century BC—the process of continuous decline continued, characterised by an increasing departure from metaphysical principles and reflected in increasingly numerous and eloquent signs of cosmological degradation. However, while it is not possible to change the sign of the times, it is possible to slow down the speed of the 'fall'. And this seems to have happened in the Western Middle Ages (which lasted from the reign of Charlemagne to the beginning of the 14th century), the only *normal* period—in the cosmological and metaphysical sense of the term—in the West. This traditional unity was broken by the Renaissance and the Reformation. The former exalted humanism, which already implied one of the most notable characteristics of our time: secularism³⁰.

A normal civilisation implies a balance between knowledge and action and the dependence of the latter on the former. The modern world shows action for action's sake and a growing contempt for knowledge, without understanding that without the latter, neither is action possible, because knowledge operates as Aristotle's 'unmoved mover'. These concepts would be developed in a book he published two years later: *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*³¹. In the conclusion of *The Crisis...* he once again returns to his cherished desire for the establishment of an intellectual elite in the West, but this time he believes that, while not essential, it would be desirable for the elite to have institutional support. There is only one traditional institution in the West that can fulfil this mission, he says, and that is the Catholic Church.

In order for the Church to carry out its intended mission, it must restore the esoteric and metaphysical meaning of its doctrine, without changing its religious form in any way. In his book *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*⁽³²⁾ he went so far as to claim that some groups of medieval Hermeticism may still survive in the West.

In *The Realm of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, the cosmological categories of the *Kali Yuga* are described in detail as a reflection of the cyclical laws of the last period of our Manvatara. In this way, the theme raised in the previous books is developed and completed.

³⁰ For Guénon, secularism does not only mean anti-religiousness, but—more importantly—anti-metaphysics.

³¹ René Guénon: *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporelle*, Paris, Les Editions Véga, 2nd edition, 1947.

³² Paris, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 2nd edition, 1953.

THE MONKEY OF GOD

In an unpublished work, which I presented last year at the Goethe Institute in Buenos Aires, entitled *The Crisis of the Modern World: Heidegger and Guénon*, I described Guénon's studies on the modern world as a metaphysics of history. In my book *Fundamentos de la filosofía de la ciencia (Fundamentals of the Philosophy of Science)*, I have dealt with the theoretical levels of history: 1) historiography; 2) epistemology of history; 3) philosophy of history; 4) theology of history; and 5) metaphysics of history³³. But to have a complete view of 'modernism', the image of a world in dissolution must be integrated with the study of one of the most sinister signs of our time: pseudo-religiosity. This task is accomplished by Guénon through two books: *Theosophism* and *The Spiritist Error* (already cited).

In the fourth part of his book *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*—a book that is like a programme of Guénon's bibliographic production—he dealt with theosophy, calling it a "pseudo-religion". In the last of the additional notes written for the second edition of *Theosophism*, the author states that the idea of publishing this book had been suggested to him by Hindus, who also provided him with much of the documentation he used in preparing the work.

The seed of the book was a series of articles that appeared in the *Revue de Philosophie* (Guénon himself clarifies that this is not the academic journal *Revue Philosophique*). Chacornac (see his aforementioned work, p. 53) believes that the wealth of information used in the writing of *Theosophism* was gathered by an enigmatic character named Hiran Singh, who signed under the pseudonym "Swami Narad Mani". Singh had written a series of violent articles against the Theosophical Society.

The intention of *Theosophism*—one of the few works in which Guénon uses the historical method—is to demonstrate, with the support of irrefutable documentation, that the doctrines propagated by the Theosophical Society are Western inventions, expressed in a language peppered with Hindu words that are poorly translated and even more poorly understood. He introduces the expression "theosophism" to distinguish the pseudo-religion invented by Madame Blavatsky from traditional theosophy, which consists of Christian-based religious, mystical, and esoteric doctrines (Boehme, Gichtel, William Law, Swedenborg, Claude de Saint-Martin).

The basic ideas of theosophism are common notions in the modern world: evolution, progress, materialism. Theosophical language contains expressions taken from Hinduism and semantically distorted. The Hindu concept of *karma*, for example, is called by Blavatsky the "law of retribution" and by the theosophist Sinnet the "law of

³³ A. Asti Vera: *Fundamentos de la filosofía de la ciencia*, Buenos Aires Nova, 1967, pp. 67-68.

ethical causality" and understood by both as a kind of immanent justice, an interpretation that, of course, has nothing to do with the Hindu conception. Furthermore, theosophists link the idea of *karma* with reincarnation, which also has nothing to do with it: *karma* means, in Sanskrit, action and, by extension, ritual action.

Initially a spiritualist (she was a medium in Cairo during the years 1870-72) and later an apostate of spiritualism, Madame Blavatsky lived surrounded by fraud and lies, beginning with her purely imaginary travels to India and Tibet, and continuing with the legend of the Tibetan "Mahatmas" to whom she attributed the production of non-existent paranormal phenomena. This disconcerting woman, whose life was marked by paradox, later confessed to the deception, writing to Solovioff (who caught her in fraud more than once): "I will say and publish in *The Times* and in all the newspapers that the Master (Morya) and the 'Mahatma Koot Hoomi' are only products of my own imagination, that I invented them." For his part, Dr Charles Richet unmasked her in a letter to Solovioff in which he said that she was nothing more than a "deceiver and a skilled conjurer".

Theosophism poorly conceals, behind a religious appearance, a fundamentally anti-Christian and anti-Jewish attitude, an attitude that was shared by the orientalist Burnouf, an ally of the theosophists and considered by them to be "a brilliant intellect".

In 1893, the Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago, in which, in addition to the theosophists, Vivekananda participated, who denatured Vedanta (he was an unfaithful disciple of Ramakrishna) driven by his intention to adapt it to the Western mentality. Thus, a new form of pseudo-religion emerged: Westernised Vedanta, with temples, missions and followers all over the world, including in our country. On the other hand, as theosophical books were and still are published in India (where theosophy has established "branches"), a strange mixture of Orientalism, theosophy and Westernised Vedanta has emerged.

Mme Besant, Blavatsky's successor, became the tutor of a young Hindu whom she elevated to the status of a potential Buddha and renamed Alcyone or Nizar, whose real name was Krishnamurti. The son of a theosophist, Krishnamurti wrote a book at the age of seventeen entitled *At the Feet of the Master*, which was greatly admired by his followers but which, in Guénon's opinion, which we fully share, is a simple collection of moral precepts without much originality. Presented as "the second Christ" (sic), his father, fed up with so much fraud and scandal, finally demanded his return before the courts.

There are two ways of denying religion, one *passive* and the other *active*; the first consists in the *decline* of religiosity and the second in its *perversion*. The decline of

religion is a weakening; for example, a reduction in the number of believers and a decrease in its influence on the world and mankind. Perversion is the total reversal of intention and meaning. Lord Northbourne³⁴ concludes that decline implies a loss of power and perversion an abuse of power.

Pseudo-religions are sinister caricatures of religions; theosophy and spiritualism are *perversions* of religion, favoured by the religious *decline* that has paved the way for them. They resemble their models, just as an ape resembles man or the Devil resembles God: they are their inverted image. That is why they are difficult to unmask, because of their caricature-like resemblance to the original.

In his book *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (op. cit.), Guénon says that pseudo-religions offer the illusion of "spirituality in reverse". They are reached insensibly, because deviation is a matter of degree: from humanism and rationalism to mechanism, and from mechanism to materialism. A continuous degradation whose end is subversion. That is why Guénon emphasises that pseudo-religions are tragic parodies of spirituality in which the indelible mark of Satan, the ape of God, that is, the spirit of denial and falsehood, is revealed.

Two important reasons prompted Guénon to write *The Spiritualist Error*³⁵. 1) The widespread popularity of spiritualism and 2) the danger of the practices indulged in by its followers³⁶. Spiritualism originated in 1848, in Hydesville, New York State, in a house where the Fox family had just moved in and where strange phenomena began to occur: mysterious noises and inexplicable movements of objects, such as those that occur in 'haunted houses'. Attributing these phenomena to a 'spirit', they constructed a conventional code — called 'spiritual telegraphy' — using knocks that symbolised words. These practices, consisting of "dialogues" with "spirits," were first called "Modern Spiritualism" and later "Spiritualism"; the term "spiritism" was invented in France.

Spiritualism, spiritism, or spiritualist doctrine arose, in a sense, as a reaction to 19th-century materialism, but, in addition to "combating one error with another error"—as Guénon says—it is, in essence, a transposed materialism. One of the basic ideas of spiritism—whose doctrine was codified by Allan Kardec—is that of *reincarnation*. The reincarnation hypothesis was first formulated by Lessing in the 18th century. Reincarnation, which was never taught in India

³⁴ See Lord Northbourne: *Religion in the Modern World*, London, J. M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1963, chapters VIII and IX.

³⁵ The terms "spiritist," "spiritualist," and "spiritist" are synonymous in the language of spiritism.

³⁶ In our country, spiritualism has multiple organisations, an abundant bibliography and specialised publishers and bookshops.

traditional in any Eastern country, it is a Western invention. It has nothing to do with either the Eastern theory of *transmigration* or the Orphic-Pythagorean notion of *metempsychosis*.

The postulates of spiritualism are: the possibility of communicating with the "spirits" of the dead by natural means and the acceptance of an action of the "spirits" on matter producing physical phenomena, such as knocks, various noises and the movement of objects. This action occurs through a living person who possesses special abilities to act as an intermediary; for this reason, they are called "mediums". In the spiritualist jargon of our country, they are called "machines".

Mediums are often pretenders (who sometimes become convinced of the reality of the powers they began by pretending to have), when they are not neurotic, hysterical, psychotic, or epileptic. Almost all of them are sick, abnormal, and unbalanced. Spiritualist practices, far from curing their ills, aggravate and spread them, promoting psychic contagion and the imbalance of other people prone to personality disorders. Most mediums end up, with their health broken, in mental asylums. (A few years ago, while conducting a study on aphasia at the old Hospicio de las Mercedes, we found that several mentally ill people had attended spiritualist centres and carried out the usual practices).

In *The Spiritist Error*, four fundamental aspects of spiritism are clarified: 1) the problem of communication with the dead; 2) the doctrine of reincarnation; 3) the question of Satanism; and 4) the explanation of phenomena. The first problem is non-existent because spirits lack bodies and, consequently, organs appropriate for communication, such as the senses, for example; the second is a distortion of the concepts of metempsychosis and transmigration; the third is a problem that occupied Guénon several times (for example, in *The Kingdom of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*) and in which we must distinguish between a) conscious Satanism and b) unconscious Satanism. The latter is more common, both among followers and among the leaders of spiritualist centres. The devil, he says, is not only terrible, he is also grotesque and childish; and childish and grotesque is spiritualism. It is no wonder that Baudelaire said that the devil's greatest skill is to make us believe that he does not exist. Finally, the explanation of phenomena — when they are not due to fraud or mental pathology — must be made taking into account the corresponding plane: psychological, psychopathological, parapsychological, or magical.

PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS ET UNIVERSALIS

It is not easy to systematically present the content of a work such as Guénon's because, despite the rigour of his method and the almost mathematical precision of his expression, it has been developed outside of any systematic framework. This is due to the author's conviction that systematising metaphysics is tantamount to denaturing it. Schuon has stated³⁷ that four major themes can be studied in his work: metaphysical doctrine, traditional principles, symbolism and criticism of the modern world. This classification is acceptable as long as it is emphasised that there is only one 'protagonist' in Guénon's work: metaphysics.

Despite the semantic misunderstandings that have arisen from the not always rigorous use of the word 'metaphysics', Guénon decides to accept it, restoring its original and etymological meaning: beyond physics, and understanding 'physics' as the ancients interpreted it, that is, 'science of nature'. He rejects the word 'knowledge', commonly used in India instead of 'metaphysics', because its use in the West would easily lead to error.

Once the term has been adopted, a second problem arises, that of its definition. The difficulty arises, first of all, from the fact that one can only speak of a metaphysical 'object' by analogy. Metaphysics—in the Guénonian sense, which is the traditional one—deals with the universal, with the knowledge of eternal and universal principles. Only what is limited can be defined, so how can we define what is essentially unlimited? A definition of metaphysics would become increasingly inaccurate as we strove to make it more precise.

Therefore, the infinity of its analogical object suggests resorting to negative terms, since only a double negation can suggest primordial infinity, for to deny finitude is to deny the negation of infinity.

With regard to the *origin* of metaphysics, Guénon will say what is stated in the metaphysical books of the Vedanta: it is of non-human origin (*apaurusheya*). The *mode* of knowledge is different from the scientific one; the latter is rational, discursive, and always indirect; the former, on the other hand, is supra-rational, intuitive, and immediate. Now, there are different forms of intuition; for example, there is sensory intuition and intellectual intuition. The organ of metaphysical knowledge is pure intellectual intuition.

The *communication* of metaphysical knowledge can only be done through symbols that support the intuition of those who meditate on them. It is not through reason (*ratio*), a limited organ of knowledge, but through pure intellect (analogous to Aristotle's *active intellect*) that the universal can be attained.

³⁷F. Schuon: *L'Oeuvre*, in the special issue of *Etudes Traditionnelles*, p. 257.

Metaphysical knowledge *cannot* be *experienced* because it is "beyond the physical world," but neither can it *be demonstrated* because the universality of its "object" escapes individual reason. There is one exceptional, unique, and non-transferable means of *proof*: *metaphysical realisation*, and only one necessary way to prepare for it: theoretical knowledge and concentration.

But theory is symbolic and virtual: only the *effective realisation* of knowledge provides final *certainty*. This is metaphysical realisation, whose principle is identification through knowledge; as Guénon says, a being is everything that the being knows: "it consists in becoming aware of what is permanent and immutable, outside of any temporal succession or any other nature"⁽³⁸⁾.

The first stage of metaphysical realisation consists in the transmutation of the individual into the *true man*, that is, in achieving, through the development of *integral* individuality, the restoration of *the primordial state*. The true man acquires a sense of eternity; for him, the (apparent) succession of things has been transmuted into (real) simultaneity.

The primordial state still corresponds to the human individual; the second stage of realisation refers to the *superhuman* (supra-individual) states. The human being leaves the world of forms, after having passed through several intermediate states; the last of these is *pure being* or the principle of manifestation.

The final goal of transcending being to reach the absolutely unconditioned state, which implies the negation of relative existence, has not yet been achieved. It can be said that being is beyond all states, or that it contains them all, or that it has attained *liberation* from all conditioning: union with the Supreme Principle³⁹.

In his *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, Guénon stated that being is not the most universal of all principles⁴⁰, which is why Aristotelian metaphysics, insofar as it studies being as being, does not transcend the *ontological plane*⁴¹. Being, even understood as the principle of manifestation, is not infinite because it does not coincide with total possibility: outside of being, or rather, beyond being, there are still the

³⁸René Guénon: *La métaphysique orientale*, op. cit., p. 15.

³⁹ See *Initiation et réalisation spirituelle*, Paris, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1952, chap. VIII, and *L'homme et son devenir selon le Védānta* (4th edition, Paris, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1952, chap. XXII.

⁴⁰ Op. cit., p. 131.

⁴¹ Note that Guénon uses the terms "ontology" and "metaphysics" in the opposite sense to Heidegger in *Being and Time*. Both agree in their criticism of Western metaphysics, but they start from different principles. The later Heidegger returned to using the word "metaphysics", although with a different meaning from that criticised by him in his early books.

possibilities of non-manifestation; being is, therefore, the first determination. In *The Symbolism of the Cross*, in *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta*, and mainly in *The Multiple States of Being*⁴², Guénon expounds the theory of the multiple states of being. Beyond being—in non-manifestation—is non-being. Being itself, insofar as it is the *principle* of manifestation, cannot belong to manifestation; that is, it is in non-manifestation. Furthermore, in non-manifestation there is that which is manifestable before its manifestation and, of course, that which is non-manifestable, that is, non-being, which is like the Supra-Self, because it contains the principle.

very essence of being.

Even though, using an analogy, we could say that non-being is *closer* to infinity than being, infinity is the union of being and non-being. Being and non-being, considered independently, cannot be infinite because they *limit* each other, that is, they 'finitise' each other⁴³. Universal Possibility, unlimited, absolutely unconditional, is infinity itself.

In *The Multiple States of Being*, an analogy is established between the relationships of non-being-being and silence-word: just as non-being (the unmanifested) is the principle of being (the manifested), silence is the principle of the word. In other words, being or unity is nothing but non-being, or metaphysical zero, *affirmed*; the word is silence *expressed*. But just as non-being is something more — infinitely more — than un-affirmed unity, analogously, silence is something more — infinitely more — than the unexpressed word: it is the inexpressible.

This conception of metaphysics as supreme knowledge, as non-human, eternal, immutable and infinite (unlimited) wisdom, has been called by Ananda Coomaraswamy *philosophia perennis et universalis* because it is the common heritage of all humanity without exception⁴⁴. Schuon⁴⁵ prefers the expression *religio*

⁴²René Guénon: *Les états multiples de l'être*, Paris, Les Editions Véga, 1947 (2nd edition).

⁴³Using a theological analogy, we would say that only God exists and is infinite because if the Devil existed, he would necessarily limit (finitise) divine infinity. If there is more than one infinity, there is no infinity. That is why — as we have explained in our work *Antimetaphysical Characteristics of Contemporary Thought* — Cantor's transfinite are, in reality, *finite*.

⁴⁴ See Ananda Coomaraswamy: *Sagesse orientale et savoir occidental*, in the special issue of *Etudes Traditionnelles* already cited, and, especially, *Eastern Wisdom and Western Knowledge*, chap. IV, of his book, already cited, *The Bugbear of Literacy*, p. 64.

⁴⁵See Chapter IX of F. Schuon's *Light on the Ancient Worlds*, London, Perennial Books, 1965, p. 143, note 2. The expression "religio perennis" is used by Schuon in a different sense from that assigned to it by W. Urban, for example, in *Humanity and Deity*, London, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1951, p. 15 ff. Urban understands *philosophia perennis* as "Greco-Christian philosophy" and *religio perennis* as "universality of religion"; for Schuon, on the other hand, *religio perennis* is another name for traditional metaphysics in the Guénonian sense of the term.

perennis to avoid any possible confusion with a philosophical system understood as a mere "mental elaboration".

THE SYMBOLIC KEY

If metaphysics has non-being as its 'object' and is therefore the knowledge of the inexpressible, how can we avoid the aporia of 'expressing the inexpressible'? There are only two possibilities: the use of terms in a negative form or the use of symbolic language⁴⁶. We find symbolism as an expression of metaphysical knowledge—albeit sporadically—in Western philosophy. Plato, in his *Dialogues*, frequently resorts to symbols and myths when attempting to express metaphysical ideas, and in two of his epistles (the second and seventh, especially the latter) he directly alludes to the need for symbolic language. Clement does the same in *Stromata* I.

In chapter VII of the second part of the *General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines*, the foundations are laid for a theory of metaphysical symbolism, which is further explored and developed in *The Symbolism of the Cross* and in *Aperçus sur l'initiation*. The symbol is the sensible representation of an idea; words are also symbols, which is why language is a particular case of symbolism. The principle of symbolism is the existence of a relationship of analogy between the idea and the image that represents it. The symbol *suggests*, it does not *express*, which is why it is the elective language of traditional metaphysics.

Its origin is non-human and is based on the correspondence between two orders of reality; it is founded on the very nature of beings and things, which is why, says Guénon, all of nature is a symbol. Symbols and myths are not mere stylistic devices but, on the contrary, indirect yet absolutely authentic forms of translating ultimate reality. The Greek expression *paramythia* etymologically designates a higher proof by means of a myth, that is, that mythical language, like symbolic language, is not only *designative* but also *probative*⁴⁷.

The symbol neither *expresses* nor *explains*; it merely serves as *a support* for rising, through meditation, to the knowledge of metaphysical truths. Its ambiguity both *veils* and *reveals*.

⁴⁶ See the work of Georges Vallin: *Essence et formes de la théologie négative*, in *Revue de Méthaphysique et Morale*. April-September 1958, no. 2-3, pp. 161-201. This essay will be published by EUDEBA, translated and annotated by me.

⁴⁷ In his work *Aperçus sur l'initiation*, he says that "the world is like a divine language for those who know how to understand it; according to the biblical expression *Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei*" (Psalm XIX, 2), note 1 on p. 133.

Reality and its polysemic nature enable its interpretation in various orders or planes of reality. Therefore, each human being penetrates the intimacy of the symbol according to their aptitudes (intellectual qualification). Polysemy is the universal sensitive reflection of the essential unity of the symbol.

The plurality of meanings included in each symbol is based on the law of correspondence (analogy): an image serves to represent realities of various orders or levels, from metaphysical truths to those that are like "secondary causes" with respect to the former. The various meanings of the symbol are not mutually exclusive; each is valid in its own order, and all complement and corroborate each other, integrating into the harmony of the total synthesis.

It is often argued that accepting the symbolic meaning of a text is equivalent to rejecting its historical or literal meaning. This erroneous criterion stems from ignorance of the principle of symbolism: the law of correspondence or analogy. As we have seen, each thing translates, in its order of existence and according to its own mode, the metaphysical principle that is its profound *raison d'être*. For example, the metaphysical interpretation of a symbol does not exclude its historical significance; rather, the latter is a consequence of the former, but this relationship of dependence does not deprive it of its *degree* of reality (that which corresponds to its order)⁴⁸.

If, as has been said, language is a particular case of symbolism, why use special symbols as an expression of metaphysical knowledge and not simply resort to philosophical language? Firstly, the symbol is the most appropriate form for conveying non-conceptual meanings and, secondly, it is synthetic, whereas language is analytical. Symbolism is intellectual (spiritual), language is rational. Symbols should not be *explained* but *understood*; one must meditate on them in order to intuitively grasp the order of reality to which they indirectly allude: *they suggest* rather than *express*.

The obscuring of symbols that characterises our era is the result of the loss of the symbolic mentality⁴⁹, which is reflected in two types of misunderstanding, referred to by Guénon as first- and second-degree misunderstanding. The *first degree* of misunderstanding corresponds to the degradation of the meaning of symbols (everism, naturalism, materialism); the *second degree* consists of the external study of symbols.

⁴⁸ In *The Symbolism of the Cross*, this principle is illustrated by showing the double meaning, metaphysical and historical, of Christ's death on the cross.

⁴⁹See my work *Myth and Semantics*, SAPSE Editions, in press, and also the book by M. D. Chénu: *La théologie au douzième siècle*, Paris, Vrin, 1957, chapters VII and VIII.

Secular philosophy uses analytical and rational language, while metaphysics, sacred science, uses synthetic and spiritual language: symbolism.

IF THE SEED DOES NOT DIE...

There are reasons to believe that Guénon was chosen by an Eastern initiatory organisation as the most qualified Western representative to receive and transmit the traditional metaphysical heritage of the East. He himself confessed to Chacornac that his knowledge of Eastern doctrines and languages was not bookish, and P. Sérant (see his cited work, p. 10) affirms that it is almost certain that at the age of 21 Guénon received directly from representatives of Islamic, Hindu, and Chinese doctrines "the elements necessary for the elaboration of his traditional synthesis." Préau, in the article already cited, maintained that Guénon learned Eastern doctrines directly through oral teaching, which Chacornac also admits, although he is unable to determine the identity of his Hindu teachers. The only thing he dares to assert is that they belonged to the Advaita (non-dualist) school of Vedanta and that this contact took place after 1908-1909.

His relationship with Islam is better known: it took place in 1909 through Abdul-Hadi, whose secular name was John Gustaf Agelii (pp. 43-46 of Chacornac's book). As is well known, Guénon's definitive incorporation into the Islamic tradition took place in 1912, a fact that appears in one of the letters he wrote to Chacornac (cited work, p. 47).

The Egyptian Sheikh El-Kebir belonged to a Shadhili branch and, at the same time, was also an authority in the exoteric order. The expression "Shadhili branch" indicates an initiatory (esoteric) organisation. According to this information — which we have taken from

M. Vâlsan⁵⁰— Guénon's teacher combined the two authorities required in the exoteric and esoteric domains of tradition.

In the Arab-Italian magazine *An-Nadi = Il Convito*, published in Cairo in the first decade of this century, Abdul Hadi, who had personal relations with Sheikh Elish, published a work containing valuable information about this spiritual master: a profound scholar, respected by all — one of the most famous men in Islam — an undisputed authority in both the exoteric and esoteric fields⁽⁵¹⁾

⁵⁰ M. Vâlsan: *L'Islam et la fonction de René Guénon*, Paris, *Etudes Traditionnelles*. no. 305, p. 36.

⁵¹ M. Vâlsan, *op. cit.*, pp. 40-47.

According to Vâlsan, Guénon's work "is part of a cyclical perspective that his teacher had explicitly stated." His doctrine is not the product of original thinking, but rather the development of certain fundamental ideas "whose means of expression and application were manifold and will certainly continue to be so until the intended goal is achieved to the extent that it must be" (cited work, pp. 45-46).

We have important testimonies regarding the metaphysical orthodoxy of the Hindu doctrines expounded in Guénon's work. One of them is that of Ananda Coomaraswamy who, when he became acquainted with his work, became his disciple. Marco Pallis, in turn, has stated that Guénon's expression of traditional metaphysics has been recognised by eminent lamas as a faithful formulation of the metaphysical principles of Tibet. Pallis himself has published a translation-adaptation of two of Guénon's books (*The Crisis of the Modern World* and *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*) in Tibetan under the title *The Kali-Yuga and its Dangers*; Tibetans who have read this work consider it strictly orthodox and written by 'a great lama'.

In an article published in one of the latest issues of *Etudes Traditionnelles*⁵², Michel Vâlsan discusses the impact of Guénon's work in the East. Ten years ago, he says, Dr Abdel-Halim Mahmud, professor at Al-Azhar University in Cairo, published a work on Guénon in Arabic, with a selection of texts from his works; a student in Cairo is preparing a thesis on *René Guénon and Islam*, which he will soon defend at the Sorbonne.

Among the eminent thinkers who quote him today, we recall the following: E. Dermenghem, Jean Hebert, Henri Corbin, Georges Vallin, R. C. Zaehner, Mircea Eliade, Leopoldo Ziegler, René Grousset, Jean Danielou, Ananda Coomaraswamy and Luc Benoist.

After reading Guénon, more than one Catholic disappointed with Catholicism returned to it. P. Sérant (cited work) mentions in his book a statement by Henri Bosco, who found in Guénon's books "new reasons to believe Catholicism". André Gide had the courage to confess: "If Guénon is right, all my work falls apart," and a few lines later, he added: "I can find nothing to object to in what Guénon has written: It is irrefutable."⁵³

It is difficult to know what degree of spiritual development Guénon had attained, and although there are reasons to suspect that he was part of an initiatory chain, we cannot be sure. He himself always refused to make the slightest allusion to his intimate spiritual life.

⁵²Michel Vâlsan: *L'Oeuvre de Guénon en Orient, Etudes Traditionnelles*, no. 411, pp. 32-37.

⁵³André Gide: *Journal 1942-1949*, Paris, Gallimard, 1950, p. 195.

It is therefore impossible to speak of a Guénonian initiatory school when we do not even know whether he himself belonged to any traditional esoteric organisation.

On 30 August 1950, faced with the not unlikely possibility of his imminent death, he wrote to Jean Reyor: "As far as the magazine (*Etudes Traditionnelles*) is concerned, I think it would be good to continue with it, if possible." Issue No. 289 of *Etudes Traditionnelles*, published in January 1951, included a notice signed by Chacornac and Reyor announcing to readers that, in accordance with Guénon's wishes, they would continue the work to which he had devoted his entire life. That same year saw the publication of a triple issue (293-294-295) dedicated to Guénon, which we have cited several times in this work.

The magazine has continued to be published regularly to this day (1969) and has featured translations of traditional texts and articles by old and new contributors, preserving the structure and orientation that Guénon gave it from its inception. Some of the names that appear as contributors to *Etudes Traditionnelles* also write in an English magazine whose spirit is similar to that of the French publication of reference, entitled *Studies in Comparative Religions* (formerly called *To Morrow. Studies in the Sacred Traditions of East and West*).

We are convinced of the providential significance of Guénon's work, but when we think of the misunderstanding that still surrounds his books, we cannot help but recall with sadness the words of Plato (7 Epistle): "All those who have written—or will write— claiming to know the object of my endeavours, have understood nothing." If, as we suspect, Guénon did not *really* have any disciples, he was the last metaphysician of the West.

ARMANDO ASTI VERA

WORKS BY RENÉ GUÉNON

- General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines* (1921; 2nd edition, 1932; 3rd edition, 1939; 4th edition revised and corrected by the author, 1952).
- Theosophism, History of a Pseudo-Religion* (1921; 2nd revised and expanded edition, 1928; expanded reissue with additional texts, 1965).
- L'Erreur spirite* (1923; 2nd edition, 1952).
- Orient et Occident* (1924; 2nd edition, 1948).
- L'homme et son devenir selon le Védānta* (1925; 2nd edition, 1941; 3rd edition, 1947; 4th edition, 1952).
- L'ésoterisme de Dante* (1925; 2nd edition, 1939; 3rd edition, 1949).
- Le Roi du Monde* (1927; 2nd edition, 1939; 3rd edition, 1950).
- The Crisis of the Modern World* (1927; 2nd edition, 1946).
- Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel* (1929; 2nd edition, 1947).
- Saint Bernard* (1929; 2nd edition, 1951).
- The Symbolism of the Cross* (1931; 2nd edition, 1950).
- Les états multiples de l'être* (1932; 2nd edition, 1947).
- Eastern Metaphysics* (1939; 2nd edition, 1945; 3rd edition, 1951). *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times* (1945, 2nd edition, 1946).
- The Principles of Infinitesimal Calculus* (1946).
- Aperçus sur l'initiation* (1946, 2nd edition, 1953).
- The Great Triad* (1946).
- Initiation and Spiritual Realisation* (1952).
- Aperçus sur l'ésoterisme chrétien* (1954).
- Fundamental Symbols of Sacred Science* (1962).
- Studies on Freemasonry and Companionship* (1964, 2 volumes).
- Studies on Hinduism* (1966)
- Note:* The last five books were edited by his disciples.

TRANSLATIONS

INTO SPANISH

General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines (1945).

Theosophism (1954).

The Crisis of the Modern World (1967).

IN ITALIAN

Il re del mondo (translation by Arturo Reghini; 1927).

The Crisis of the Modern World (1937).

Man and His Becoming According to the Vedanta (translation by Corrado Rocco, 1937).

Considerations on the Initiatory Path (translation by Corrado Rocco, 1949).

The Esotericism of Dante (translation by Corrado Rocco, 1951).

Eastern Metaphysics (translation by Giovanni Frigieri).

General Introduction to the Study of Hindu Doctrines (translation by Giovanni Frigieri).

The Great Triad (translated by Corrado Rocco).

IN GERMAN

Krisis der Neuzeit (translation by Martín Otto, 1950).

IN PORTUGUESE

The Crisis of the Modern World (translation by F. G. Galvao, 1948).

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- Paul Chacornac: *The Simple Life of René Guénon* (Paris, Les Editions Traditionnelles, 1958).
- Ananda Coomaraswamy: *The Bugbear of Literacy* (London, Dennis Dobson, Ltd., 1947).
- Léopold Ziegler: *René Guénon and the Transcendence of the Modern World*. * Michel Vâlsan: *The Function of René Guénon and the Fate of the West*. * Frithjof Schuon: *The Work*. *
- Luc Benoist: *Perspectives générales*. *
- André Préau: *René Guénon and the Metaphysical Idea*. *
- Jean Thamar: *How to situate René Guénon*. *
- J.C.: *Some remarks on the work of René Guénon*. *
- Marco Pallis: *René Guénon and Buddhism*. *
- Paul Chacornac: *The Simple Life of René Guénon*. *
- González Truc: *Memories and Perspectives on René Guénon*. *
- F. Vreede: *In Memoriam René Guénon*. *
- Mario Meunier: *René Guénon, Precursor*. *
- Jean Reyor: *The Last Watch of the Night*. *
- Georges Vallin: *The Metaphysical Perspective* (Paris, P.U.F., 1959).
- Michel Vâlsan: *The Work of René Guénon and the East* (E. T., no. 411).
- Denys Roman: *René Guénon and the Letter G* (E. T., no. 401).
- Jean Reyor: *René Guénon and the notion of universality* (E. T., no. 358).
- Jean Reyor: *Around "The Simple Life of René Guénon"* (E. T., no. 348).
- Jean Reyor: *In the Margins of "The Simple Life of René Guénon"* (E. T., no. 345).
- Fernand Bruner: *Science and Reality* (Paris, Aubier, 1954).
- Ives Millet: *Science and Reality by Fernand Bruner* (E. T., no. 338).
- Marie-Paule Bernard: *Traditional ideas in the age of great illusions* (E. T., no. 336).
- Jean Reyor: *Initiation and Cosmic Moment According to the Work of René Guénon* (E. T., no. 329).
- Arturo Reghini: *The principles of infinitesimal calculus according to Guénon* (E. T., no. 264).
- Jean Reyor: *Church and Masonry in the work of René Guénon* (E. T., no. 325).

Jean Reyor: *On René Guénon's "Masters"* (E. T., no. 321). Jean Reyor: *On a new book by René Guénon* (E. T., no. 316). Michiel Vâlsan: *Islam and the role of René Guénon* (E. T., no. 305).

Jean Reyor: *René Guénon and Freemasonry* (E. T., no. 300). Jean Thamar: *The Wisdom of René Guénon* (E. T., no. 297).

Jean Danielou: *The Mystery of History* (Paris, Editions du Senil, 1953).

Cornelis and Léonard: *The Eternal Gnosis* (Paris, Librairie Artheme Fayard, 1959).

René Daumal: *René Guénon* (Cahiers de la Pléiade, print.-été 1951).

Luc Benoist: *Art du monde, la spiritualité du métier* (Paris, Gallimard, 1941).

Louis Beinaert: *Sagesse de René Guénon?* (*Etudes*, May 1951 issue).

* *Note:* The works marked with * have been published in the special issue of *Etudes Traditionnelles* dedicated to René Guénon: nos. 293-294-295. In general, "E. T." is the abbreviation for "Etudes Traditionnelles".

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

The translation strives to strictly respect the author's style, characterised by long paragraphs in which the train of thought develops in a complex but lucid manner, with numerous digressions, and articulated by frequent anaphora and conjunctions. Some notes have been added, distinguished by the abbreviation (*Translator's note*), to clarify expressions that the author takes for granted, and sometimes some points of detail. Without special indication, in the articles or notes, the translation or explanation of a term or the precise indication of the passage of a quotation has occasionally been given in square brackets; these brackets are different from those of the compiler, which enclose another kind of note. Sometimes it has been necessary, in order to translate certain concepts, to use neologisms of meaning or form (for example, *reversal*, explained in its place; or *indefiniteness*, as an abstract noun of *indefinite*; or *principled*, as an adjective of *Principle*).

Biblical quotations have generally been taken from the Bover-Cantera or Nacar-Colunga translations (both from the B. A. C.).

As for Greek and Eastern terms, the author has only been partially followed (for example, in the values given to Arabic vocalism, or in the form of Sanskrit words, cited by the author in the nominative and not by their themes, as is usual); in this regard, it should be noted in particular that, on the subject of *Brahman*, the neuter *Brahma* is the name of the absolute and unconditioned "Principle", and the masculine *Brah-má*, the "god", one of the first "determinations" of the former with regard to "manifestation".

For transcriptions, the criteria used in other publications by the publisher have generally been preferred. However, in most cases, a semi-strict transcription (similar to that of the author) has been used, and a strict transcription has been used only in quotations of phrases (not titles) and in cases where the etymological argumentation of the text made it advisable. Long vowels are marked with a circumflex (except for *o* and *e* in Sanskrit, which are always long and closed); however, accentuation has been indicated according to the rules of Spanish, using a grave accent on long vowels and an acute accent in other cases (*Vedánta*, *Brahmana*, *Mashiah*, *kshátriya*, *mishnáh*). For Chinese, the almost international Wade system has been used, with minor differences. For Hebrew, no distinction has been made between short, open and closed vowels and the "aspirated" values of *b*, *g*, *d*, *t* (the "aspirated" *k* is *j*, and the aspirated *p* is *f*); but, for

<i>R</i> : not followed or preceded by a vowel: in Sanskrit, <i>r</i> is vocalic, almost like <i>ri</i> , and can be accented.	Sanskrit: <i>pitr</i> , <i>Vrtra</i> , <i>Rshi</i> = [rishi].
<i>Ū</i> : as in German <i>ü</i> (<i>Führer</i>) or French <i>u</i> (<i>mur</i>).	Ch.: <i>Nü</i> .
<i>Y</i> : 1) in Greek, like <i>ü</i> ; 2) otherwise, like the <i>i</i> in <i>cielo</i> , <i>ionizar</i> , <i>hoy</i> .	Gr.: <i>lykos</i> ; Sanskrit: <i>kshátriya</i> , <i>yoga</i> .
<i>Z</i> : voiced or 'buzzing' <i>z</i> , as in French or English <i>zone</i> .	Hebrew: <i>lúz</i> , <i>Zohar</i> .
' : 1) in Chinese, as aspirated <i>h</i> ; 2) in Semitic languages, glottal stop.	Ch.: <i>t'ao</i> ; Arabic: 'álif, <i>Mika'il</i> .
' : voiced pharyngeal fricative (like a soft gurgle). in Arabic, uvular (like a rough gurgle).	Ar. and Heb.: 'ayn. <i>G</i> : Ar.: <i>logah</i> , <i>segír</i> .
<i>Q</i> : in Semitic languages, uvular (a very back <i>k</i> . <i>maqám</i>).	Arabic: <i>qâf</i> .

Letters in roman type within italics:

<i>D</i> , <i>T</i> , <i>N</i> : in Sanskrit, retroflex.	Sanskrit: <i>pinda</i> , <i>hatha</i> .
<i>D</i> , <i>T</i> , <i>S</i> , <i>Z</i> : in Semitic languages, velarised (<i>Z</i> is, strictly speaking, the velarised form of <i>DH</i>)	Arabic: <i> fayd</i> , <i>zâhir</i> , <i>saffât</i> , Hebrew: <i>Metatron</i> .
<i>H</i> : in Semitic languages, voiceless pharyngeal fricative (as when expelling air with strong friction).	Arabic: <i>Rûh</i> , <i>hadîth</i> ; Hebrew: <i>Ruah</i> .

In Greek transcription, when there is no other accent marked in the word, a *and* that appears is the carrier of the acute accent in the original spelling; e.g.: *lykos*.

INTRODUCTION

*This volume brings together all of René Guénon's articles that deal specifically with traditional symbols and that have not been revisited—or at least not exhaustively—in his later works. These texts, as well as most of those that have yet to be grouped around other ideas, were published in newspapers between 1925 and 1950⁽⁵⁴⁾, mainly in *Regnabit* and *Le Voile d'Isis*, titled *Études Traditionnelles* since 1936.*

*The somewhat unusual form of the articles that appeared in the first of the aforementioned publications requires some explanation, which will also be useful for René Guénon's biography. *Regnabit* was a Catholic monthly magazine founded in 1921 by Father Félix Anizan, of the Oblates of Mary Immaculate; initially, it bore the subtitle: "Revue universelle du Sacré-Coeur" (Universal Review of the Sacred Heart), and had given rise to a "Society for the Intellectual Radiation of the Sacred Heart," which was "sponsored by fifteen cardinals, archbishops or bishops" and whose secretary general was Father Anizan himself. Among its regular contributors was Louis Charbonneau-Lassay, engraver and heraldist, whose works on Christian iconography and emblematics would soon appear as one of the most important contributions to the contemporary revival of traditional intellectualism in the West.⁵⁵ Through Charbonneau-Lassay, René Guénon began contributing to the magazine in 1925, that is, at a time when he had already published *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, *Le Théosophisme*, *L'Erreur Spirite*, *Orient et Occident*, *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta* and *L'Ésoterisme de Dante*, works that had developed the fundamental themes of his work, inspired by Eastern teachings, and in which he had clearly stated his intellectual position of an openly universal nature. However, in the very particular context of *Regnabit*, Guénon had to place himself, as he himself would later say, "more especially in the 'perspective' of the Christian tradition, with the intention of showing its perfect agreement with the other forms of the universal tradition"⁵⁶ He began, in the April-September 1925 issue, with an article entitled "*Le Sacré-Coeur et la légende du Saint**

⁵⁴ Let us recall that René Guénon was born in Blois on 15 November 1886 and died in Cairo on 7 January 1951.

⁵⁵ L. Charbonneau-Lassay, born in 1871 in Loudun (French Vienna), where he died on 26 December 1946, was able during his lifetime to compile and publish in 1940 a volume containing some of his works, entitled *Le Bestiaire du Christ* (Desclée de Brouwer); this first work was to be followed by a *Vulnery*, a *Florary* and a *Lapidary of Christ*. Who knows when, or by whose curation, all these treasures accumulated through immense labour and the purest of passions will see the light of day.

Grail", and then, starting with the November issue, he regularly published studies concerning above all the symbolism of the Heart and the Centre of the World, that is to say, in short, the two aspects, microcosmic and macrocosmic, of the centre of being. The unusual ideas of Guénon's teaching nevertheless found undoubted favour with R. P. Anizan⁵⁷ and valuable documentary support in the research of Charbonneau-Lassay: these two authors liked to refer, on certain occasions, to the intellectual authority and knowledge of René Guénon⁵⁸. Thus, shortly after these beginnings in *Regnabit*, it became apparent that the magazine was deliberately trying to take a more intellectual direction, and even showed a certain openness to the idea of traditional universality, all of this, of course, surrounded by a large number of doctrinal and terminological precautions. At the beginning of 1926, the "Society for the Intellectual Radiation of the Sacred Heart" itself followed this new orientation and reorganised itself to better correspond to its objective, which was defined as a work of a doctrinal nature, "in the order of thought". A Call addressed to writers and artists, drafted by Father Anizan but signed, among others, by L. Charbonneau-Lassay and Guénon himself, declared (the underlining is that of the author of the text):

⁵⁶See below, the initial note to Chapter LXXIII, "The Mustard Seed". Moreover, in one of his first articles in *Regnabit* ("À propos de quelques symboles hermétiques-religieux," December 1925, p. 27), Guénon concluded as follows, on the occasion of certain links he had just established between Christian symbols and symbols from other traditional forms: "We hope that by pointing out all these relationships, we have at least succeeded in conveying to some extent the profound identity of all traditions, clear proof of their original unity, and the perfect conformity of Christianity with the primordial tradition, traces of which are thus scattered everywhere."

(⁵⁷) When introducing Guénon's first article, Father Anizan presented it in the following terms:

It is also a blossoming—as enchanting as it is dense—of the ancient myths that have shaped humanity's early education. Beautiful themes from primitive tradition, or beautiful offshoots of the human spirit, do these legends not express in their own way the features of Christ, which the first man had to announce to his children and which all souls instinctively await? M. Guénon sees in the Grail—the mysterious cup of one of our mythical novels—a figure of the loving Heart that 'the Lord gave one day to Saint Matilda under the symbol of a golden cup from which all the saints were to drink the elixir of life' (*Le livre de la grâce spéciale*, Part 1, Chapter XXII, No. 41). May all the old myths make us drink from traditional doctrine, where the friends of *Regnabit* will be pleased to find a pre-manifestation of the Heart of Jesus.

(⁵⁸) Pointing out certain shortcomings in the work of contemporary historians dealing with devotion to the Sacred Heart, Charbonneau-Lassay said: "In the latest issue of *Regnabit*, René Guénon has spoken to us, with his indisputable authority, about that Christian hermeticism whose existence and important role in the Middle Ages it would be childish to deny" ("À propos de deux livres récents," November 1925 issue).

"While in the Catholic world, due to an implausible but very real aberration, everything related to the Sacred Heart is classified ipso facto as mere devotion, we, for our part, are convinced that the Sacred Heart brings to human thought the saving word, the word we wish to repeat tirelessly, the last word of the Gospel... We have a very broad idea of the Revelation of the Sacred Heart—which we do not date in any way to the 17th century—which we consider to be very accurate. Following Bossuet, who saw in the Heart of Christ "the summary of all the mysteries of Christianity, the mystery of charity whose origin is in the heart," we believe that the Revelation of the Sacred Heart is the totality of the Christian idea manifested in its essential point and in the aspect that human thought is most capable of grasping. Far be it from us to hold the opinion, as erroneous as it is widespread, that the Revelation of the Sacred Heart is only the beginning of a devotion. Certainly, devotion to the Sacred Heart is beautiful among all devotions and, when well understood, should radiate throughout the whole of Christian life. But the Revelation of the Sacred Heart goes far beyond the framework of a devotion, however beautiful and radiant it may be. Directly and by its very nature, this Revelation addresses the spirit, to place it or reposition it in the meaning of the Gospel. Since the symbol is essentially an aid to thought—since it is fixed and guided by Christ, by showing itself in a real symbol that, even to ancient peoples, has appeared as a source of inspiration and a focus of light, it addresses the mind. The call of his love and the call of his love under the symbol of his Heart: here is something that belongs to the order of the spirit, here is something that leads us directly "along the path of the Gospel". And for this reason, we believe that the Revelation of the Sacred Heart will always be of paramount importance... We do not believe that the Sacred Heart is the salvation of the world solely because of the devotion to which it is the object. Evil is of another essence. It is thought itself that is becoming de-Christianised. By bringing our affirmation into the realm of thought, we are conscious of placing it at the vital point..." (January 1926 issue).

Meanwhile, Regnabit had become the organ of the Society it had given rise to, and with the March 1926 issue, the publication effectively adopted this subtitle: "Revue universelle du Sacré-Coeur et organe de la Société du Rayonnement intellectuel du Sacré-Coeur". However, certain reactions began to emerge, which, curiously enough, referred to the very purpose of the magazine and the Society, and more precisely to the idea of a Revelation of the Sacred Heart. The various contributors thus had to

justify their objective and programme in different ways, but tirelessly⁵⁹. As for René Guénon, who often cited data from other traditional forms of Western and Eastern thought in his studies, particularly Hinduism, his situation appeared, as is easy to understand in such circumstances, to be the most critical. This explains, moreover, the surprising fact that he never referred to his own works devoted to Hindu doctrines, while his teaching was generally based mainly on those doctrines. When asked to explain his method himself, he did so in the following terms, in a postscript to his February 1927 article ("A propos du Poisson" ["About the Fish"]), a text that we quote here in its entirety in view of its interest, including in other respects, and all the more so because it would be difficult to find a more appropriate place for it elsewhere⁶²:

Some may be surprised, either because of the considerations we have just outlined, or because of those we have given in other articles or will give later, at the preponderant (though, of course, by no means exclusive) place we assign to the Indian tradition among the different ancient traditions; and such astonishment would be quite understandable, given the complete ignorance that generally prevails in the Western world about the true significance of the doctrines in question. We could limit ourselves to pointing out that, having had the opportunity to study Hindu doctrines more closely, we can legitimately take them as a basis for comparison; but we believe it preferable to state clearly that there are other, deeper and more profound reasons for this.

⁵⁹It is not our purpose here to recount the entire debate or to judge the different positions, but only to evoke the characteristic circumstances in which René Guénon had to formulate his studies of Christian symbolism at that time. However, with regard to the question raised by the very idea of the Revelation of the Sacred Heart, which was the subject of *Regnabit* and which could not encounter any serious difficulty either from the point of view of traditional orthodoxy in general or from that of Roman Catholic orthodoxy in particular, it may be pointed out, by way of illustration, that another Catholic publication at the time raised this question in the following terms, through the words of a Thomist clergyman: "It would be necessary to tell us clearly what is meant by the Revelation of the Sacred Heart. Is it something new? Is it really distinct from Christian Revelation? If so, what distinguishes it? If not, it is the very suppression of the object and raison d'être of the magazine *Le Sacré-Coeur* [i.e., *Regnabit, revue universelle du Sacré-Coeur*]." This was already a bad omen for the future of the magazine.

⁶⁰ Of his books, he only cited *L'Ésotérisme de Dante* once (in the article "La Terre Sainte et le Coeur du Monde", September-October 1926), and *Le Théosophisme, histoire d'une pseudo-religion*, also once (in the article "Une contrefaçon du catholicisme", April 1927).

⁶¹ Regarding the importance he attached to the study of Hindu doctrines, see especially *Orient et Occident*, chap. IV (pp. 204–13 of the 1948 edition).

⁶² The article in question was rewritten and published under the title "Quelques aspects du symbolisme du Poisson" in *Études Traditionnelles* in February 1936, where this *postscript* does not appear. This article has been included here in its new form (chapter XXII).

entirely general scope. To those who might be tempted to question this, we strongly recommend reading the fascinating book by Fr. William Wallace, S.J., entitled *De l'Évangélisme au Catholicisme par la route des Indes* (French translation by Fr. Humblet, S.J., Albert Dewit bookshop, Brussels, 1921), which is a valuable testimony in this regard. It is an autobiography of the author, who, having gone to India as an Anglican missionary, converted to Catholicism through his direct study of Hindu doctrines; and in the outlines he offers of them, he demonstrates an understanding that, while not absolutely complete in all points, goes incomparably further than anything we have found in other Western works, including those of 'specialists'. Now, R. P. Wallace formally states, among other things, that "the Sanatana Dharma of the Hindu sages (which could be translated quite accurately as *Lex perennis*: it is the unchanging foundation of doctrine) proceeds exactly from the same source as that "the Sanatana Dharma of the Hindu sages (which could be translated quite accurately as *Lex perennis*: the immutable foundation of doctrine) proceeds from exactly the same principle as the Christian religion," that "both face the same goal and offer the same essential means of achieving it" (p. 218 of the French translation), that "Jesus Christ appears as the Consumator of the Sanátana Dharma of the Hindus, that sacrifice at the feet of the Supreme, as clearly as the Consumator of the typical and prophetic religion of the Jews and of the Law of Moses" (p. 217), and that Hindu doctrine is "the natural pedagogue that leads to Christ" (p. 142). Does this not amply justify the importance we attach here to this tradition, whose profound harmony with Christianity could not escape anyone who studies it, as R. P. Wallace has done, without preconceived ideas? We will consider ourselves fortunate if we succeed in conveying a little of this harmony in the points we have occasion to discuss, and at the same time in making it understood that the reason for this is to be found in the direct link that unites Hindu doctrine to the great primordial Tradition.

Meanwhile, the works on the symbol of the Sacred Heart, which was the theme of the magazine, dealt with the question of Christian and universal symbolism. Father Anizan carried out very thorough research, especially in the texts of the Doctor of the Church par excellence, St. Thomas Aquinas, in order to show the reason and importance of studies on sacred symbolism and to doctrinally underpin the activity of Regnabit and the "Society for the Intellectual Radiation of the Sacred Heart". Thus, he deemed it appropriate to legitimise the work of his most threatened collaborators. As a conclusion to one of his studies, in March 1927, he wrote:

"The very nature of the Revelation of the Sacred Heart and the example of St. Thomas Aquinas justify our far-reaching studies on symbolism. In the light of primitive symbols, M. René Guénon leads us to follow the thread

of the traditional truths that link us, by their origin, to the revealing Word, and, by their end, to the incarnate Word consummator. Architect of the symbolism of Christ, M. Charbonneau-Lassay gives the diamonds he cuts such reflections that our eyes can no longer look at the beings around us without perceiving in them the clarity of the Word. Why do they make such efforts? Is it simply a game of high intelligence? Not at all. Rather, above all, a need to radiate, in a most beautiful way, magnificent teachings (in the exact sense, to make greatness: magnum facere); and, moreover, a desire to reacquaint human thought a little with the beneficial lights of symbolism, in order to better adapt souls to that manifestation of the Sacred Heart which is the symbolic call of living Love, the synthesis of all truth.

However, René Guénon was soon forced to suspend his collaboration, which he later explained was due to "the hostility of certain neo-scholastic circles"⁶³. His last article, which dealt with "Le Centre du Monde dans les traditions extrême-orientales" (The Centre of the World in Far Eastern Traditions), dates from May 1927.⁶⁴ However, nineteen of his articles had already been published in *Regnabit*, a list of which is provided in chronological order in Appendix I of this volume.

In addition, two other articles written for the same publication remained unpublished for a long time and did not see the light of day until some twenty years later—although, in short, in their initial form, as the author has indicated—in *Études Traditionnelles*, January-February 1949 issues: "La grain de sénevé" ['The Mustard Seed'], and in the March-April issue of the same year: "L'Ether dans le coeur" ['The Ether in the Heart'], from which we have taken them to constitute chapters LXXIII and LXXIV, respectively.

Of these articles, which, in short, all deal with symbols and the question of traditional symbolism, some were revisited by the author, either in terms of their subject matter or the text itself, from a perspective detached from the initial contingencies, and incorporated in various ways into works on a wide range of subjects, particularly *Le Roi du Monde* (1927), *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (1931) and *Aperçus sur l'Initiation* (1946). Others were rewritten as articles and published, generally with new titles, in *Le Voile d'Isis-Études Traditionnelles*, from which we have taken them here in their new form. Thus, at the time of René Guénon's death, only a few of his studies written for *Regnabit* still retained their own interest and could be included in their original form in a comprehensive compilation on the

⁶³ See note 2 of chapter LXXIV: "The mustard seed".

⁶⁴ The magazine *Regnabit* ceased publication in 1929 (the last issue was in May). Shortly afterwards, Charbonneau-Lassay edited a new magazine, *Le Rayonnement intellectuel*, which appeared from 1930 to 1939, but to which Guénon did not contribute; however, he did mention it in his columns in *Le Voile d'Isis-Études Traditionnelles*, where he continued his work in the field of symbolism at the time.

symbolism. However, among these same texts, some were sometimes superimposed with partial reworkings, varying in form and importance, carried out in the course of studies—books or articles—referring to other topics; and if we have decided to reproduce them here almost in their entirety, it is for reasons that we do not consider insignificant. Firstly, the parts that have remained intact, if they had been taken out of context and published separately, would have diminished their interest; on the other hand, their themes and references are often inserted into expositions that give them a certain additional circumstantial value, because of the same specifically Christian perspective that we have mentioned. Finally, in putting together a compilation in which we have tried to organise material that we cannot treat with the same freedom as the author, we felt it preferable to corroborate the overall configuration by means of all the texts which, although not used in their entirety in terms of their substance, could best highlight both the characteristic points dealt with or addressed in them and the scope of René Guénon's work in the field of symbols. However, for these as for the other texts, we have reorganised and completed the references, taking into account both the place assigned to each one in this volume and its position in relation to the rest of the work. In addition, from the material in the articles that was used almost entirely in subsequent reworkings, we have been able to collect some passages that remained of interest, and we have introduced them in notes in the appropriate places in the other chapters. Furthermore, Annex II of this volume contains a complete list of the reuse, here or elsewhere, by the author or by ourselves, of the entire series of texts from *Regnabit*. Here we will only say that of the nineteen texts, we were finally able to reuse six in their entirety⁶⁵. The two articles mentioned above, originally intended for *Regnabit* but only published in *Études Traditionnelles*, can be linked to this group.

The other studies collected in this volume—apart from "Sayfu-l-Islâm," which appeared in *Cahiers du Sud*—were all published in *Le Voile d'Isis-Études Traditionnelles*, during a long collaboration that, after a few sporadic beginnings, became regular and extensive in scope and variety from 1929 onwards.

⁶⁵ The article "Le Sacré-Coeur et la légende du Saint Graal" (*Regnabit*, August-September 1925), which is among the six texts collected here, as well as two other articles on symbolism: "Le Saint Graal" (*Le Voile d'Isis*, February-March 1934) and "Les Gardiens de la Terre Sainte" (*ibid.*, August-September 1929), which also appear in this compilation, have already been included in a provisional posthumous compilation entitled *Aperçus sur L'ésotérisme chrétien*, *Les Éditions Traditionnelles*, Paris, 1954, for which a single edition had been authorised, and whose material will now be redistributed in definitive compilations.

(doctrinal expositions, studies of symbolism and traditional history, book and magazine reviews), and continued until the author's death, which, taking into account the interruption caused by the war years, means nearly twenty years of effective publication⁶⁶. A list of these studies can be found in Appendix III of this volume.

Le Voile d'Isis, which at the beginning of this collaboration described itself as a "monthly magazine of High Science" and stated its objective as "the study of Tradition and the various movements of ancient and modern spiritualism", was gradually transformed under the influence of René Guénon, and from 1932 onwards presented itself in its programme as "the only French-language magazine dedicated to the study of traditional doctrines, both Eastern and Western, as well as the sciences related to them"; The same text added that "its programme thus embraces the different forms that what has rightly been called THE PERPETUAL AND UNANIMOUS TRADITION has taken over time, revealed both by the dogmas and rites of orthodox religions and by the universal language of initiatory symbols"⁶⁷.

Within the framework of Le Voile d'Isis, after a period of adaptation, Guénon was able to freely expound his theses on traditional universality, make increasing reference to Eastern doctrines, emphasise for a time, and even with some insistence, the signs of his personal integration into Islam, and deal with all topics of traditional and intellectual interest using the same methods he employed in his books. But when one observes that initiatory symbolism appears in the very programme of this magazine, it can be said that Guénon's work on symbolism had found a land of choice. It is likely, moreover, that having to publish regularly (for a long time this was to be monthly) reviews of books and magazines containing some traditional information, and also to write short texts of five to six pages, particularly favoured succinct notes on symbols, as separate topics, in the course of examining periodical documentation. The documentary aspect, and even a certain intellectual picturesqueness, of the topics thus treated ensured that Guénon's writings in this field received a much more attentive and widespread reception than his expositions of pure doctrine or his considerations on traditional facts in general. The character of exact science that normally emerges from Guénon's writings was affirmed in them in a much more evident way: supported by the sensible,

⁶⁶ On this point, some biographical details can be found in Paul Chacornac's book, *La vie simple de René Guénon*, Les Éditions Traditionnelles, Paris, 1958.

⁶⁷Under its latest name, *Études Traditionnelles*, this journal continues to be published.

the definitions are clearer, the demonstrations more verifiable, the conclusions more rigorous. And yet the incomparable intellectual artistry of Guénonian style ensured that these texts in particular were imbued with that indefinable element of mystery, of profound majesty of realities, of ineffable beauty of meanings and of undoubted perfection of ends, which is characteristic of the data of true science, that which he himself has enunciated and designated, precisely on the occasion of studies. of symbolism, such as the "sacred science"⁶⁸.

Regarding this group of texts, one point of considerable significance should be highlighted. In the author's bibliographical and doctrinal references after 1936, one name often appears: that of Dr. Coomaraswamy, a learned Orientalist and at the same time an excellent connoisseur of Western traditions, on whose spirit Guénon's doctrinal work had exerted a most happy influence⁶⁹. It could be said that, as far as the study of symbolism is concerned, the subject that concerns us here, among the contemporaries of Guénon's generation proper, and in an effort combined with his own, Coomaraswamy was to fulfil in the domain of Hinduism, and even, more generally, in that of the East, what was otherwise the work of Charbonneau-Lassay in the field of Christianity.

The presentation in volume form of these texts, which deal with a wide variety of subjects and belong to different periods, required an organising idea for the whole, and it was naturally desirable to come as close as possible to what Guénon's own projects in this area might have been. In this regard, some initial indications arise from the logical sequence and even the continuity of writing between some of these studies, which are in fact sometimes presented in small chronologically ordered series. In addition, the author also mentions some study projects related to the existing texts. Such is the case, for example, of the mention at the beginning of one of his oldest articles, "Quelques aspects du symbolisme de Janus" [Some Aspects of the Symbolism of Janus] (*Le Voile d'Isis*, July 1929, here chap. XVIII), of his intention to write, "one day," "an entire volume" on Janus. And, in fact, it is clear that a considerable number of his articles are now situated within the perspective of a work on this general theme: notable in this regard is the ongoing series dealing with the Mountain and the Cave and other analogous symbols, which, transposed regularly, in the

⁶⁸ Cf. *Le symbolisme de la Croix*, Préface.

⁶⁹ Dr Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy, born in Colombo on 22 August 1877 and died in Boston on 9 September 1947, was curator of the Department of Islam and the Middle East at the *Museum of Fine Arts* in Boston, and is best known as the author of numerous works on Hindu art and Vedic and Buddhist myths. For his biography, see the preface to the French translation of his book *Hindouisme et Bouddhisme*, published in the "Tradition" collection by Gallimard, Paris, 1949, and subsequent editions.

macrocosmic order, to the cosmic cave, leads to the solstice symbolism of Janus and its correspondences with the two Saint Johns. On the other hand, this same group of studies can easily be related to the articles on constructive symbolism, which are presented in several fairly homogeneous series and logically continue in axial and passage symbolism. In this first perspective, the ordering of the studies links most of the existing texts more or less directly and, by reaction, will determine the location of the remaining material in the same summary.

Thus, articles containing substantial expositions of general symbolic doctrine will necessarily be placed at the forefront of the compilation, even if they were formulated in connection with the study of a particular symbolism, such as that of the Grail or sacred scripture. Certain other articles from quite different periods can then be organised quite well around the idea of the Centre and sacred geography, which Guénon often dealt with, in some way and to some extent, in his own books⁷⁰, since these notions are symbolically linked to the themes of the supreme Centre and the primordial Tradition, which dominate the entire traditional order. The group of these articles, due to the very general nature of their symbolism, can adequately follow the initial articles and, on the other hand, introduce in some way the less unified group of studies concerning cyclical manifestation, which in turn should be placed, like the particular group of symbolic weapons, before the continuous cosmological, constructive and axial series that we have already mentioned as constituting the framework of the whole. On the contrary, the articles that deal specifically with the symbolism of the heart and which appear as the logical culmination of a transposition to the microcosmic and initiatory order of all studies of geographical, macrocosmic and constructive symbolism, should be placed at the end of the summary, and therefore follow the articles on axial and passage symbolism.

In detail, cross-references between texts may sometimes disrupt the linear sequence of texts by subject and impose some heterogeneous intercalation; but, in any case, the relative autonomy afforded to these studies by the fact that each one is devoted to a specific theme or aspect of a symbolic theme never disrupts the transition from one chapter to another. The only drawback to this arrangement may be that the author sometimes announced or planned a series that never appeared: in such cases, we have noted the state of affairs each time.

⁷⁰ Cf. in particular *Le Roi du Monde* (1927), *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (1931) and *La Grande Triade* (1946).

Such has been, in simplified terms, our method for first ordering and then organising all this material according to a summary that is, despite everything, coherent and conclusive.

It is certain that the volume, compiled according to this formula or any other that might have been considered advantageous, cannot fail to give the impression that it is always an improvised and more or less artificial compilation. The author certainly had the textual raw material here to compose at least two works of symbolism, and in order to clearly define the contours and exhaust the circumscribed themes, he should have written a number of new chapters and complementary passages in order to fill in the gaps and link the different groups and, within the groups, the constituent texts in a normal way. Similarly, he should have discarded a number of pages which, although they contain some passages that are 'unpublished' in relation to his books, are too reminiscent of other passages in them. Strictly speaking, we ourselves could have chosen from all this material and organised separately those studies that refer to one or two more general topics and do not overlap with the other texts included in the books written by the author; but this would have resulted in an entirely inorganic diversity and a very weak link to the rest of the texts, which would have made editing extremely difficult. Moreover, the advantage of such a special grouping is not denied to the researcher in the chosen presentation, since the groups of a more or less necessary nature appear in it in a clearly distinct manner. On the other hand, the publication in a single compilation of all the articles on symbolism that Guénon has left us offers a comprehensive view of an intellectual treasure of exceptional richness, none of whose elements is indifferent.

Furthermore, the symbolic themes that dominate this collection, as well as the particular themes that abound in the main text or in the notes, take on new dimensions in terms of meaning, since the overall picture within which they have found their place attracts, in a certain way, the symbols mentioned to new reciprocal relationships, which may reveal aspects and functions not yet expressed; the references, made by the author or added by us, are but a faint indication of the possibilities that exist in this direction. The reader's interest and attention will often be rewarded by some unexpected verification or new insight, prompted by mutual references between different pieces of information or by transpositions that he himself will make. This will lead the reader to make discoveries comparable to those commonly made by the author, that is, any symbolic piece of information, initially secondary, will suddenly be illuminated by a new light, highlighted and enhanced, so that it can finally be

achieve the highest meanings. That is why the title we have given to this collection of works on symbolism is, one might say, doubly justified: firstly, because of the doctrinal and institutional importance of most of the symbols studied according to the author's choice of theme, and secondly, because of the indefinite universalisation, offered even to symbols of lesser practical importance, of reaching, through the technique of analogies and transpositions, the degree of significance of fundamental symbols.

We must now provide some further details regarding the exact form in which the compiled articles appear here. In order to approximate as closely as possible the form of chapters in a book, we have had to adjust certain phrases, especially at the beginning or end of articles, where they bore traces of their initial contingencies that are now useless. However, we have ensured that the reader can always know the origin of the text they are reading, even without referring to the bibliographical references in the appendices and the summary: the first footnote in each chapter indicates the name of the journal and the date of publication.

Furthermore, in order to reinforce the cohesion between the texts gathered here and to make them more consistent with the author's work as a whole, we have included new notes with the references we considered most useful. As the editions of Guénon's works have multiplied and the pagination varies from edition to edition, we have standardised the references as far as possible, establishing them with reference only to the chapters of the works cited, without mentioning the page number.

All notes or passages from notes added by us are enclosed in square brackets.

MICHEL VALSAN

TRADITIONAL SYMBOLISM
AND SOME OF ITS GENERAL APPLICATIONS

I

*THE REFORM OF MODERN MENTALITY*⁷¹

Modern civilisation appears in history as a true anomaly: of all those we know, it is the only one that has developed in a purely material sense, and also the only one that is not based on any principle of a higher order. This material development, which has been going on for several centuries now and is accelerating more and more, has been accompanied by an intellectual regression that this development is quite incapable of compensating for. Let us be clear: we are referring to true and pure intellectuality, which could equally be called spirituality, and we refuse to give this name to what moderns have applied themselves to above all: the cultivation of the experimental sciences with a view to the practical applications to which they can give rise. A single example would suffice to measure the extent of this regression: St Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica* was, in its time, a manual for students;

where are the students today who are capable of delving into it and assimilating it?

The decline did not happen suddenly; its stages can be traced throughout modern philosophy. It is the loss or neglect of true intellectuality that has made possible these two errors, which are only apparently opposed, but are in fact correlative and complementary: rationalism and sentimentalism. Since all purely intellectual knowledge was denied or ignored, as it has been since Descartes, it was logical that this would lead, on the one hand, to positivism, agnosticism and all the 'scientific' aberrations, and, on the other, to all the contemporary theories which, not content with what reason can provide, seek something else, but seek it on the side of feeling and instinct, that is, below and not above reason, and arrive, with William James for example, at seeing the subconscious as the means by which man can enter into communication with the Divine. The notion of truth, after having been reduced to a mere representation of sensible reality, is finally identified by pragmatism with utility, which is equivalent to suppressing it pure and simple; for what does truth matter in a world whose aspirations are solely material and sentimental?

It is not possible to develop here all the consequences of such a state of affairs; let us limit ourselves to pointing out a few, among them those that refer more particularly to

⁷¹ [Published in *Reg.* June 1926. Text of a communication from the author to the study day of 6 May 1926 organised by the Society for the Intellectual Irradiation of the Sacred Heart. On this Society, cf. the Introduction to this book.]

religious point of view. First of all, it should be noted that the contempt and repulsion felt by other peoples, especially Easterners, towards Westerners stems largely from the fact that the latter generally appear to them as men without tradition or religion, which in their eyes is a true monstrosity. An Oriental cannot accept a social organisation that is not based on traditional principles; for a Muslim, for example, the entire body of law is nothing more than a simple dependency of religion. In the past, it was the same in the West; think of what Christianity was like in the Middle Ages; but today the relationship has been reversed. Indeed, religion is now viewed as a mere social fact; instead of the entire social order being linked to religion, on the contrary, when it is still granted a place, it is no longer seen as anything more than one of the constituent elements of the social order. And how many Catholics, alas, accept this view without the slightest difficulty! It is time to react against this tendency, and in this regard, the affirmation of the social Kingdom of Christ is a particularly timely manifestation; but to make it a reality, it is necessary to reform the entire modern mentality.

Let us not hide the truth: those who sincerely believe themselves to be religious, for the most part, have only a very diminished idea of religion; it has hardly any effective influence on their thinking or their actions; it is separated from the rest of their existence. In practice, believers and non-believers behave in much the same way; for many Catholics, the affirmation of the supernatural has only a purely theoretical value, and they would feel very uncomfortable if they had to verify a miraculous event. This is what could be called practical materialism, materialism in fact; is it not even more dangerous than avowed materialism, precisely because those it affects are not even aware of it?

On the other hand, for the vast majority, religion is nothing more than a matter of sentiment, without any intellectual scope; religion is confused with a vague religiosity, reduced to morality; the place of doctrine, which is nevertheless absolutely essential, that from which everything else must logically follow, is diminished as much as possible. In this respect, Protestantism, which ends up being pure and simple "moralism," is very representative of the tendencies of the modern spirit; but it would be a great mistake to believe that Catholicism itself is not affected by the same tendencies, not in its principle, certainly, but in the way it is usually presented: under the pretext of making it acceptable to the current mentality, the most annoying concessions are made, thus encouraging what should, on the contrary, be vigorously combated. We will not dwell on the blindness of those who, under the pretext of 'tolerance', become unwitting accomplices to outright falsifications of religion, whose intention

hidden are far from what they seem. Let us just point out, in passing, the deplorable abuse that is so often made of the word 'religion' itself: are expressions such as 'religion of the homeland', 'religion of science', 'religion of duty' not used all the time? These are not mere linguistic oversights: they are symptoms of the confusion that reigns everywhere in the modern world, for language does nothing more than faithfully represent the state of minds; and such expressions are incompatible with the true religious sense.

But let us proceed to what is most essential, namely the weakening of doctrinal teaching, which has been almost entirely replaced by vague moral and sentimental considerations that may be more pleasing to some, but which, at the same time, cannot but repel and alienate those who have intellectual aspirations; and yet, despite everything, there are still such people in our time. This is proven by the fact that some, even more numerous than one might think, deplore this lack of doctrine; and we see a favourable sign, despite appearances, in the fact that, from various quarters, there is greater awareness of this today than there was a few years ago. Certainly, it is wrong to claim, as we have often heard, that no one would understand a presentation of pure doctrine. First of all, why always want to stick to the lowest level, on the pretext that it is that of the majority, as if quantity were to be considered rather than quality? Is this not a consequence of that democratic spirit which is one of the characteristic aspects of the modern mentality? And, on the other hand, is it really believed that so many people would be incapable of understanding if they had been accustomed to doctrinal teaching? Should we not even think that those who did not understand everything would nevertheless derive some benefit, perhaps greater than is supposed?

But undoubtedly the most serious obstacle is the kind of mistrust that is evident in too many Catholic circles, and even ecclesiastical ones, towards intellectuals in general. We say it is the most serious because it is a sign of misunderstanding even among those whose task it is to teach. They have been touched by the modern spirit to the point of no longer knowing, like the philosophers we mentioned earlier, what true intellectualism is, to the point of sometimes confusing intellectualism with rationalism, thus unwittingly playing into the hands of their adversaries. We believe, precisely, that what matters above all is to restore that true intellectuality, and with it the meaning of doctrine and tradition; it is time to show that there is something else in religion besides sentimental devotion, something else besides moral precepts or consolations for spirits weakened by suffering; that in it one can find the "solid food" of which St. Paul speaks in his *Epistle to the Hebrews*.

We are well aware that this has the disadvantage of going against certain acquired habits and that it is difficult to break free from them; and yet, it is not a question of innovating: far from it, it is, on the contrary, a question of returning to the tradition from which they have strayed, of recovering what has been lost. Would this not be better than making the most unjustified concessions to the modern spirit, such as those found in apologetic treatises, where the author strives to reconcile dogma with everything that is most hypothetical and least founded in current science, only to call everything into question again whenever these so-called scientific theories are replaced by others? It would be very easy, however, to show that religion and science cannot really come into conflict, for the simple reason that they do not refer to the same domain. How can one fail to see the danger in seeking, for a doctrine concerning immutable and eternal truths, a point of support in what is most changeable and uncertain? And what are we to think of certain Catholic theologians who are so affected by the 'scientistic' spirit that they feel obliged to take into account, to a greater or lesser extent, the results of modern exegesis and 'textual criticism', when it would be so easy, provided one has a reasonably secure doctrinal foundation, to expose the futility of it all?

How can it not be seen that the so-called "science of religions", as taught in universities, has never really been anything other than a war machine directed against religion and, more generally, against everything that may still remain of the traditional spirit, which those who lead the modern world in a direction that can only end in catastrophe naturally want to destroy?

There is much to be said about all this, but we have only wanted to briefly indicate some of the points where reform is necessary and urgent; and, to conclude with a question that is of particular interest to us here, why is there so much hostility, more or less openly admitted, towards symbolism? Surely because it is a world of expression that has become entirely alien to the modern mentality, and because man naturally tends to distrust what he does not understand. Symbolism is the medium best suited to teaching higher truths, religious and metaphysical, that is, everything that the modern spirit disdains or rejects; it is the very opposite of what suits rationalism, and its adversaries all behave, some without knowing it, like true rationalists. As for us, we consider that if symbolism is misunderstood today, this is one more reason to insist on it, explaining as fully as possible the real meaning of traditional symbols and restoring their full intellectual significance, instead of simply using them as a theme for sentimental exhortations, for which, moreover, the use of symbolism is quite useless.

This reform of the modern mentality, with all that it implies: the restoration of true intellectuality and doctrinal tradition, which for us are inseparable, is certainly a considerable task; but is this a reason not to undertake it? On the contrary, it seems to us that such a task constitutes one of the highest and most important goals that can be proposed to a society such as the Intellectual Radiation of the Sacred Heart, all the more so because all efforts made in this direction will necessarily be directed towards the Heart of the Incarnate Word, the spiritual Sun and Centre of the world 'in which are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge', not of that vain profane knowledge. oriented towards the Heart of the Incarnate Word, the spiritual Sun and Centre of the world "in which are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"—not of that vain profane knowledge known to most of our contemporaries, but of true sacred knowledge, which opens up unsuspected and truly unlimited horizons to those who study it properly.

II

*THE WORD AND THE SYMBOL*⁷²

We have already had occasion to refer to the importance of symbolic form in the transmission of traditional doctrinal teachings⁷³. We return to the subject to provide some additional details and to show even more explicitly the different points of view from which it can be approached.

First and foremost, symbolism appears to us as being particularly suited to the demands of human nature, which is not purely intellectual, but requires a sensitive foundation in order to rise to higher spheres. It is necessary to take the human composite as it is, both one and multiple in its real complexity; this is what we often tend to forget, ever since Descartes sought to establish a radical and absolute separation between the soul and the body. For pure intelligence, of course, no external form, no expression is needed to understand the truth, nor even to communicate to other pure intelligences what it has understood, insofar as this is communicable; but this is not the case with man. Ultimately, every expression, every formulation, whatever it may be, is a symbol of thought, which it translates externally; in this sense, language itself is nothing more than symbolism. There should therefore be no opposition between the use of words and that of figurative symbols; these two modes of expression would rather be mutually complementary (and in fact, moreover, they can be combined, since writing is primitively ideographic and sometimes, as in China, has always retained that character). In general, the form of language is analytical, 'discursive', like human reason, of which it is the instrument and whose course language follows or reproduces as accurately as possible; on the contrary, symbolism proper is essentially synthetic, and therefore "intuitive" in a certain way, which makes it more suitable than language to serve as a support for "intellectual intuition", which is above reason, and which must be careful not to confuse with that inferior intuition to which various contemporary philosophers appeal. Consequently, if one is not content with the verification of

⁷² [Published in *Reg.*, January 1926; this study referred to an article by R. P. Anizan, entitled "Si nous savions regarder" (If we knew how to look), which appeared in the November 1925 issue of the same magazine, which emphasised more particularly the importance and value of the symbol of the Sacred Heart.]

⁷³ [Cf. *Introduction générale à l'étude des doctrines hindoues*, published in 1921, part II, chap. VII, and *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, published in 1925; after this article, Guénon often returned in other articles and books to the doctrine that underpins symbolism, especially in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* and in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chaps. XVI-XVIII].

the difference, and if we want to talk about superiority, this will be, however much some may claim the contrary, on the side of synthetic symbolism, which opens up truly unlimited possibilities of conception, while language, with its more defined and fixed meanings, always places more or less narrow limits on understanding.

Let it not be said, then, that symbolic form is good for the common people; the truth is rather the opposite; or, better still, that form is equally good for everyone, because it helps each person, according to the measure of their own intellectual abilities, to understand more or less completely, more or less deeply, the truth represented by it. Thus, the highest truths, which would in no way be communicable or transmissible by any other means, become so to a certain extent when they are, so to speak, incorporated into symbols that will undoubtedly conceal them from many, but which will reveal them in all their splendour to the eyes of those who know how to see.

Is it fair to say that the use of symbolism is a necessity? Here it is necessary to make a clear and absolute distinction: no external form is necessary; all are equally contingent and accidental with respect to what they express or represent. Thus, according to Hindu teaching, any figure, for example a statue symbolising this or that aspect of the Divinity, should be considered only as a "support", a point of reference for meditation; it is, therefore, a simple "aid" and nothing more. A Vedic text gives a comparison in this regard that perfectly clarifies this role of symbols and external forms in general: such forms are like the horse that allows a man to travel more quickly and with much less effort than if he had to do so by his own means. Undoubtedly, if that man did not have a horse at his disposal, he could still reach his goal, but with how much greater difficulty! If he can use a horse, he would be very wrong to refuse to do so on the pretext that it is more dignified for him not to resort to any help: is this not precisely how the detractors of symbolism act? And even if the journey is long and arduous, although it is never absolutely impossible to make it on foot, it may be truly impossible in practice. This is the case with rites and symbols: they are not absolutely necessary, but they are necessary in a certain sense because of a need for convenience, in view of the conditions of human nature.

⁷⁴ [A parallel text from St. Thomas Aquinas can be cited: "For any end, something is said to be necessary in two ways: in one way, as that without which it cannot be, such as food necessary for the preservation of human life; in another, as that by which that end is best and most conveniently attained, such as the horse is necessary for the journey" (*Summa Theol.*, III, q. 1, a. 2, *respondeo*). This led Fr. Anizan to write: "*Sicut equus necessarius est ad iter*", say the *Vedas* and the *Summa Theologica*" (*Reg.*, January 1927, p. 136).

But it is not enough to consider symbolism from the human side, as we have done so far; in order to penetrate its full scope, it is also necessary to approach it from the divine side, if I may express it that way. If it is proven that symbolism has its foundation in the very nature of beings and things, that it is in perfect conformity with the laws of that nature, and if we reflect on the fact that natural laws are ultimately nothing more than an expression and a manifestation of the divine Will, does this not authorise us to affirm that such symbolism is of "non-human" origin, as the Hindus say, or, in other words, that its principle goes back further and higher than humanity?

It is not without reason that the first words of the Gospel of St John have been recalled⁷⁵ in relation to symbolism: "In the beginning was the Word". The Word, the Logos, is both Thought and Word: in itself, it is the divine Intellect, which is the "place of possibilities"; in relation to us, it manifests and expresses itself through Creation, in which some of those same possibilities, which as essences are contained in Him from all eternity, are realised in actual existence. Creation is the work of the Word; it is also, for that very reason, its manifestation, its external affirmation; and that is why the world is like a divine language for those who know how to understand it: *Caeli enarrant gloriam Dei* (Ps. XIX, 2). The philosopher Berkeley was not wrong, then, when he said that the world is 'the language that the infinite Spirit speaks to finite spirits'; but he was mistaken in believing that this language is nothing more than a set of arbitrary signs, when in reality there is nothing arbitrary even in human language, since all meaning must have its origin in some natural convenience or harmony between the sign and the thing signified. Because Adam had received from God the knowledge of the nature of all living beings, he was able to give them their names (*Genesis, II, 19-20*); and all ancient traditions agree in teaching that the true name of a being is one with its very nature or essence.

If the Word is Thought within and Speech without, and if the world is the effect of the divine Word uttered at the beginning of time, then the whole of nature can be taken as a symbol of supernatural reality. Everything that exists, whatever its mode of being, having its origin in the divine Intellect, translates or represents that principle in its own way and according to its order of existence; and thus, from one order to another, all things are linked and correspond to each other in order to contribute to universal and total harmony, which is like a reflection of the divine Unity itself. This correspondence is the true foundation of symbolism, and that is why the laws of a lower domain can always be taken to symbolise the reality of a higher order, where they have their profound reason, which is both their beginning and their end. Let us point out, on this occasion, the error of the

⁷⁵ [Cf. R. P. Anizan, at the beginning of the article in *Reg.*, November 1925].

modern 'naturalistic' interpretations of ancient traditional doctrines, interpretations that simply distort the hierarchy of relationships between different orders of reality: for example, symbols or myths have never had the function of representing the movement of the stars, but the truth is that they often contain figures inspired by that movement and intended to express something else entirely by analogy, because the laws of the former physically translate the metaphysical principles on which they depend. The lower can symbolise the higher, but the reverse is impossible; moreover, if the symbol were not closer to the sensible order than that represented by it, how could it fulfil the function for which it is intended?⁷⁶ In nature, the sensible can symbolise the supersensible; the entire natural order can, in turn, be a symbol of the divine order; and, moreover, if we consider man more particularly, is it not legitimate to say that he too is a symbol, by the very fact that he has been 'created in the image of God' (*Genesis*, I, 26-27)? Let us add that nature only acquires its full meaning if it is considered as a means of elevating us to the knowledge of divine truths, which is precisely the essential role we have recognised in symbolism⁷⁷.

These considerations could be developed almost indefinitely; but we prefer to leave it to each individual to develop them through personal reflection, as nothing could be more beneficial. Like the symbols that are their subject, these notes should be nothing more than a starting point for meditation. Words, moreover, can only very imperfectly convey what is at stake here; nevertheless, there is still one aspect of the question, and not the least important, which we shall endeavour to make understood, or at least sensed, by means of a brief indication.

The divine Word is expressed in Creation, we said, and this is comparable, analogically and all proportions being saved, to thought expressed in forms (it is no longer possible here to distinguish between language and symbols proper) that both veil and manifest it. The primordial Revelation, the work of the Word like Creation, is also incorporated, so to speak, into symbols that have been transmitted from age to age since the origins of humanity; and this process is also analogous,

⁷⁶ [This passage has been reproduced almost verbatim in *Autorité spirituelle et pouvoir temporel*, chap. I; parallel passage in the preface to *Le symbolisme de la Croix* (1931).

⁷⁷It may be worth noting that this view, according to which nature is considered a symbol of the supernatural, is by no means new, but rather was commonly held in the Middle Ages, especially by the Franciscan school and in particular by St Bonaventure. Let us also note that analogy, in the Thomistic sense of the word, which allows us to ascend from the knowledge of creatures to that of God, is nothing more than a mode of symbolic expression based on the correspondence between the natural and supernatural orders.

in its order to that of Creation itself. On the other hand, can we not see, in this symbolic incorporation of the "non-human" tradition, a kind of anticipated image, a "prefiguration" of the Incarnation of the Word? And does this not also allow us to perceive, to a certain extent, the mysterious relationship between Creation and the Incarnation that crowns it?

We will conclude with a final observation regarding the importance of the universal symbolism of the Heart and more especially the form it takes in the Christian tradition, that of the Sacred Heart. If symbolism is, in its essence, strictly in accordance with the 'divine plan', and if the Sacred Heart is the centre of being, both in reality and symbolically, this symbol of the Heart, by itself or through its equivalents, must occupy a truly central place in all doctrines emanating more or less directly from the primordial tradition⁷⁸ ; this is what we will try to show in some of the studies that follow⁷⁹ .

⁷⁸ [The author added here a reference to the central position occupied by the heart, in the middle of the planetary and zodiacal circles, in an astronomical marble relief in Saint-Denis-d'Orques (Sarthe), sculpted by a Carthusian monk towards the end of the 15th century. The figure had first been reproduced by L. Charbonneau-Lassay in *Reg.*, February 1924; cf., by the same author, *Le Bêstiaire du Christ*, p. 102. This point will be discussed again in chapter LXIX].

⁷⁹ [R. Guénon had already discussed the heart as the centre of being, and more specifically as the "abode of Brahma" or "residence of Âtmâ" in *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vedânta* (1925); in the context of *Reg.*, where he never referred to his works on Hinduism, he had to revisit this topic in a new way].

III

*THE SACRED HEART AND THE LEGEND
OF THE HOLY GRAIL*⁸⁰

In his article "Iconographie ancienne du Coeur de Jésus"⁸¹ L. Charbonneau-Lassay rightly points out that the legend of the Holy Grail, written in the 12th century but much older in origin, is linked to what could be called the "prehistory of the Eucharistic Heart of Jesus", since it is in fact a Christian adaptation of very ancient Celtic traditions. The idea of this connection had already occurred to us in the previous article, which was extremely interesting from our point of view, entitled "Le Coeur humain et la notion du Coeur de Dieu dans la religion de l'ancienne Égypte"⁸², from which we recall the following passage: "In hieroglyphics, a sacred script in which the image of the thing often represents the word itself that designates it, the heart was, however, represented only by an emblem: the vessel. Is not the heart of man, in fact, the vessel in which his life is continually elaborated with his blood?" This vessel, taken as a symbol of the heart and a substitute for it in Egyptian ideography, immediately made us think of the Holy Grail, all the more so because in the latter, apart from the general meaning of the symbol (considered, moreover, in both its divine and human aspects), we see a special and much more direct relationship with the Heart of Christ itself.

Indeed, the Holy Grail is the cup that contains the precious blood of Christ, and it contains it twice, since it was first used for the Last Supper and then Joseph of Arimathea collected in it the blood and water that flowed from the wound opened by the centurion's spear in the Redeemer's side. That cup therefore replaces, in a way, the Heart of Christ as the receptacle of His blood, taking, so to speak, the place of the latter and becoming a kind of symbolic equivalent: and is it not even more remarkable, in such circumstances, that the cup was already an ancient emblem of the heart? On the other hand, the cup, in one form or another, plays, like the heart itself, a very important role in many ancient traditions; and this was undoubtedly particularly true among the Celts, since it was from them that what constituted the very basis or at least the plot of the legend of the Holy Grail originated. It is regrettable that it is hardly possible to know precisely what form this tradition took in the past.

⁸⁰ [Published in *Reg.*, August-September 1925].

⁸¹ [See *Reg.*, June 1925].

⁸² [*Id.*, November 1924. Cf. Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, chap. X, p. 95].

to Christianity, which, moreover, is the case with everything concerning Celtic doctrines, for which oral teaching was always the only means of transmission used; but there is, on the other hand, sufficient agreement to be at least certain about the meaning of the main symbols that appeared in it, and this is, in short, the most essential thing.

But let us return to the legend as it has come down to us; what it says about the very origin of the Grail is very noteworthy: this cup is said to have been carved by the angels from an emerald detached from Lucifer's forehead at the moment of his fall⁸³. This emerald is remarkably reminiscent of the *urnā*, the frontal pearl which, in Hindu iconography, often occupies the place of *Shiva's* third eye, representing what might be called the 'sense of eternity'. This relationship seems to us more appropriate than any other to perfectly clarify the symbolism of the Grail; and one can even see in it a further link with the heart, which, in Hindu tradition as in many others, but perhaps even more clearly, is the centre of the whole being, and to which, therefore, that 'sense of eternity' must be directly linked.

It is then said that the Grail was entrusted to Adam in the earthly Paradise, but that, as a result of his fall, Adam lost it in turn, since he could not take it with him when he was expelled from Eden; and this is also made very clear by the meaning we have just indicated. Man, separated from his original centre through his own fault, was henceforth confined to the temporal sphere; he could no longer recover the unique point from which all things are contemplated under the aspect of eternity. The earthly Paradise was, in fact, truly the 'Centre of the World', symbolically assimilated everywhere to the divine Heart; and can we not say that Adam, while he was in Eden, truly lived in the Heart of God?

What follows is more enigmatic: Set managed to enter the earthly Paradise and was thus able to recover the precious cup; now, Set is one of the figures of the Redeemer, all the more so because his very name expresses the ideas of foundation and stability, and in a way heralds the restoration of the primordial order destroyed by the fall of man. There had been, therefore, at least a partial restoration, in the sense that Set and those who possessed the Grail after him were able to establish, somewhere on earth, a spiritual centre that was like an image of Paradise lost. The legend, on the other hand, does not say where or by whom the Grail was preserved until the time of Christ, nor how its transmission was ensured; but its recognised Celtic origin probably suggests that the Druids played a part in this and should be counted among the regular preservers of the primordial tradition. In

⁸³ [The author has reproduced the following passage almost verbatim, but accompanied by new developments, in *Le Roi du Monde* (chap. V), published in 1927].

In any case, the existence of such a spiritual centre, or even several, simultaneously or successively, does not seem to be in doubt, however one may think about its location; what should be noted is that these centres were always and everywhere referred to, among other names, as the 'Heart of the World', and that in all traditions, descriptions of it are based on identical symbolism, which can be traced down to the most precise details. Does this not sufficiently show that the Grail, or what is thus represented, already had, prior to Christianity, and even from time immemorial, a very close link with the divine Heart and with *Emmanuel*, that is to say, with the manifestation, virtual or real according to the ages, but always present, of the eternal Word in the bosom of earthly humanity?

After Christ's death, according to legend, the Holy Grail was taken to Britain by Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus; then began the story of the Knights of the Round Table and their exploits, which we do not intend to follow here. The Round Table was destined to receive the Grail when one of its knights managed to conquer it and transport it from Britain to Armorica; and that Table (or Mesa) is also a likely very ancient symbol, one of those that were associated with the idea of those spiritual centres to which we have just alluded. The circular shape of the table is, moreover, linked to the 'zodiacal cycle' (another symbol that deserves further study) by the presence around it of twelve main characters, a feature found in the constitution of all the centres in question. That being the case, can we not see in the number of the twelve Apostles a sign, among many others, of the perfect conformity of Christianity with the primordial tradition, to which the name 'pre-Christianity' would be so apt? And, on the other hand, with regard to the Round Table, we have highlighted a strange concordance in the symbolic revelations made to Marie des Vallées⁸⁴, where mention is made of "a round table of jasper, representing the Heart of Our Lord", while at the same time there is talk of "a garden that is the Holy Sacrament of the altar" and which, with its "four fountains of living water", is mysteriously identified with the earthly Paradise. Is this not another surprising and unexpected confirmation of the connections we have pointed out?

Naturally, these brief notes cannot claim to constitute a comprehensive study of such a little-known subject; for the time being, we must limit ourselves to offering simple indications, and we are well aware that some of these considerations may initially surprise those who are unfamiliar with ancient traditions and their customary modes of symbolic expression; however, we reserve the right to develop and justify them more fully at a later date.

⁸⁴ See *Reg.*, November 1924.

in future articles, in which we also plan to address many other points that are no less worthy of interest⁸⁵.

In the meantime, we will mention, with regard to the legend of the Holy Grail, a strange complication that we have not yet taken into account: through one of those verbal assimilations that often play a not insignificant role in symbolism, and which, moreover, may have deeper reasons than one might imagine at first glance, the Grail is both a cup (*grasale*) and a book (*gradale or graduale*). In certain versions, the two meanings are even closely linked, as the book then becomes an inscription traced by Christ or an angel on the cup itself. We do not intend to draw any conclusions from this at present, although it is easy to establish connections with the 'Book of Life' and certain elements of apocalyptic symbolism.

Let us also add that legend associates other objects with the Grail, especially a spear, which, in the Christian adaptation, is none other than the spear of the centurion Longinus; but what is most curious is the pre-existence of that spear or one of its equivalents as a symbol that in a certain way complements the cup in ancient traditions. On the other hand, among the Greeks, Achilles' spear was believed to heal the wounds it caused; medieval legend attributes precisely the same virtue to the spear of the Passion. And this reminds us of another similarity of the same kind: in the myth of Adonis (whose name, incidentally, means 'the Lord'), when the hero is mortally wounded by a boar's tusk (the tusk replacing the spear here), his blood, spilling onto the ground, gives birth to a flower; Well, L. Charbonneau has pointed out in *Regnabit*⁸⁶ "a 12th-century host iron, where the blood from the wounds of the Crucified One is seen falling in droplets that turn into roses, and the 13th-century stained-glass window in Angers Cathedral, where the divine blood, flowing in streams, also spreads out in the form of roses". We will return shortly to floral symbolism, approached from a slightly different angle; but, whatever the multiplicity of meanings that all symbols present, all of this is perfectly complete and harmonious, and such multiplicity, far from being an inconvenience or a defect, is, on the contrary, for those who know how to understand it, one of the main advantages of a language that is much less narrowly limited than ordinary language.

To conclude these notes, we will indicate some symbols that, in various traditions, sometimes replace that of the cup and are essentially identical to it: this is not to stray from our subject.

⁸⁵ [After *Le Roi du Monde* (1927), already mentioned, the author returned more specifically to this question in 1934, in a study by V. I. entitled "Le Saint Graal", which forms chapter IV of this compilation].

⁸⁶ See *Reg.*, January 1925.

the subject, then. The Grail itself, as can easily be seen from all that we have just said, has no other meaning in its origin than that generally attributed to the sacred vessel wherever it is found, and in particular, in the East, the sacrificial cup containing the Vedic *soma* (or the Mazdean *haoma*), that extraordinary Eucharistic "prefiguration" to which we may return on another occasion⁸⁷ What *soma* actually represents is the 'elixir of immortality' (the *ámrtâ* of the Hindus, the *ambrosia* of the Greeks, both words being etymologically similar), which confers or restores to those who receive it with the required dispositions that 'sense of eternity' of which we spoke earlier.

One of the symbols we wish to refer to is the downward-pointing triangle; it is a kind of schematic representation of the sacrificial cup, and as such it is found in certain *yantras* or geometric symbols in India. On the other hand, it is particularly noteworthy from our point of view that the same figure is also a symbol of the heart, whose shape it reproduces in a simplified form: the "triangle of the heart" is a common expression in Eastern traditions. This leads us to an observation that is not without interest: that the representation of the heart inscribed in a triangle arranged in this way is not in itself illegitimate, whether it refers to the human heart or the divine Heart, and that it is even highly significant when it refers to the emblems used by certain medieval Christian Hermeticism, whose intentions were always fully orthodox. If, in modern times, some have sought to attribute a blasphemous meaning to such a representation, it is because, consciously or not, the original meaning of the symbols has been altered to the point of reversing their normal value. This is a phenomenon for which many examples could be cited and which, moreover, finds its explanation in the fact that certain symbols are indeed susceptible to double interpretation and have two opposing sides. The serpent, for example, and also the lion, do they not signify both Christ and Satan, depending on the case? We cannot go into a general theory on this subject here, as it would take us too far afield, but it will be understood that there is something about this that makes the use of symbols very delicate and that this point requires very special attention when it comes to discovering the real meaning of certain emblems and translating it correctly⁸⁹.

Another symbol that is often equivalent to that of the cup is a floral symbol: does not the flower, in fact, evoke the idea of a "receptacle" because of its shape, and do we not speak of the "chalice" of a flower? In the East, the symbolic flower par excellence is the lotus; in the West, it is the rose

⁸⁷ [See *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. VI].

⁸⁸ [See *Reg.*, August-September 1924].

⁸⁹ [Cf. *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XXIX: 'Le renversement des symboles'].

it most often plays that same role. Of course, we do not mean to say that this is the only meaning of the latter, nor that of the lotus, since, on the contrary, we ourselves had previously indicated another; but we would be inclined to see it in the design embroidered on that altar canon in Fontevrault Abbey, where the rose is located at the foot of a spear along which drops of blood rain down. This rose appears there associated with the spear exactly as the cup is in other places, and seems in fact to collect the drops of blood rather than to come from the transformation of one of them; but, for the rest, the two meanings complement each other rather than oppose each other, for those drops, falling on the rose, enliven it and make it open. It is the 'heavenly rose', according to the image so often used in connection with the idea of Redemption, or with the related ideas of regeneration and resurrection; but this would require lengthy explanations, even if we limited ourselves to highlighting the concordance of the various traditions with regard to this other symbol⁹¹.

On the other hand, since the Rosicrucians have been mentioned in connection with Luther's seal⁹², we will say that this hermetic emblem was originally specifically Christian, regardless of the false interpretations, more or less 'naturalistic', that have been given to it since the 18th century. And is it not remarkable that in it the rose occupies, in the centre of the cross, the very place of the Sacred Heart? Apart from representations in which the five wounds of the Crucified One are depicted by five roses, the central rose, when alone, can very well be identified with the Heart itself, with the vessel containing the blood, which is the centre of life and also the centre of the whole being.

There is at least one other symbolic equivalent of the cup: the crescent moon; but this, to be properly explained, would require elaborations that would be entirely outside the scope of the present study; we mention it, therefore, only so as not to neglect any aspect of the question entirely.

From all the relationships we have just pointed out, we will draw a conclusion that we hope to make even more evident later: when such similarities are found everywhere, is this not more than a mere indication of the existence of a primordial tradition? And how can we explain that, more often than not, those who feel obliged to admit this primordial tradition in principle do not think about it any further and in fact reason exactly as if it had never existed, or at least as if nothing had been preserved over the centuries? If one stops to reflect on what is abnormal about such an attitude, one may perhaps

⁹⁰ [See *Reg.*, January 1925, figure on p. 106].

⁹¹ [On floral symbolism, see *below*, Chapter IX].

⁹² [*Reg.*, January 1925, article by Charbonneau-Lassay, "À propos de la rose emblématique de Martin Luther"].

less inclined to be surprised by certain considerations which, in truth, seem strange only because of the mental habits of our age. On the other hand, it suffices to inquire a little, provided one does so without prejudice, to discover everywhere the marks of that essential doctrinal unity, the awareness of which may sometimes have been obscured in humanity, but which has never entirely disappeared; and as one advances in this inquiry, the points of comparison multiply as if by themselves, and more evidence appears at every moment; indeed, the *Quaerite et invenietis* of the Gospel is not a vain word.

ADDENDUM⁹³

We would like to say a few words about an objection that has been raised to us concerning the connections we have considered between the Holy Grail and the Sacred Heart, although, to tell the truth, the response that has been given at the same time seems to us to be entirely satisfactory⁹⁴.

It matters little, in fact, that Chrestien de Troyes and Robert de Boron did not see the full significance of the ancient legend of which they were merely adapters

⁹³ [Published in *Reg.*, December 1925].

⁹⁴ [See *Reg.*, October 1925, pp. 358-59. A correspondent had written to the magazine: "René Guénon's study on the Holy Grail and the Heart of Jesus is very interesting. But could an objection be raised against his thesis that would undermine it completely? Chrestien de Troyes probably never thought about the Heart of Christ. In any case, the Celts of ancient Gaul certainly did not think about it. To see the Holy Grail as an emblem of the Heart of Christ is an entirely modern interpretation of the old myth: an interpretation that may be very ingenious, but which would have astonished our ancestors." In the same issue, the magazine replied: "R. Guénon may one day tell us himself what he thinks of the objection that has been raised. Let us simply note that the complete 'ignorance' of the Celts or of Chrestien de Troyes regarding the Heart of Jesus could not 'undermine' R. Guénon's interpretation of the legend of the Holy Grail. R. Guénon does not claim that the Celts saw in the mysterious Cup an emblem of the Heart of Christ. He shows that the Holy Grail—whose legend the Celts knew and have passed on to us—is *objectively* an emblem of the living Heart, which is the true cup of true life. Now, this second statement is independent of the first. The fact that the Celts *did not see* this or that meaning in the legend that nourished their thinking does not in any way prove that this meaning *was not there*. It simply proves that this meaning remains veiled, even to those who must have loved the wonderful legend so much. We all know today that the *fullness of grace* in the angelic salutation includes the grace of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. Imagine that for many centuries an entire school of theology *did not see* in that formula the meaning that we see today, and that would not prove at all that that meaning *was not there*. It would simply prove that that school had not grasped the *full* meaning of the formula. All the more so, it is possible that one of the true meanings of a religious myth may have gone unnoticed by those very people who piously preserved that legend.

contained therein; this meaning was nonetheless truly contained therein, and we do not claim to have done anything other than make it explicit, without introducing anything "modern" into our interpretation. For the rest, it is very difficult to say exactly what 12th-century writers saw or did not see in the legend; and, given that they played, in short, only a simple role as "transmitters," we readily concede that they certainly did not see everything that their inspirers saw; that is, the true possessors of traditional doctrine.

On the other hand, as far as the Celts are concerned, we have taken care to remember what precautions must be taken when talking about them, in the absence of any written documentation; but why should we assume, despite the evidence to the contrary that we do have, that they were less favoured than other peoples of Antiquity? Indeed, everywhere, and not only in Egypt, we see the symbolic assimilation established between the heart and the cup or vessel; everywhere, the heart is considered the centre of being, a centre that is both divine and human in the multiple applications it allows; everywhere, too, the sacrificial cup represents the Centre or Heart of the World, the 'abode of immortality'⁹⁵; what more is needed? We know well that the cup and the spear, or their equivalents, have also had other meanings than those we have indicated, but, without dwelling on this, we can say that all these meanings, however strange some may seem to modern eyes, are perfectly consistent with each other and actually express the applications of the same principle to different orders, according to a law of correspondence on which the harmonious multiplicity of meanings included in all symbolism is based.

Now, not only is the Centre of the World effectively identified with the Heart of Christ, but this identity has been clearly indicated in ancient doctrines, which we hope to show in other studies⁹⁶. Evidently, the expression "Heart of Christ" in this case must be taken in a sense that is not precisely what we might call "historical"; but it should be noted that historical facts themselves, like everything else, translate realities in their own way.

⁹⁵We could also have mentioned the hermetic *athanor*, the vessel in which the "Great Work" is accomplished, whose name, according to some, derives from the Greek *athánatos*, "immortal"; the invisible fire that is perpetually maintained in it corresponds to the vital heat that resides in the heart. We could also have established links with another widespread symbol, that of *the egg*, which signifies resurrection and immortality, and to which we may perhaps have occasion to return. Let us also point out, at least as a matter of curiosity, that the *cup* in the Tarot (whose origin is, incidentally, quite mysterious) has been replaced by the *heart* in French playing cards, which is another indication of the equivalence of the two symbols.

⁹⁶ [See *below*, chap. VIII: 'The idea of the Centre in ancient traditions'].

superiors and conform to that law of correspondence to which we have just alluded, a law which alone can explain certain "prefigurations". It is, if you will, the Christ principle, that is, the Word manifested at the central point of the Universe; but who would dare to claim that the eternal Word and its historical, earthly and human manifestation are not really and substantially one and the same Christ in two different aspects? This also brings us to the question of the relationship between the temporal and the timeless; perhaps it is not advisable to dwell on this too much, for these things are precisely those that only symbolism allows us to express to the extent that they are expressible. In any case, it is enough to know how to read the symbols to find in them everything that we find; but, unfortunately, particularly in our time, not everyone knows how to read them.

IV

*THE HOLY GRAIL*⁹⁷

Arthur Edward Waite has published a work on the legends of the Holy Grail⁹⁸, impressive in its size and the amount of research it represents, in which anyone interested in this subject will find a very complete and methodical exposition of the content of the many texts referring to it, as well as various theories that have been proposed to explain the origin and significance of these highly complex legends, which are sometimes even contradictory in some of their elements. It should be added that A. E. Waite did not set out to produce a purely scholarly work, and he should be commended for this as well, as we fully share his opinion on the limited value of any work that does not go beyond this point of view, whose interest can only be, in short, 'documentary'; he has attempted to unravel the real and 'inner' meaning of the symbolism of the Grail and the *quest*. Unfortunately, we must say that this aspect of his work seems to us the least satisfactory; the conclusions he reaches are, in fact, rather disappointing, especially when one considers the great effort made to reach them; and on this we would like to make some observations, which will naturally refer to issues that we have already dealt with on other occasions.

We do not believe we are doing Mr Waite an injustice when we say that his work is somewhat *one-sided*; should we translate this into our language as 'partial'? Perhaps that would not be strictly accurate, and in any case, we do not mean to imply that it is deliberate; rather, there would be something of that defect so common in those who, having 'specialised' in a particular field of study, are led to reduce everything to it, or to disregard what cannot be reduced in this way. That the legend of the Grail is Christian is certainly not debatable, and Mr Waite is right to assert this; but does that necessarily prevent it from also being something else at the same time? Those who are aware of the fundamental unity of all traditions will see no incompatibility in this; but Mr Waite, for his part, wants to see, in a way, only what is specifically Christian, thus confining himself to a particular traditional form, and the relationships that it has with others, precisely because of its 'inner' aspect, seem to escape him. It is not that he denies the existence of elements of another origin, probably prior to Christianity, for that would be to go against the evidence; but he attaches very little importance to them and seems to consider them as 'accidental'.

⁹⁷ [Published in *V. I.*, February and March 1934].

⁹⁸ *The Holy Grail, its legends and symbolism*, Rider and Co., London, 1933.

as if they had been added to the legend "from outside", and simply because of the medium in which it was created. Thus, he considers such elements to belong to what has come to be called "folklore", not always out of disdain, as the English word might suggest, but rather to satisfy a kind of "fashion" of our time, and not always realising the intentions involved in this; and it is perhaps not useless to insist somewhat on this point.

The very concept of 'folklore', as it is commonly understood, rests on a radically false idea, namely that there are 'popular creations', spontaneous products of the masses; and one immediately sees the close connection between this view and 'democratic' prejudices. As has been very rightly said, 'the profound interest of all so-called popular traditions lies above all in the fact that they are not popular in origin'⁹⁹; and we would add that, if, as is almost always the case, we are dealing with traditional elements in the true sense of the word, however distorted, diminished or fragmentary they may sometimes be, and with things that have real symbolic value, all of this, far from being of popular origin, is not even of human origin. What may be popular is only the fact of "survival" when these elements belong to traditional forms that have disappeared; and in this respect, the term "folklore" acquires a meaning quite close to that of "paganism", taking into account only the etymology of the latter term and eliminating its "polemical" and offensive connotation. The people thus preserve, without understanding them, the remnants of ancient traditions, which sometimes date back to a past so remote that it would be impossible to determine and which it is customary to refer to, for this reason, as the obscure domain of 'prehistory'; in doing so, they fulfil the function of a kind of more or less 'subconscious' collective memory, the content of which has clearly come from elsewhere¹⁰⁰. What may seem most surprising is that, when one gets to the bottom of things, one finds that what is thus preserved contains above all, in a more or less veiled form, a considerable amount of esoteric data, that is, precisely what is least popular in essence; and this fact in itself suggests an explanation that we will limit ourselves to indicating in a few words. When a traditional form is about to die out, its last representatives may well voluntarily entrust to the collective memory we have just mentioned what would otherwise be irretrievably lost; it is, in short, the only recourse for saving what can be saved to a certain extent; and, at the same time, the

⁹⁹ Lue Benoist, *La Cuisine des Anges, une esthétique de la pensée*, p. 74.

¹⁰⁰ This is essentially a 'lunar' function, and it should be noted that, according to astrology, the masses correspond effectively to the moon, which clearly indicates their purely passive nature, incapable of initiative or spontaneity.

The natural incomprehension of the masses is sufficient guarantee that what possessed an esoteric character will not be stripped of this character, but will remain only as a kind of testimony to the past for those who, in other times, are capable of understanding it.

That said, we do not see why everything that belongs to traditions other than Christianity should be attributed to 'folklore' without further examination, making Christianity the only exception; this seems to be Mr Waite's intention when he accepts this designation for the 'pre-Christian', and particularly Celtic, elements found in the 'legends of the Grail'. In this regard, there are no privileged traditional forms; the only distinction to be made is between forms that have disappeared and forms that are currently alive; and, consequently, the whole problem would be reduced to knowing whether the Celtic tradition had really ceased to exist when the legends in question were formed. This is, at the very least, debatable: on the one hand, this tradition may have been maintained for much longer than is commonly believed, with a more or less hidden organisation; and, on the other hand, these legends themselves may be older than the "critics" think, not because there were necessarily texts that are now lost, in which only Mr Waite believes, but because they may have been primarily the subject of an oral tradition that may have lasted several centuries, which is far from being an exceptional occurrence. For our part, we see in this the sign of a "junction" between two traditional forms, one ancient and the other then new: the Celtic tradition and the Christian tradition, a junction by which what was to be preserved from the former was in a certain way incorporated into the latter, undoubtedly modifying it to a certain extent in terms of its external form, through adaptation and assimilation, but not transposed to another plane, as Mr Waite claims, for there are equivalences between all regular traditions; there is, therefore, much more than a simple question of "sources" in the sense understood by scholars. It would perhaps be difficult to pinpoint exactly where and when this merger took place, but this is of only secondary and almost exclusively historical interest; moreover, it is easy to understand that such things leave no trace in written 'documents'. Perhaps the "Celtic Church" or "Culdéan Church" deserves, in this respect, more attention than Mr Waite seems willing to give it; its very name might suggest this; there is nothing implausible in the idea that there is something else behind it, not religious, but initiatory, for, like everything that concerns the links between different traditions, what we are dealing with here necessarily refers to the initiatory or esoteric domain. Exotericism, whether religious or not, never goes beyond the limits of the traditional form to which it properly belongs; what goes beyond these limits cannot belong to a "Church" as such, but the latter can only serve it as

external "support"; and this is an observation to which we will have occasion to return later.

Another observation, which concerns symbolism in particular, also stands out: there are symbols that are common to the most diverse and distant traditional forms, not as a result of "borrowing" which in many cases would be totally impossible, but because they actually belong to the primordial tradition from which all these forms derive directly or indirectly. Such is precisely the case with the glass or cup; why should these objects be considered mere "folklore" when referring to "pre-Christian" traditions, while in Christianity alone they are essentially "Eucharistic" symbols?

What must be rejected here are not the assimilations proposed by Burnouf and others, but rather the "naturalistic" interpretations that they have sought to extend to Christianity as well as to everything else and which, in reality, are not valid in any respect. It would therefore be necessary to do exactly the opposite of what Mr Waite does, who, dwelling on external and superficial explanations, confidently accepted as long as they do not concern Christianity, sees radically different and unrelated meanings where there are only more or less multiple aspects of the same symbol or its various applications; No doubt it would have been otherwise had he not been hindered by his preconceived idea of a kind of heterogeneity between Christianity and other traditions. Similarly, Mr Waite rightly rejects, with regard to the legend of the Grail, theories that appeal to supposed 'gods of vegetation', but it is regrettable that he is much less clear-cut with regard to the ancient mysteries, which also had nothing in common with this 'naturalism' of entirely modern invention; the 'gods of vegetation' and other stories of the same kind have never existed except in the imagination of Frazer and his ilk, whose anti-traditional intentions, moreover, are beyond doubt.

In truth, it also seems that Mr Waite is more or less influenced by a certain 'evolutionism'; this tendency is particularly evident when he states that the origin of the legend is much less important than the final state it subsequently reached; and he seems to believe that there must have been a kind of progressive improvement from one to the other. In reality, if it is something that is truly traditional, everything must, on the contrary, be given from the beginning, and subsequent developments only make it more explicit, without adding new elements taken from outside.

Mr Waite seems to admit a kind of 'spiritualisation' whereby a higher meaning could have been grafted onto something that did not originally contain it; in fact, what usually happens is rather the reverse; and that

It is somewhat reminiscent of the profane conceptions of "historians of religions". We find, with regard to alchemy, a very striking example of this kind of confusion: Mr Waite believes that material alchemy preceded spiritual alchemy, and that the latter only appeared with Kuhnrath and Jacob Boehme; if he were familiar with certain Arabic treatises that predate these by a long time, he would be forced, even if he stuck to the written documents, to modify this opinion; moreover, since he acknowledges that the language used is the same in both cases, we might ask him how he can be sure that this or that text does not refer to material operations. The truth is that authors have not always felt the need to expressly state that it was something else, which, on the contrary, had to be veiled by the symbolism used; and if some have subsequently declared this, it was mainly in response to degenerations due to the fact that there were already people who, ignorant of the value of symbols, took everything literally and in an exclusively material sense: they were the "blowers", precursors of modern chemistry. To think that a new meaning can be given to a symbol that no longer possessed it in itself is almost to deny symbolism, for it is tantamount to making it something artificial, if not entirely arbitrary, and in any case purely human; and, in this vein, Mr Waite goes so far as to say that each person finds in a symbol what he himself puts into it, so that its meaning would change with the mentality of each era; we recognise here the 'psychological' theories dear to many of our contemporaries; and were we not right to speak of 'evolutionism'?

We have often said it, and we will never repeat it too much: every true symbol carries within itself multiple meanings, and this has been the case since its origin, for it is not constituted as such by virtue of human convention, but by virtue of the "law of correspondence" that links all worlds together; although some see these meanings and others do not see them or see them only in part, this does not mean that they are not really contained within it, and it is each person's "intellectual horizon" that makes all the difference: symbolism is an exact science, not a dream world where individual fantasies can run wild.

We do not believe, therefore, in this order, in "inventions of poets", to which Mr Waite seems willing to grant great importance; such inventions, far from revealing the essence, only conceal it, deliberately or not, wrapping it in the deceptive appearances of some kind of "fiction"; and sometimes these conceal it too well, for when they become too invasive, it ends up being almost impossible to discover the deep and original meaning; was this not how, among the Greeks, symbolism degenerated into "mythology"? This danger is to be feared above all when the poet himself is not aware of the real value of symbols, for it is

It is evident that this may be the case; the parable of the "donkey carrying relics" applies here as in many other things; and the poet, then, will play a role analogous to that of the profane people who unknowingly preserve and transmit initiatory data, as we said above. The question arises here in particular: were the authors of the Grail novels in the latter case, or, on the contrary, were they aware, to a greater or lesser degree, of the profound meaning of what they were expressing? It is certainly not easy to answer with certainty, for here too appearances can be deceiving: faced with a mixture of insignificant and incoherent elements, one is tempted to think that the author did not know what he was talking about; However, this is not necessarily the case, for it has often happened that obscurities and even contradictions are entirely deliberate and that useless details are expressly intended to mislead the attention of the uninitiated, in the same way that a symbol may be intentionally concealed in a more or less complicated decorative motif. In the Middle Ages in particular, examples of this kind abound, if only in Dante and the "Fidels of Love". The fact that the higher meaning is less transparent in Chrestien de Troyes, for example, than in Robert de Borron, does not necessarily prove that the former was less aware of the symbolic meaning than the latter. even less should it be concluded that this meaning is absent from his writings, which would be an error comparable to attributing to the ancient alchemists concerns of a purely material nature for the sole reason that they did not deem it appropriate to write literally that their science was in fact spiritual in nature¹⁰¹. Furthermore, the question of the "initiation" of the authors of these novels is perhaps less important than it might seem at first glance, since in any case it does not change the appearance under which the subject is presented; since it is a matter of "externalising" esoteric data, but in no way of "vulgarising" it, it is easy to understand that this must be the case. We will go further: even a layman may, for such an 'externalisation', have served as a 'spokesperson' for an initiatory organisation, which may have chosen him for this purpose simply because of his qualities as a poet or writer, or for any other contingent reason. Dante wrote with perfect knowledge of the subject; Chrestien de Troyes, Robert de Boron and many others were probably much less aware of what they were expressing, and perhaps some of them were not aware at all; but in the end it matters little, for if there was an initiatory organisation behind them, whatever it may have been, the danger of distortion due to their lack of understanding was thereby eliminated.

¹⁰¹If Mr Waite believes, as it seems, that certain things are too 'material' to be compatible with the existence of a higher meaning in the texts where they are found, we might ask him what he thinks, for example, of Rabelais or Boccaccio.

ruled out, since such an organisation could constantly guide them without their knowledge, either through some of its members who provided them with the elements to work with, or through suggestions or influences of another kind, more subtle and less 'tangible' but no less real or effective. It will be easily understood that this has nothing to do with so-called poetic 'inspiration' as understood by moderns, which is nothing more than pure and simple imagination, nor with 'literature' in the profane sense of the term, and we will add immediately that it is not a question of 'mysticism' either; but this last point directly touches on other questions, which we must now address in a more special way.

We do not believe that the origins of the legend of the Grail can be traced back to the transmission of traditional elements, of an initiatory nature, from Druidism to Christianity; this transmission having taken place regularly, and whatever its modalities may have been, these elements have since formed an integral part of Christian esotericism; We agree wholeheartedly with Mr Waite on this second point, but we must say that the first seems to have escaped him. The existence of Christian esotericism in the Middle Ages is absolutely certain; evidence of all kinds abounds, and denials due to modern misunderstanding, whether they come from supporters or opponents of Christianity, cannot change this fact. We have had sufficient opportunity to refer to this question elsewhere, so there is no need to dwell on it here. But even among those who admit the existence of Christian esotericism, there are many who have a more or less inaccurate idea of it, and this also seems to be the case with Mr Waite, judging by his conclusions; in them there are also confusions and misunderstandings that need to be dispelled.

Firstly, it should be noted that we say "Christian esotericism" and not "esoteric Christianity"; it is not, in fact, a special form of Christianity, but rather the "inner" side of the Christian tradition; and it is easy to understand that there is more to it than just a simple nuance. Furthermore, when we distinguish between two aspects in a traditional form, one exoteric and the other esoteric, we must bear in mind that they do not refer to the same domain, so that there can be no conflict or opposition of any kind between them. In particular, when exotericism has a specifically religious character, as is the case here, the corresponding esotericism, although based on and supported by the former, has nothing to do with the religious domain and belongs to an entirely different order. It immediately follows from this that esotericism cannot in any case be represented by any "churches" or "sects," which, by definition, are always religious and therefore exoteric. This is also a point that we have already discussed in other circumstances, and which

therefore suffices to recall briefly. Some "sects" may have arisen from a confusion between the two domains and from an erroneous "externalisation" of esoteric data that has been misunderstood and misapplied; but true initiatory organisations, strictly remaining within their own domain, necessarily remain aloof from such deviations, and their very "regularity" compels them to recognise only what is orthodox, even in the exoteric order. It is therefore certain that those who wish to refer to "sects" in relation to esotericism or initiation are on the wrong path and cannot help but go astray; there is no need for further examination to rule out any hypothesis of this kind; and if elements that appear to be esoteric in nature are found in some "sects", it must be concluded, not that they have their origin in esotericism, but quite the contrary, that they have been diverted from their true meaning.

That being the case, certain apparent difficulties are immediately resolved, or rather, it becomes clear that they do not exist: thus, there is no need to wonder what the situation might be with regard to Christian orthodoxy understood in the ordinary sense of a line of transmission outside the 'apostolic succession' as referred to in certain versions of the Grail legend; if it is an initiatory hierarchy, the religious hierarchy could in no way be affected by its existence, of which, moreover, it has no reason to be "officially" aware, so to speak, since it itself exercises legitimate jurisdiction only in the exoteric domain. Similarly, when it comes to a secret formula related to certain rites, there is, frankly speaking, a singular naivety in those who wonder whether the loss or omission of that formula might prevent the celebration of Mass from being considered valid: Mass, as it is, is a religious rite, and that is an initiatory rite: each is valid in its own order, and even if both have a "Eucharistic" character in common, this in no way alters that essential distinction, just as the fact that the same symbol can be interpreted from both exoteric and esoteric points of view does not prevent them from being entirely different and belonging to totally different domains; whatever the external similarities may sometimes be, which are moreover explained by certain correspondences, the scope and purpose of initiatory rites are entirely different from those of religious rites. A fortiori, there is no point in inquiring whether the mysterious formula in question could be identified with a formula in use in this or that Church endowed with a more or less special ritual; firstly, insofar as orthodox Churches are concerned, variations in ritual are entirely secondary and cannot in any way affect anything essential; moreover, these various rituals can never be anything but religious, and as such they are perfectly equivalent, without consideration of one or the other bringing us any closer

From an introductory point of view. How much useless research and discussion could be avoided if, first and foremost, people were well informed about the principles!

Now, the fact that the writings concerning the legend of the Grail emanate, directly or indirectly, from an initiatory organisation does not mean that they constitute an initiation ritual, as some have rather extravagantly assumed; and it is curious that no such hypothesis has ever been put forward—at least as far as we know—about works that more clearly describe an initiatory process, such as the *Divine Comedy* or the *Roman de la Rose*. It is quite evident that not all writings of an esoteric nature are therefore rituals. Mr Waite, who rightly rejects this assumption, highlights the implausibilities it implies: in particular, the fact that the intended recipient would have to ask a question, rather than having to answer the initiator's questions, as is generally the case; and we might add that the differences between the various versions are incompatible with the nature of a ritual, which necessarily has a fixed and well-defined form; but how does all this prevent the legend from being linked, in some other way, to what Mr Waite calls *Instituted Mysteries*, and what we more simply call initiatory organisations? It so happens that the author has a rather narrow view of these organisations, which is inaccurate in more ways than one: on the one hand, he seems to conceive of them as something exclusively 'ceremonial', which, let us point out in passing, is a very typically Anglo-Saxon way of seeing things; on the other hand, according to a widespread error on which we have already insisted often enough, they are represented approximately as "societies", whereas, although some of them have come to take this form, this is nothing more than the effect of a wholly modern kind of degradation. The author has undoubtedly had direct experience of a good number of these pseudo-initiatory associations that abound in the West today, and although he seems to have been rather disappointed, he has not, in a way, failed to be influenced by what he has seen in them: we mean that, because he has not clearly perceived the difference between authentic initiation and pseudo-initiation, he mistakenly attributes to true initiatory organisations characteristics comparable to those of the counterfeits with which he has come into contact; and this error has further consequences, which directly affect, as we shall see, the positive conclusions of his study.

It is clear, in fact, that anything pertaining to initiation could in no way fit into a framework as narrow as that of modern-style "societies"; But precisely where Mr Waite finds nothing that remotely resembles his "societies", he becomes lost and ends up accepting the fantastical assumption of an initiation capable of existing outside any organisation and

all regular transmission; we can do no better here than refer to our previous studies on this subject¹⁰². For, outside of these "societies," he seems to see no other possibility than a vague and undefined thing which he calls the "secret Church" or "inner Church," according to expressions taken from mystics such as Eckharts-hausen and Lopukin, in which the very word "Church" indicates that we are, in reality, purely and simply led back to the religious point of view, even if it is through one of those more or less aberrant varieties into which mysticism spontaneously tends to turn when it escapes the control of strict orthodoxy. In fact, Mr Waite is one of those, unfortunately so abundant in our day, who, for various reasons, confuse mysticism and initiation; and he goes so far as to speak indifferently of one or the other of these two things, which are incompatible with each other, as if they were more or less synonymous. What he believes to be initiation ultimately resolves itself into a simple 'mystical experience'; and we even wonder if, deep down, he does not conceive of this 'experience' as something 'psychological', which would reduce us to a level even lower than that of mysticism understood in its proper sense, since true mystical states entirely escape the domain of psychology, despite all the modern theories of the kind whose best-known representative is William James. As for the inner states whose realisation belongs to the initiatory order, they are neither psychological nor even mystical states; they are something much deeper and, at the same time, they are not things about which one cannot say where they come from or what they are exactly, but, on the contrary, they imply exact knowledge and precise technique; sentimentality and imagination have no part in them. Transposing the truths of the religious order to the initiatory order is not dissolving them in the clouds of some "ideal"; on the contrary, it is penetrating their deepest and most "positive" meaning, dispelling all the clouds that hinder and limit the intellectual vision of ordinary humanity. In truth, in a conception such as that of Mr Waite, it is not a question of such transposition, but, at most, if you like, of a kind of prolongation or extension in the 'horizontal' sense, for everything that is mysticism is included in the religious domain and goes no further; and, to go beyond that, something else is needed other than affiliation to a "Church" described as "inner" above all, it seems, because it has no existence other than a "ideal" one, which, translated into clearer terms, amounts to saying that it is in fact nothing more than a dream organisation.

That could not truly be the "secret of the Holy Grail," nor any other real initiatory secret; if one wants to know where that secret lies, one must refer to the very "positive" constitution of spiritual centres, as

¹⁰² [See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chapters XI and XII].

We have indicated this quite explicitly in our study on *Le Roi du Monde* ¹⁰³. In this regard, we will limit ourselves to pointing out that Mr Waite sometimes touches on things whose significance seems to escape him: thus, he speaks on several occasions of "substituted" things that may be words or symbolic objects; but this may refer either to the various secondary centres as images or reflections of the supreme Centre, or to the successive phases of "darkening" that gradually occur, in accordance with cyclical laws, in the manifestation of those same centres in relation to the outside world. On the other hand, the first of these two cases enters in a certain way into the second, for the very constitution of the secondary centres, corresponding to particular traditional forms, whatever they may be, already indicates a first degree of darkening with respect to the primordial tradition; in effect, the Supreme Centre is no longer in direct contact with the outside world, and the link is maintained only through secondary centres. On the other hand, if one of these disappears, it can be said that in a certain way it has been reabsorbed into the Supreme Centre, of which it was but an emanation; here too, moreover, degrees can be observed: it may happen that such a centre becomes only more hidden and more closed, and this can be represented by the same symbolism as its complete disappearance, since any distancing from the outside world is simultaneously, and to an equivalent degree, a return to the Principle. We are referring here to the symbolism of the definitive disappearance of the Grail: that it has been taken up to Heaven, according to some versions, or that it has been transported to the 'Kingdom of Prester John', according to others, means exactly the same thing, which Mr Waite does not seem to suspect¹⁰⁴.

It is always a question of this same withdrawal from the external to the internal, due to the state of the world at a given time; or, to be more precise, of that part of the world that is related to the traditional form considered; such a withdrawal does not apply here, however, except to the esoteric side of tradition, since in the case of Christianity the exoteric side has remained apparently unchanged; but it is precisely through the esoteric side that effective and conscious links with the supreme Centre are established and maintained. That something of it subsists, however, even in a certain invisible way, is necessarily required insofar as the traditional form of which it is a part

¹⁰³ [See also *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. X].

¹⁰⁴ From the fact that a letter attributed to Prester John is manifestly apocryphal, Mr Waite seeks to conclude that Prester John did not exist, which is a rather singular argument, to say the least. The author deals with the question of the relationship between the legend of the Grail and the Order of the Temple in a manner that is only slightly less summary. He seems, unconsciously no doubt, to be in a hurry to dismiss things that are too significant and irreconcilable with his 'mysticism'; and, in general, we believe that the German versions of the legend deserve more consideration than he gives them.

It must remain alive; otherwise, it would be tantamount to saying that the 'spirit' has entirely withdrawn from it and that only a dead body remains. It is said that the Grail was no longer seen as before, but it is not said that no one has seen it since; surely, in principle at least, it is always present for those who are 'qualified'; but in fact these have become increasingly rare, to the point where they are now only a tiny exception; and since the time when the Rosicrucians are said to have withdrawn to Asia, whether this is to be understood literally or symbolically, what possibilities of effective initiation can they still find open to them in the Western world?

V

*TRADITION AND THE "UNCONSCIOUS"*¹⁰⁵

We have already discussed elsewhere the role of psychoanalysis in the work of subversion which, following the materialistic 'solidification' of the world, constitutes the second phase of the anti-traditional action characteristic of the modern era as a whole¹⁰⁶. We must return to this subject, for we have noticed for some time that the psychoanalytic offensive is going further and further, in the sense that, by addressing tradition directly under the pretext of explaining it, it now tends to distort its very notion in the most dangerous way. In this regard, a distinction must be made between unequally "advanced" varieties of psychoanalysis: psychoanalysis, as first conceived by Freud, was still limited to a certain extent by the materialist attitude he always sought to maintain; Of course, psychoanalysis did not cease to have a distinctly "satanic" character, but at least this prevented it from attempting to penetrate certain domains, or, even if it did so despite everything, it achieved nothing but gross falsifications, leading to confusions that were still relatively easy to dispel. Thus, when Freud spoke of "symbolism", what he abusively designated as such was in reality nothing more than a simple product of the human imagination, varying from one individual to another, and having nothing truly in common with authentic traditional symbolism. It was only a first step, and it was left to other psychoanalysts to modify the theories of their "master" in the direction of a false spirituality, in order to be able, through a much more subtle confusion, to apply them to an interpretation of traditional symbolism itself. This was particularly the case with C. G. Jung, whose first attempts in this field date back quite some time¹⁰⁷. It is worth noting, as it is very significant, that for this interpretation he started from a comparison he believed he could establish between certain symbols and some drawings made by patients; and it must be acknowledged that, in fact, these drawings sometimes present, with respect to true symbols, a kind of "parodic" resemblance that is rather disturbing in terms of the nature of what inspires them.

What greatly aggravated matters was that Jung, in order to explain something that purely individual factors did not seem to account for, was led to formulate the hypothesis of a supposed "collective unconscious," existing in some way in the

¹⁰⁵ [Published in *É. T.*, July-August 1949].

¹⁰⁶ See *Le Règne de la Quantité et les Signes des Temps*, chap. XXXIV.

¹⁰⁷ See in this regard A. Préau, *La Fleur d'or ou le Taoïsme sans Tao*.

under the psyche of all human individuals, to which he believed he could refer indiscriminately both the origin of the symbols themselves and that of their pathological caricatures. It goes without saying that the term 'unconscious' is completely inappropriate, and that what he refers to, insofar as it may have any reality, belongs to what psychologists more commonly refer to as the 'subconscious', that is, the set of lower extensions of consciousness. We have already pointed out elsewhere the confusion that has continually been made between the 'subconscious' and the 'supraconscious'; as the latter completely escapes, by its very nature, the domain over which psychologists' research falls, they never fail, when they have the opportunity to learn about some of its manifestations, to attribute them to the 'subconscious'. It is precisely this confusion that we find here as well: that the productions of patients observed by psychiatrists come from the 'subconscious' is certainly not in doubt; but, on the other hand, everything that is of a traditional nature, and especially symbolism, can only be referred to the "supraconscious", that is, to that by which communication with the superhuman is established, while the "subconscious" tends, conversely, towards the subhuman. There is therefore a real inversion in this, which is entirely characteristic of the type of explanation in question; and what gives it an appearance of justification is the fact that, in cases such as the one we have cited, the 'subconscious', thanks to its contact with psychic influences of the lowest order, effectively imitates the 'supraconscious'; this, for those who are deceived by such falsifications and are unable to discern their true nature, gives rise to the illusion that leads to what we have called "spirituality in reverse".

Through the theory of the "collective unconscious," it is believed that the symbol can be explained as "prior to individual thought" and transcending it; the real problem, which does not even seem to be raised, would be to know in which direction this transcendence occurs: whether it is from below, as the reference to the supposed "unconscious" would seem to indicate, or from above, as all traditional doctrines expressly affirm, on the contrary. We found a sentence in a recent article where this confusion appears with the greatest possible clarity: "The interpretation of symbols... is the open door to the Great Whole, that is, the path that leads to total light through the maze of the dark depths of our individuality." Unfortunately, there is a high probability that, by getting lost in those "dark depths," one will arrive at something very different from "total light." let us also note the dangerous misconception of the "Great Whole," which, like the "cosmic consciousness" into which some aspire to merge, can be nothing more or less than the diffuse psychism of the lowest regions of the subtle world; and thus, the psychoanalytic interpretation of

symbols and their traditional interpretation actually lead to diametrically opposed ends.

Another important observation should be made: among the many different things that are supposed to be explainable by the 'collective unconscious', we must naturally include 'folklore', and this is one of the cases in which the theory may appear to have some semblance of truth. To be more precise, we should speak of a kind of "collective memory," which is like an image or reflection, in the human domain, of that "cosmic memory" corresponding to one of the aspects of the symbolism of the moon. However, to attempt to deduce the nature of "folklore" from the very origin of tradition is to commit an error similar to that which is so widespread today, which leads us to consider as "primitive" what is nothing more than the product of degradation. It is clear, in fact, that 'folklore', consisting essentially of elements belonging to extinct traditions, inevitably represents a state of degradation with respect to them; but, on the other hand, it is the only means by which something of them can be saved. It would also be necessary to ask under what conditions the preservation of such elements has been entrusted to the 'collective memory'; as we have already had occasion to say¹⁰⁸, we can only see this as the result of a fully conscious action on the part of the last representatives of ancient traditional forms on the verge of disappearing. What is certain is that the collective mentality, insofar as there is such a thing, is reduced to memory, which is expressed in terms of astrological symbolism as being lunar in nature; in other words, it can play a certain conservative role, which is precisely what "folklore" consists of, but it is totally incapable of producing or elaborating anything, especially things of a transcendent nature, as all traditional data is by definition.

Psychoanalytic interpretation actually aims to deny this transcendence of tradition, but in a new way, one might say, and different from those that have been in use until now: it is no longer, as with rationalism in all its forms, either a radical denial or a pure and simple ignorance of the existence of any 'non-human' element. On the contrary, it seems to be accepted that tradition does indeed have a 'non-human' character, but completely distorting the meaning of this term; thus, at the end of the aforementioned article, we read the following: "We will perhaps return to these psychoanalytic interpretations of our spiritual treasure, whose 'constancy' across different times and civilisations clearly demonstrates its traditional, non-human character, if the word 'human' is taken in the sense of separative, of individual". Here we see perhaps the best possible illustration of what, in

¹⁰⁸ [See chap. IV: "The Holy Grail"].

The underlying, true intention behind all this, an intention which, moreover—we would like to believe—is not always conscious in those who write such things, for it must be made very clear that what is being questioned in this regard is not this or that individuality, even if it be that of a 'school leader' such as Jung, but rather the highly suspect 'inspiration' from which these interpretations originate. It is not necessary to have gone very far in the study of traditional doctrines to know that, when it comes to a "non-human" element, what is meant by this, and which essentially belongs to the supra-individual states of being, has absolutely nothing to do with a "collective" factor, which, in itself, in reality belongs only to the individual human domain, just like what is described as "separative" and which, moreover, due to its "subconscious" nature, cannot in any case open up communication with other states except in the direction of the subhuman. One immediately grasps, then, the process of subversion which consists in seizing upon certain traditional notions and inverting them in a certain way, substituting the 'supraconscious' for the 'subconscious', the supra-human for the infra-human. Is this subversion not even more dangerous than simple denial, and would it be an exaggeration to say that it helps pave the way for a true "counter-tradition," destined to serve as a vehicle for that "backwards spirituality" of which, towards the end of the current cycle, the "kingdom of the Antichrist" will signal the apparent and fleeting triumph?

VI

*THE SCIENCE OF LETTERS**(‘ILMU-L-HURŪF)¹⁰⁹*

In the preliminaries to a study on "La Théodicée de la Kabbale"¹¹⁰ F. Warrain, after stating that 'the Kabbalistic hypothesis is that the Hebrew language is the perfect language taught by God to the first man', believes it necessary to express reservations about 'the illusory claim to preserve the pure elements of the natural language, when only residues and deformations of it are possessed'. Nevertheless, he admits that "it remains probable that ancient languages derive from a hieratic language, composed by inspired individuals," that "there must therefore be words in them that express the essence of things and their numerical relationships," and that "the same can be said about the divinatory arts." We believe it would be useful to provide some clarification on this matter, but we would like to point out first of all that F. Warrain has taken what could be called a primarily philosophical perspective, while we intend to stick strictly to the initiatory and traditional realm, as we always do.

A first point that deserves attention is the following: the assertion that Hebrew is the very language of primitive revelation seems to be merely exoteric in nature and does not belong to the core of Kabbalistic doctrine, but rather simply covers something much deeper. The proof lies in the fact that the same is said of other languages, and that this assertion of 'primordially', if it can be called that, cannot be taken literally, nor justified in all cases, since it would imply an obvious contradiction. This is particularly true of the Arabic language, and it is even a very common opinion in the country where it is used that it was the original language of humanity; but what is remarkable, and what has led us to believe that the same must be true of Hebrew, is that this popular opinion is so unfounded and so devoid of authority that it is in direct contradiction with the true traditional teaching of Islam, according to which the "Adamic" language was the "Syriac language" (*logah sûryâniyah*), which, moreover, has nothing to do with the country currently known as Syria, nor with any of the more or less ancient languages whose memory has been preserved among men until

¹⁰⁹ [Published in *V. I.*, February 1931].

¹¹⁰ [*Ibid.*, October 1930; cf. F. Warrain, *La Théodicée de la Kabbale*, ed. Vega, Paris].

today. That *logah sûryâniyah* is properly, according to the interpretation given to its name, the language of "solar illumination" (*shems-ish-râqyah*); indeed, *Sûryâ* is the Sanskrit name for the Sun, and this would seem to indicate that its root *sur*, one of those designating light, did indeed belong to the original language. This is, therefore, the primitive Syria of which Homer speaks as an island located "beyond Ogygia", which identifies it with the Hyperborean *Tula*, "where the revolutions of the Sun are". According to Josephus, the capital of that country was called Heliopolis, "city of the Sun"¹¹¹, a name later given to the city in Egypt also called *On*, just as Thebes was originally one of the names of the capital of Ogygia. The successive transfers of these names, and of many others, would be particularly interesting to study in relation to the constitution of the secondary spiritual centres of the various periods, a constitution that is closely related to that of the languages intended to serve as "vehicles" for the corresponding traditional forms. These languages are those that can properly be called "sacred languages"; and it is precisely on the distinction that must be made between these sacred languages and vulgar or profane languages that the justification of Kabbalistic methods, as well as similar procedures found in other traditions, essentially rests.

We can say this: just as every secondary spiritual centre is like an image of the supreme and primordial Centre, as we have explained in our study on *Le Roi du Monde*, every sacred language, or 'hieratic' language if you will, can be considered an image or reflection of the original language, which is the sacred language par excellence; this is the "lost Word", or rather hidden from men of the "dark age", just as the supreme Centre has become invisible and inaccessible to them. But these are not "residues and deformations"; on the contrary, they are regular adaptations required by the circumstances of time and place, that is, in short, by the fact that, according to what Seyîdî Mohyiddin ibn Arabia teaches at the beginning of the second part of *El-Futûhâtu-l-Mekkiyah* ["The Revelations of Mecca"], every prophet or revealer had to use a language that could be understood by those to whom he was addressing himself, and therefore one that was more particularly suited to the mentality of that people or that era. Such is the reason for the very diversity of traditional forms, and this diversity brings with it, as an immediate consequence, that of the languages that must serve as their respective means of expression; thus, all sacred languages must be considered as truly the work of 'inspired' individuals, without which they would not be fit for the function for which they are essentially intended. As for the primitive language, its origin must have been "non-human," like that of the primordial tradition.

¹¹¹Cf. *The Solar Citadel* of the Rosicrucians, *The City of the Sun*, by Campanella, etc. The cyclical symbolism of the Phoenix should actually refer to this first Heliopolis.

same; and every sacred language still participates in this character insofar as it is, by its structure (*el-mabâni*) and its meaning (*el-ma'âni*), a reflection of that primitive language. This can, moreover, be translated in different ways, which do not all have the same importance, since the question of adaptation also comes into play here: such is, for example, the symbolic form of the signs used in writing; such is also, and more particularly for Hebrew and Arabic, the correspondence of numbers with letters, and consequently with the words composed of them.

Surely, it is difficult for Westerners to realise what sacred languages truly are, since, at least under current conditions, they have no direct contact with any of them; and we can recall in this regard what we have said more generally and on other occasions about the difficulty of assimilating the 'traditional sciences', which is much greater than that of purely metaphysical teachings, due to their specialised nature, which binds them inextricably to a particular form and does not allow them to be transferred as they are from one civilisation to another, at the risk of rendering them completely unintelligible or obtaining only entirely illusory, if not completely false, results. Thus, in order to effectively understand the full scope of the symbolism of letters and numbers, it is necessary to experience it, in a certain way, in its application to the circumstances of everyday life, as is possible in certain Eastern countries; but it would be utterly chimerical to attempt to introduce considerations and applications of this kind into European languages, for which they were not designed and in which the numerical value of letters, in particular, is non-existent. The attempts that some have made in this vein, outside of all traditional data, are therefore erroneous from the outset; and if, nevertheless, some correct results have sometimes been obtained, for example from the "onomantic" point of view, this does not prove the value and legitimacy of the procedures, but only the existence of a kind of "intuitive" faculty (which, of course, has nothing in common with true intellectual intuition) in those who have applied them, as is often the case with the "divinatory arts"¹¹³.

¹¹²This form may, moreover, have undergone modifications corresponding to subsequent traditional readaptations, as occurred with Hebrew after the Babylonian captivity; we say that this is a readaptation, since it is implausible that the ancient script should have been truly lost in a short period of seventy years, and it is even surprising that this generally goes unnoticed. Similar events, at more or less distant times, must also have occurred for other scripts, particularly for the Sanskrit alphabet and, to a certain extent, for Chinese ideograms.

¹¹³ It seems that the same can be said, despite the "scientific" appearance of the methods, with regard to the results obtained by modern astrology, so far removed from true traditional astrology; the latter, whose keys seem to have been lost, was, moreover, much more than a simple "art".

To explain the metaphysical principle of the "science of letters" (in Arabic *'ilmu-l-hurūf*), Seyîdî Mohyiddîn, in *El-Futûhâtu-l-Mekkiyah*, considers the universe as symbolised by a book: it is the well-known symbol of *the Liber Mundi* of the Rosicrucians, as well as the apocalyptic *Liber Vitae*¹¹⁴. The characters in this book are, in principle, all written simultaneously and indivisibly by the "divine pen" (*el-Qâlamu-l-ilâhî*); these "transcendent letters" are the eternal essences or divine ideas; and, since every letter is also a number, one will note the agreement of this teaching with Pythagorean doctrine. These same "transcendent letters", which are all creatures, after having been condensed principally in divine omniscience, have descended, by divine breath, to the lower lines, to compose and form the manifested Universe. A comparison with the role played by letters in the cosmogonic doctrine of *the Sefer Yetzirah* is obvious here; the "science of letters" has, moreover, approximately the same importance in Hebrew Kabbalah as in Islamic esotericism¹¹⁵.

Based on this principle, it is easy to understand why a correspondence is established between the letters and the various parts of the manifested Universe, and more particularly of our world; the existence of planetary and zodiacal correspondences is, in this respect, sufficiently well known that it is unnecessary to dwell on it, and it suffices to note that this places the "science of letters" in close relation to astrology, understood as a "cosmological" science¹¹⁶. On the other hand, by virtue of the constitutive analogy of the "microcosm" (*el-kawnu-s-segîr*) with the "macrocosm" (*el-kawnu-l-kebîr*), these same letters also correspond to the various parts of the human organism; and, in this regard, we will point out in passing that there is a therapeutic application of the "science of letters", in which each of them is used in a certain way to cure diseases that particularly affect the corresponding organ.

divination", although clearly capable of applications of this kind, but of an entirely secondary and "accidental" nature.

¹¹⁴We have already had occasion to point out the relationship between this symbolism of the "Book of Life" and that of the "Tree of Life": the leaves of the tree and the characters in the book equally represent all beings in the universe (the "ten thousand beings" of Far Eastern tradition).

¹¹⁵ It should also be noted that the "Book of the World" is at the same time the "Divine Message" (*er-Risâlatu-l-ilâhîyah*), the archetype of all sacred books; the traditional scriptures are but translations of it into human language. This is expressly stated in the *Veda* and the *Qur'an*; the idea of the "eternal Gospel" also shows that this same conception is not entirely foreign to Christianity, or at least has not always been so.

¹¹⁶There are also other correspondences, with the elements, the sensible qualities, the celestial spheres, etc.; the letters of the Arabic alphabet, which number twenty-eight, are also related to the lunar mansions.

It follows, then, from what has just been said, that the "science of letters" must be approached in different orders, which can be summarised as the "three worlds": understood in its highest sense, it is the knowledge of all things in their very principle, as eternal essences beyond all manifestation; in a sense that can be described as intermediate, it is cosmogony, or the knowledge of the production or formation of the manifested world; finally, in the lower sense, it is the knowledge of the virtues of names and numbers insofar as they express the nature of each being, knowledge that allows, by way of application, to exercise through them, and by reason of this correspondence, an action of a "magical" order on the beings themselves and on the events that concern them. Indeed, according to Ibn Khaldun, written formulas, being composed of the same elements that constitute the totality of beings, have for this reason the power to act upon them; and that is why knowledge of the name of a being, an expression of its own nature, can give power over it; this application of the "science of letters" is usually referred to as *sîmî'â*¹¹⁷. It is important to note that this goes much further than a simple "divinatory" procedure: first of all, by means of a calculation (*hisâb*) performed on the numbers corresponding to letters and names, it is possible to predict certain events¹¹⁸; but this is only the first and most basic level, and it is then possible, based on the results of this calculation, to make changes that will have the effect of producing a corresponding change in the events themselves.

Here too, it is necessary to distinguish between very different degrees, as in knowledge itself, of which this is but an application or realisation: when this action is exercised only in the sensible world, it is the lowest degree, and in this case one can properly speak of 'magic'; but it is easy to conceive that it is something of a very different order when the action has repercussions in the higher worlds. In the latter case, we are clearly in the "initiatory" order in the fullest sense of the term; and only those who have reached the degree of "red sulphur" (*el-Kebrîtu-l-âhmar*) can actively operate in all worlds, a name that indicates an assimilation, which may seem somewhat unexpected to some, of the "science of letters" to alchemy¹¹⁹. In fact, these two sciences, understood in their deepest sense, are but one in

¹¹⁷ The word *sîmî'â* does not appear to be purely Arabic; it probably comes from the Greek *sêmeia* 'signs', which makes it roughly equivalent to the name of the Kabbalistic *gematria*, a word also of Greek origin, but derived not from *geometry*, as is commonly said, but from *grammáiteia* (from *grámmata*, 'letters').

¹¹⁸ In certain cases, it is also possible to obtain the solution to doctrinal questions by means of a calculation of the same kind; and this solution sometimes takes a most remarkable symbolic form.

¹¹⁹Seyyidî Mohyiddin ibn 'Arabi is nicknamed *es-Shejju-l-âkbar wa el-Kebrîtu-l-âhmar*.

reality; and what both express, under very different appearances, is nothing other than the process of initiation itself, which, moreover, rigorously reproduces the cosmogonic process, since the total realisation of a being's possibilities necessarily takes place by passing through the same phases as those of universal Existence¹²⁰.

¹²⁰It is at least curious to note that Masonic symbolism itself, in which the 'lost word' and its search also play an important role, characterises the initiatory degrees by means of expressions clearly taken from the 'science of letters': spelling, reading, writing. The 'Master', who among his attributes has the 'tracing board', if he were truly what he should be, would be capable not only of reading but also of writing the 'Book of Life', that is, of consciously cooperating in the realisation of the plan of the 'Great Architect of the Universe'; hence the distance between the nominal possession of such a degree and its effective possession can be judged.

VII

*THE LANGUAGE OF BIRDS*¹²¹

Wa-s-sâffâti saffan
Fa-z-zâjirâti zajran
Fa-t-tâliyâti dhikran...

("By those who are arranged in order and
 those who expel by repelling
 and those who recite the invocation...")

Quran, XXXVII, 1-3

Often, in various traditions, there is mention of a mysterious language called "the language of birds"; this is clearly a symbolic designation, since the very importance attributed to knowledge of this language, as a prerogative of high initiation, does not allow it to be taken literally. Thus, we read in the Qur'an: "And Salomon was the heir of David; and he said: O men! We have been taught the language of birds (*'ullimna mântiqa-t-tayri*) and filled with all good things..." (XXVII, 15). On the other hand, heroes who defeat dragons, such as Siegfried in Norse legend, are seen to understand the language of birds immediately, and this makes it easy to interpret the symbolism in question. Indeed, victory over the dragon has as its immediate consequence the conquest of immortality, represented by some object that the dragon prevents one from approaching, and this conquest of immortality essentially implies reintegration into the centre of the human being, that is, the point where communication with the higher states of being is established. This communication is represented by the understanding of the language of birds; for, in fact, birds are often taken as a symbol of angels, that is, precisely, of the higher states. We have had occasion to quote elsewhere¹ the Gospel parable which speaks, in this sense, of "the birds of the sky" that come to rest on the branches of the tree, that same tree which represents the axis that passes through the centre of each state of being and links all states together².

¹²¹ [Published in *V. I.*, November 1931].

¹ *L'Homme et son devenir selon te Védânta*, chap. III.

² In the medieval symbol of *Peridexion* (corruption of *Paradision*), birds are seen on the branches of the tree and the dragon at its foot (cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IX). In a study on the symbolism of the "bird of paradise" (*Le Rayonnement intellectuel*, May-June 1930), L. Charbonneau-Lassay reproduced a sculpture in which this bird is depicted with only a head and wings, a form in which angels are often represented. [Cf. *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, chap. LVI, p.

In the Quranic text that we have reproduced as a motto, the term *es-saffât* is considered to literally refer to birds, but at the same time it is symbolically applied to angels (*el-malâ'-ikah*); thus, the first verse refers to the constitution of the celestial or spiritual hierarchies³. The second verse expresses the struggle of the angels with the demons, of the heavenly powers against the infernal powers, that is, the opposition between higher states and lower states⁴; in the Hindu tradition, it is the struggle of the *Devas* against the *Asuras*, and also, according to a symbolism entirely similar to the one we are dealing with here, the struggle of the *Garuda* against the *Naga*, in which we find, moreover, the serpent or dragon mentioned a few lines earlier; the *Garuda* is the eagle, and in other cases it is replaced by other birds, such as the ibis, the stork, the heron, all enemies and destroyers of reptiles⁵. Finally, in the third verse, we see the angels reciting the *dhikr*, which, in the most common interpretation, is considered to indicate the recitation of the *Qur'an*, not, of course, the *Qur'an* expressed in human language, but its eternal prototype inscribed on the "preserved tablet" (*el-lawhu-l-mahfûz*), which extends from the heavens to the earth like Jacob's ladder, that is, through all degrees of universal Existence⁶. Similarly, in the Hindu tradition it is said that the *Devas*, in their struggle against the *Asuras*, protected themselves (*achhan dayan*) by reciting hymns from the *Vedas*, and that for this reason these hymns were given the name *chhanda*, a word that properly designates 'rhythm'. The same idea is also contained in the word *dhikr*, which, in Islamic esotericism, is applied to rhythmic formulas corresponding exactly to Hindu *mantras*, formulas whose repetition is intended to produce a harmonisation of the

425].

⁽³⁾ The word *saff*, 'order, row', is one of many in which some have sought to find the origin of the terms *sîfi* and *tasâwwuf*; although this derivation does not seem acceptable from a linguistic point of view, it is nonetheless true that, like many others of the same kind, it represents one of the ideas actually contained in these terms, since 'spiritual hierarchies' are essentially identified with the degrees of initiation.

⁴This opposition is reflected in every being by the two tendencies, ascending and descending, called *sattva* and *tamâs* in Hindu doctrine. It is also what Mazdeism symbolises by the antagonism between light and darkness, personified respectively in *Ormuzd* and *Ahriman*.

⁵ See, in this regard, the notable works of L. Charbonneau-Lassay on the animal symbols of Christ [cf. *Le Bestiaire du Christ*]. It is important to note that the symbolic opposition between the bird and the serpent only applies when the latter is viewed in its evil aspect; on the contrary, in its beneficial aspect, it is sometimes associated with the bird, as in the figure of *Quetzalcóhuatl* in ancient American traditions; moreover, the battle between the eagle and the serpent is also found in Mexico. In the case of the association of the serpent and the bird, we may recall the Gospel text: "Be wise as serpents and harmless as doves" (*St Matthew*, X, 16).

⁶ On the symbolism of the Book, to which this refers directly, see *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XIV.

various elements of being and determine vibrations capable, through their repercussion across the series of states, in an undefined hierarchy, of opening communication with the higher states, which, moreover, constitutes, in general terms, the essential and fundamental *raison d'être* of all rites.

We are thus led back, as will be seen, to what we said at the beginning about the "language of birds", which we can also call "angelic language", and whose image in the human world is rhythmic language, since the "science of rhythm", which has many applications, is ultimately the basis for all the means that can be used to communicate with higher states. That is why an Islamic tradition says that Adam, in the Garden of Eden, spoke in verse, that is, in rhythmic language; This is the "Syriac language" (*logah sûryâniyah*) that we discussed in our previous study on the "science of letters"⁷, and which should be considered a direct translation of "solar" and "angelic" illumination as manifested in the centre of the human state. That is why the sacred books are also written in rhythmic language, which, as we can see, makes them something other than simple "poems" in the purely profane sense of the term, as the anti-traditional prejudice of modern "critics" would have us believe; Moreover, poetry was not originally the vain "literature" it has become through a degradation whose explanation must be sought in the downward march of the human cycle, but had a truly sacred character⁸. Traces of this can be found even in classical Western antiquity, in which poetry was still called the "language of the Gods", an expression equivalent to those we have indicated, since the "Gods", that is, the *Devas*⁹, are, like angels, the representation of the higher states. In Latin, verses were called *carmina*, a designation referring to their use in the performance of rites, since the word *carmen* is identical to the Sanskrit *karma*, which should be taken here in its particular sense of "ritual action"¹⁰; and the poet himself, interpreter of the "sacred language" through which the divine Word was revealed, was the *vates*, a word that

⁷ [See *above*, Chapter VI].

⁸ It can be said, moreover, in general terms, that the arts and sciences have become profane only by virtue of such degradation, which has stripped them of their traditional character and, consequently, of all higher meaning; we have explained ourselves on this subject in *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chap. II, and in *La Crise du monde moderne*, chap. IV. [Cf. also *La Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. VIII].

⁹ The Sanskrit *Deva* and the Latin *Deus* are one and the same word.

¹⁰ The word "poetry" also derives from the Greek verb *poieîn*, which has the same meaning as the Sanskrit root *kr.* from which *Karma* comes, and which is also found in the Latin verb *creare* understood in its primitive sense; in its origin, therefore, it was something very different from the simple production of an artistic or literary work, in the profane sense, which seems to have been the only one Aristotle had in mind when he spoke of what he called "poetic sciences".

characterised him as endowed with a somewhat prophetic inspiration. Later, due to further degradation, the *vates* was nothing more than a vulgar "fortune teller"¹¹; and the *carmen* (from which the French word *charme*, 'charm', derives), an 'enchantment', that is, an operation of low magic; this is another example of how magic, and even sorcery, constitutes what remains as the last vestige of vanished traditions"⁽¹²⁾.

These few indications will suffice, we believe, to show how wrong those who mock stories that speak of the 'language of birds' are; it is indeed too easy and far too simple to dismiss everything that is not understood as 'superstition'; but the ancients, for their part, knew very well what they were saying when they used symbolic language. True "superstition", in the strict etymological sense (*quod superstat*), is that which survives itself, or, in a word, the "dead letter"; but even this preservation, however unworthy of interest it may seem, is not so despicable, for the spirit, which "blows where it wills" and when it wills, can always come to revive symbols and rites and restore to them, with the meaning they had lost before, the fullness of their original virtue.

¹¹The word "diviner" itself is no less distorted from its original meaning, as etymologically it is directly related to *divinus*, and therefore means "interpreter of the gods". The "haruspices" (from *aves spicere*, 'to observe birds') drew omens from the flight and song of birds, which is more specifically related to the "language of birds", understood here in the most material sense, but still identified with the "language of the gods", as it was believed that the gods manifested their will through such omens, and birds thus played a role as "messengers" analogous to that generally attributed to angels (hence their very name, as this is precisely the meaning of the Greek word *ángelos*), albeit in a much lesser capacity.

¹² [On this subject of the origins of magic and sorcery, see *below*, chapter XX, 'Shet', last paragraph].

SYMBOLS OF THE CENTRE AND THE WORLD

VIII

*THE IDEA OF THE CENTRE IN ANCIENT TRADITIONS*¹³

We have already had occasion to refer to the "Centre of the World" and the various symbols that represent it¹⁴; we must return to this idea of the Centre, which is of the utmost importance in all ancient traditions, and indicate some of the main meanings associated with it. For modern people, in fact, this idea no longer immediately evokes what it evoked for the ancients; in this, as in everything related to symbolism, many things have been forgotten and certain ways of thinking seem to have become totally foreign to the vast majority of our

¹³ [Published in *Reg.*, May 1926].

¹⁴ ["Les Arbres du Paradis" (*Reg.*, March 1926), elements of which were taken up in various places in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*. Here is the final passage, referred to in the text:

"... We should add that while the tree is one of the main symbols of the 'Axis of the World', it is not the only one: the mountain is also a symbol, common to many different traditions; the tree and the mountain are also sometimes associated with each other. The stone itself (which can also be taken as a reduced representation of the mountain, although it is not only that) also plays the same role in certain cases; and this symbol of the stone, like that of the tree, is very often related to the serpent. We will undoubtedly have the opportunity to return to these various figures in other studies; but we would like to point out that, by virtue of the fact that they all refer to the 'Centre of the World', they have a more or less direct link with the symbol of the heart, so that in all this we are not straying so far from the subject of this magazine as some might believe; and we will return to it, moreover, more immediately, with a final observation. We said that, in a certain sense, the 'Tree of Life' has been made accessible to man through Redemption; in other words, it could also be said that the true Christian is one who, at least virtually, is reintegrated into the dignity and rights of primordial humanity and therefore has the possibility of returning to Paradise, to the 'abode of immortality'. Undoubtedly, this reintegration will not be fully realised for humanity as a whole until 'the new Jerusalem descends from heaven to earth' (*Revelation*, XXI), since it will be the perfect consummation of Christianity, coinciding with the no less perfect restoration of the order that existed before the Fall. It is no less true, however, that reintegration can a l r e a d y be approached individually, if not generally; and in this, we believe, lies the fullest meaning of the 'spiritual habitat' in the Heart of Christ, of which L. Charbonneau-Lassay (January 1926) spoke. Recently, L. Charbonneau-Lassay (January 1926) said that, like the earthly Paradise, the Heart of Christ is truly the 'Centre of the World' and the 'dwelling place of immortality'.

[Let us recall that the idea of the "Centre of the World" is the fundamental theme of the work entitled *Le Roi du Monde*, which appeared in 1927 and in which the subject matter of *Reg's* articles on this theme was taken up almost entirely. On the same idea, see also *La Grande Triade*, especially chapters XVI, XVII and XXVI.]

contemporaries; it is therefore worth emphasising this point, especially since misunderstanding is more widespread and complete in this regard.

The Centre is, above all, the origin, the starting point of all things; it is the main point, without form or dimensions, therefore indivisible, and, consequently, the only image that can be given of the primordial Unity. From it, through its radiation, all things are produced, just as Unity produces all numbers, without its essence being modified or affected in any way. There is a complete parallelism here between two modes of expression: geometric symbolism and numerical symbolism, in such a way that they can be used interchangeably and that one can even pass from one to the other in the most natural way. It should not be forgotten, moreover, that in both cases it is always a matter of symbolism: arithmetic unity is not metaphysical Unity; it is only a figure of it, but a figure in which there is nothing arbitrary, for there is a real analogical relationship between the two, and it is this relationship that allows the idea of Unity to be transposed beyond the quantitative domain to the transcendental order. The same is true of the idea of the Centre; it is capable of a similar transposition, whereby it is stripped of its spatial character, which is now evoked only as a symbol: the central point is the Principle, pure Being; and the space it fills with its radiation, which is nothing other than that radiation itself (the *Fiat Lux* of *Genesis*), without which such space would be nothing but "deprivation" and nothingness, is the World in the broadest sense of the term, the totality of all beings and all states of Existence that constitute universal manifestation.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

The simplest representation of the idea we have just formulated is the point at the centre of the circle (fig. 1): the point is the emblem of the Principle, and the circle that of the World. It is impossible to assign any origin in time to the use of this figuration, as it is frequently found in prehistoric objects; undoubtedly, it must be seen as one of the signs directly linked to the primordial tradition. Sometimes the point is surrounded by several concentric circles, which seem to represent the different states or degrees of manifested existence, arranged hierarchically according to their greater or lesser distance from the primordial Principle. The point in the centre of the circle has

has also been taken, probably since very ancient times, as a figure of the sun, because the sun is truly, in the physical order, the Centre or the "Heart of the World"; and that figure has remained to this day as the usual astrological and astronomical sign of the sun. Perhaps for this reason, archaeologists, wherever they find this symbol, seek to assign it an exclusively "solar" meaning, when in reality it has a much broader and deeper meaning; they forget or ignore that the sun, from the point of view of all ancient traditions, is itself only a symbol, that of the true "Centre of the World" which is the divine Principle.

The relationship between the centre and the circumference, or between what they respectively represent, is already clearly indicated by the fact that the circumference could not exist without its centre, while the centre is completely independent of the circumference. This relationship can be indicated even more clearly and explicitly by means of radii that emanate from the centre and end at the circumference; these radii can obviously be represented in varying numbers, since they are in fact an indefinite multitude, just like the points on the circumference that are their endpoints; but in fact, numbers that have a particular symbolic value have always been chosen for representations of this kind. Here, the simplest form is one with only four radii dividing the circumference into equal parts, that is, two orthogonal diameters forming a cross inside the circle (fig. 2). This new figure has the same general meaning as the first, but secondary meanings are added to complete it: the circumference, if represented as travelled in a certain direction, is the image of a cycle of manifestation, such as those cosmic cycles of which Hindu doctrine in particular offers a highly developed theory. The divisions determined on the circumference by the ends of the arms of the cross then correspond to the different periods or phases into which the cycle is divided; and such a division can be approached, so to speak, on different scales, depending on whether the cycles are more or less extensive: thus, for example, and to stick only to the order of earthly existence, we have the four main moments of the day, the four phases of the moon, the four seasons of the year, and also, according to the conception found in the traditions of India and Central America as well as in those of Greco-Roman antiquity, the four ages of humanity. We are merely summarising these considerations here to give an overview of what the symbol in question expresses; they are, moreover, directly linked to what we will say next.



Fig. 3



Fig. 4

Among the figures that include a greater number of spokes, we should make special mention of the wheels or "small wheels", which usually have six or eight spokes (figs. 3 and 4). The "Celtic wheel", which has been perpetuated throughout most of the Middle Ages, appears in one of these two forms; these same figures, especially the second, are also very often found in Eastern countries, particularly in Chaldea and Assyria, in India (where the wheel is called *chakra*) and in Tibet. On the other hand, there is a close relationship between the six-spoked wheel and the *chrism*¹⁵, which, in short, differs from the former only in the fact that the circumference to which the ends of the spokes belong is not usually drawn; now then: the wheel, instead of being simply a "solar" sign, as is commonly taught in our time, is above all a symbol of the World, which can be understood without difficulty. In the symbolic language of India, there is constant reference to the "wheel of things" or the "wheel of life", which clearly corresponds to this meaning; and there is also the "wheel of the Law", an expression that Buddhism has taken, like so many others, from earlier doctrines, and which, at least originally, refers above all to cyclical theories. It should also be added that the Zodiac is also represented in the form of a wheel, with twelve spokes, of course, and that, moreover, the name given to it in Sanskrit literally means "wheel of signs"; it could also be translated as "wheel of numbers", according to the primary meaning of the word *râçi*, which designates the signs of the zodiac¹⁶.

There is also a certain connection between the wheel and various floral symbols¹⁷; we could even speak, at least in certain cases, of a true equivalence¹⁸.

¹⁵ [Here the author referred to his article in *Reg.*, November 1925, on "Le Chrisme et le Coeur dans les anciennes marques corporatives" ("The Chrism and the Heart in Ancient Corporate Marks"), a text not included in this compilation, but taken up again by the author in two articles in *É. T.* which form chapters L ("The Symbols of Analogy") and LXVII ("The 'Four of Cups'") here. L ("The symbols of analogy") and LXVII ("The 'four of figures'").]

¹⁶ It should also be noted that the "wheel of Fortune", in Western ancient symbolism, is closely related to the "wheel of Law" and also, although this may not be so clear at first glance, to the zodiacal wheel.

¹⁷ [See Chapter IX: "Symbolic Flowers" and L: "Symbols of Analogy".]

If we consider a symbolic flower such as the lotus, the lily or the rose¹⁹, its opening represents, among other things (since these are symbols with multiple meanings), and by a readily understandable similarity, the development of manifestation; this opening is, moreover, a radiation around the centre, since in this case too we are dealing with "centred" figures, and this is what justifies their assimilation to the wheel²⁰. In the Hindu tradition, the World is sometimes represented in the form of a lotus in the centre of which rises *Meru*, the sacred Mountain that symbolises the Pole.

But let us return to the meanings of the Centre, for so far we have only discussed the first of these, which makes it the image of the Principle. We find another meaning in the fact that the Centre is properly the 'middle', the point equidistant from all points on the circumference, dividing every diameter into two equal parts. In the foregoing, the Centre was considered, in a certain sense, before the circumference, which has no reality except through the radiation of the former; now, it is considered in relation to the realised circumference, that is, it is the action of the Principle within Creation. The middle between the extremes represented by opposite points on the circumference is the place where the opposing tendencies, reaching those extremes, neutralise each other, so to speak, and are in perfect balance. Certain schools of Muslim esotericism, which attribute a symbolic value of the utmost importance to the cross, call the centre of that cross the "divine station" (*el-maqâmu-l-ilâhi*), which they designate as the place where all opposites are unified and all oppositions are resolved.²¹ The idea expressed most particularly here is, therefore, that of balance, and that idea is identified with that of harmony; they are not two different ideas, but only two aspects of the same. There is still a third aspect of it, more particularly linked to the moral point of view (although capable of receiving other meanings), and that is the idea of Justice; one can thus

¹⁸Among other indications of this equivalence, with regard to the Middle Ages, we have seen the eight-spoked wheel and an eight-petalled flower facing each other on the same carved stone embedded in the façade of the old church of Saint-Mexme in Chinon, a stone that most likely dates from the Carolingian period.

¹⁹The lily has six petals; the lotus, in the most common representations, has eight; the two forms therefore correspond to wheels with six and eight spokes, respectively. As for the rose, it is depicted with a variable number of petals, which can modify its meaning or at least nuance it in different ways. On the symbolism of the rose, see the very interesting article by L. Charbonneau-Lassay (*Reg.*, March 1926).

²⁰ In the figure of the chrisim with a rose, from the Merovingian period, which has been reproduced by L. Charbonneau-Lassay (*Reg.*, March 1926, p. 298), the central rose has six petals oriented according to the branches of the chrisim; moreover, it is enclosed in a circle, which makes its identity with the six-spoked wheel appear as clearly as possible.

²¹ [Cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. VII].

relate what we were saying to the Platonic conception according to which virtue consists of a happy medium between two extremes. From a much more universal point of view, Far Eastern traditions speak incessantly of the "Unchanging Middle", which is the point where the "Activity of Heaven" manifests itself, and, according to Hindu doctrine, at the centre of every being, as in every state of cosmic existence, there resides a reflection of the Supreme Principle.

Equilibrium, on the other hand, is in truth nothing more than the reflection, in the order of manifestation, of the absolute immutability of the Principle; in order to view things according to this new relationship, it is necessary to consider the circumference in motion around its centre, the only point that does not participate in that motion. The very name of the wheel (*rota*) immediately evokes the idea of rotation; and this rotation is the figure of the continuous change to which all manifested things are subject; in such movement, there is only one single point that remains fixed and immutable, and this point is the Centre. This brings us back to the cyclical conceptions we mentioned earlier: the course of any cycle, or the rotation of the circumference, is succession, whether in the temporal mode or in any other mode; the fixity of the Centre is the image of eternity, where all things are present in perfect simultaneity. The circumference cannot rotate except around a fixed centre; similarly, change, which is not sufficient in itself, necessarily presupposes a principle that is outside it: it is Aristotle's 'unmoved mover'²², also represented by the Centre. The immutable Principle, then, at the same time, and by the very fact that everything that exists, everything that changes or moves, has no reality except through it and depends totally on it, is what gives movement its first impulse and also what immediately governs and directs and legislates it, for the preservation of the order of the World is, in a certain sense, nothing but a prolongation of the creative act. The Principle is, according to the Hindu expression, the "internal organiser" (*antaryâni*), for it directs all things from within, residing itself at the most intimate point of all, which is the Centre²³.

Instead of the rotation of a circumference around its centre, one can also consider that of a sphere around a fixed axis; the symbolic meaning is exactly the same. This is why representations of the 'Axis of the World' are so frequent and important in all ancient traditions; and the general meaning is basically the same as that of the figures of the 'Centre of the World', except perhaps that they evoke more directly the role of the immutable Principle with respect to universal manifestation than the other aspects in which the Centre can equally be

²² [See chap. XVIII: "Some aspects of the symbolism of Janus"].

²³ [Cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, chap. XIV, and in this compilation, chap. LXXIII: "The Mustard Seed" and LXXV: "The Divine City"].

considered. When the sphere, whether terrestrial or celestial, completes its revolution around its axis, there are two points on this sphere that remain fixed: these are the poles, the ends of the axis or its points of contact with the surface of the sphere; that is why the idea of Pole is also equivalent to the idea of Centre. The symbolism associated with the Pole, which sometimes takes on very complex forms, is also found in all traditions, and even occupies a considerable place in them; if most modern scientists have not noticed this, it is further proof that they completely lack a true understanding of symbols²⁴.

One of the most notable figures, in which the ideas we have just outlined are summarised, is the *swastika* (Figs. 5 and 6), which is essentially the 'sign of the Pole'²⁵; we believe, moreover, that its true meaning has never been made known in modern Europe. Attempts to explain this symbol by means of



Fig. 5



Fig. 6

of the most fanciful theories; it has even been seen as the outline of a primitive instrument used to produce fire; in truth, if there is sometimes a connection with fire, it is for very different reasons. Most often, the *swastika* is made into a 'solar' sign; if it has come to be so, it could only have happened accidentally and in a very indirect way: we could repeat here what we said earlier about the wheel and the point in the centre of the circle. Closer to the truth are those who have seen in the *swastika* a symbol of movement, but this interpretation is still insufficient, for it is not just any movement, but a rotational movement that takes place around a centre or an immutable axis; and it is precisely the fixed point that is the essential element to which the symbol in question directly refers. The other meanings of the same figure derive from

²⁴ [On the symbolism of the Pole, see especially *Le Roi du Monde*, chaps. II, VII, VIII, IX and X; and in this compilation, chap. X: 'A Hieroglyph of the Pole'.

²⁵ [Most of the following considerations on the *swastika* have been taken up again, with new developments, in *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. II, and *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. X; the unity of the context compels us to retain them, with the exception, however, of some footnotes that would now be superfluous].

all of that: the Centre imprints movement on all things, and since movement represents life, the *swastika* thereby becomes a symbol of life or, more precisely, of the life-giving role of the Principle with respect to the cosmic order.

If we compare the *swastika* with the figure of the cross inscribed in the circumference (fig. 2), we can see that they are, in essence, two equivalent symbols; but the rotation, instead of being represented by the circumference, is only indicated in the *swastika* by the lines added to the ends of the arms of the cross, with which they form right angles; these lines are tangent to the circumference, marking the direction of movement at the corresponding points. Since the circumference represents the World, the fact that it is, so to speak, implied clearly indicates that the *swastika* is not a figure of the World, but of the action of the Principle with respect to it²⁶.

If the *swastika* is related to the rotation of a sphere, such as the Earth, around its axis, the symbol must be assumed to be drawn on the equatorial plane, and then the central point will be the projection of the axis onto that plane, which is perpendicular to it. As for the direction of rotation indicated by the figure, it is of secondary importance; in fact, the two forms we have just reproduced²⁷ are found, without there being in all cases an intention to establish an opposition between them²⁸. We are well aware that, in certain countries and at certain times, schisms may have occurred whose supporters deliberately gave the figure an orientation contrary to that which was in use in the milieu from which they separated themselves, in order to assert their antagonism by means of an outward manifestation; but this in no way affects the essential meaning of the symbol, which remains constant in all cases.

²⁶ The same observation would also apply to chrisms compared to the wheel.

²⁷ The word *svastika* is, in Sanskrit, the only one that can be used in all cases to designate the symbol in question; the term *sauvastika*, which some have applied to one of the two forms to distinguish it from the other (which would then be the true *swastika*), is in fact nothing more than an adjective derived from *swastika* and means 'belonging or relating to that symbol or its meanings'.

²⁸ The same observation could be made with regard to other symbols, and in particular to the Constantinian chrisms, in which the P ['ro'] is sometimes inverted; it has sometimes been thought that it should then be considered a sign of the Antichrist; this intention may indeed have existed in certain cases, but there are others in which it is manifestly impossible to admit it (in the catacombs, for example). Likewise, the corporate 'four of cipher', which is otherwise nothing more than a modification of the same P of the chrisms [see chap. LXVII], is found indifferently turned in one direction or the other, without it even being possible to attribute this fact to rivalry between different corporations or to their desire to distinguish themselves from each other, since both forms appear in marks belonging to the same corporation.

The *swastika* is far from being an exclusively Eastern symbol, as is sometimes believed; in fact, it is one of the most widespread symbols, found practically everywhere from the Far East to the Far West, and even among certain indigenous peoples of North America. In modern times, it has been preserved mainly in India and in Central and East Asia, and it is probably only in these regions that its meaning is still known; however, even in Europe itself it has not disappeared entirely²⁹. In Lithuania and Courland, peasants still draw this sign on their dwellings; they undoubtedly no longer know its meaning and see it only as a kind of protective talisman; but what is perhaps even more curious is that they give it its Sanskrit name of *svastika*³⁰. In ancient times, we find this symbol particularly among the Celts and in pre-Hellenic Greece; and even in the West, as L. Charbonneau-Lassay has said, it was formerly one of the emblems of Christ and remained in use as such until the end of the Middle Ages. Like the point in the centre of the circle and the wheel, this symbol undoubtedly dates back to prehistoric times; for our part, we see in it, without the slightest doubt, one of the vestiges of the primordial tradition³³.

We have not yet finished explaining all the meanings of the Centre: if it is first and foremost a starting point, it is also a point of arrival; everything has come from it, and everything must ultimately return to it. Since all things exist only because of the Principle, without which they could not subsist, there must be a permanent link between them and it, represented by the radii that connect all points on the circumference to the centre; but these radii can be travelled in two opposite directions: first from the centre to the circumference, then returning from the circumference to the centre. They are like two complementary phases, the first of which is represented by a centrifugal movement and the second by a centripetal movement; these two phases can be compared to those of breathing, according to a symbolism often referred to in Hindu doctrines; and, on the other hand, there is also a no less

²⁹We are not referring here to the entirely artificial use of *the swastika*, especially by certain German political groups, which have arbitrarily made it a symbol of anti-Semitism, on the pretext that this emblem is characteristic of the so-called "Aryan race"; all this is pure fantasy.

³⁰ Lithuanian is, moreover, the European language most similar to Sanskrit.

³¹There are several variants of *the swastika*, for example a form of curved branches (resembling two crossed S's), which we have seen particularly on a Gallic coin. On the other hand, certain figures that have retained only a purely decorative character, such as the one known as the "fret", originally derive from *the swastika*.

³² *Reg.*, March 1926, pp. 302-303.

³³ [On the *swastika*, see also *infra*, chap. XVII].

notable with the physiological function of the heart. Indeed, blood leaves the heart, spreads throughout the body, enlivening it, and then returns; the role of the heart as an organic centre is therefore truly complete and corresponds entirely to the idea that, in general, we must form of the Centre in the fullness of its meaning.

All beings, who depend on their Principle in everything they are, must, consciously or unconsciously, aspire to return to it; this tendency to return to the Centre also has its symbolic representation in all traditions. We refer to ritual orientation, which is properly the direction towards a spiritual centre, an earthly and tangible image of the true "Centre of the World"; the orientation of Christian churches is, in essence, nothing more than a particular case of this symbolism, and refers essentially to the same idea, common to all religions. In Islam, this orientation (*qiblah*) is like the materialisation, if one may say so, of the intention (*niyyah*) by which all the powers of being must be directed towards the divine Principle³⁴; and it would be easy to find many other examples. Much could be said on this subject; we will undoubtedly have opportunities to return to it in the continuation of these studies³⁵, and so we will content ourselves, for the moment, with briefly indicating the last aspect of the symbolism of the Centre. In short, the Centre is both the beginning and the end of all things; it is, according to a well-known symbolism, *the alpha and the omega*. Better still, it is the beginning, the centre and the end; and these three aspects are represented by the three elements of the monosyllable *Aum*, to which L. Charbonneau-Lassay had alluded as an emblem of Christ, and whose association with the *swastika* among the signs of the Carmelite monastery in Loudun seems particularly significant to us. Indeed, this symbol, much more complete than the alpha and omega, and capable of meanings that could give rise to almost indefinite developments, is, by one of the most astonishing coincidences to be found, common to both the ancient Hindu tradition and medieval Christian esotericism; and, in both cases, it is equally and par excellence a symbol of the Word, which is truly and really the "Centre of the World"³⁷.

³⁴ The word "intention" should be understood here in its strictly etymological sense (from *in-tendere*, 'to tend towards').

³⁵ [See *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. VIII].

³⁶ [Here are Charbonneau-Lassay's words: "...At the end of the 15th century, or in the 16th century, a monk from the monastery of Loudun, Brother Guyot, covered the walls of the staircase of his chapel with a whole series of esoteric emblems of Jesus Christ, some of which, repeated several times, are of Eastern origin, such as the *Swastika and the Sauwastika*, the *Aum* and the *Crucified Serpent*" (*Reg.*, March 1926)].

³⁷ [R. Guénon had already discussed the symbolism of the monosyllable *Aum* in *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chapter XVI; he later returned to the subject on several occasions, most notably in *Le Roi du*

IX

*SYMBOLIC FLOWERS*³⁸

The use of flowers in symbolism is, as everyone knows, very widespread and found in most traditions; it is also very complex, and our intention here can only be to indicate some of its more general meanings. It is clear, in fact, that depending on which flower is taken as a symbol, the meaning will vary, at least in its secondary forms, and also that, as is generally the case in symbolism, each flower can have a plurality of meanings, which are moreover linked to each other by certain correspondences.

One of its main meanings refers to the feminine or passive principle of manifestation, that is, to *Prākṛti*, the universal substance; and in this respect, the flower is equivalent to a number of other symbols, among which one of the most important is the chalice. Like the chalice, the flower evokes by its very form the idea of a "receptacle," as *Prākṛti* is for the influences emanating from *Pūruṣha*, and we also commonly speak of the "calyx" of a flower. On the other hand, the opening of the flower represents at the same time the development of manifestation itself, considered as the production of *Prākṛti*; this double meaning is particularly clear in a case such as that of the lotus, which is in the East the symbolic flower par excellence and which has the special characteristic of opening on the surface of the water, which, as we have explained elsewhere, always represents the domain of a particular state of manifestation, or the plane of reflection of the "Celestial Ray" that expresses the influence of *Puruṣha* in the act of exercising itself over that domain to realise the possibilities potentially contained within it, enveloped in the primordial undifferentiation of *Prakṛiti*³⁹.

The aforementioned connection with the cup naturally brings to mind the symbolism of the Grail in Western traditions; and in this regard, it is worth making a very interesting observation. It is well known that among the various objects that legend associates with the Grail, there is a spear, which, in the Christian adaptation, is none other than the spear of the centurion Longinus, with which the wound was opened in Christ's side from which the blood and water collected by Joseph of Arimathea in the cup at the Last Supper flowed; but it is no less true that this spear, or one of its equivalents, already existed as a symbol that was in a way complementary to the cup.

Monde, chap. IV. Furthermore, in this same compilation, it is referred to in chaps. XIX: "The hieroglyph of Cancer," and XXII: "Some aspects of the symbolism of the Fish."

³⁸ [Published in *É.T.*, April 1936.]

³⁹ See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XXIV.

in pre-Christian traditions⁴⁰. When placed vertically, the spear is one of the symbols of the 'Axis of the World', which is identified with the 'Celestial Ray' we have just mentioned; in this regard, we can also recall the frequent assimilations of the sun's rays to weapons such as spears or arrows, which we cannot dwell on in this work. On the other hand, in certain representations, drops of blood fall from the spear itself into the cup; such drops are here nothing more, in their main significance, than the image of the influences emanating from *Purusha*, which moreover evokes the Vedic symbolism of the sacrifice of *Purusha* at the origin of manifestation⁴¹; and this brings us directly back to the question of floral symbolism, from which we have only apparently strayed with the above considerations.

In the myth of Adonis (whose name, incidentally, means 'the Lord'), when the hero is mortally wounded by the tusk of a wild boar, which plays the same role here as the spear⁴², his blood, spilling onto the ground, gives birth to a flower; and other similar examples could undoubtedly be found easily. This is also found in Christian symbolism; thus, L. Charbonneau-Lausay has pointed out "a 12th-century communion plate, where the blood from the wounds of the Crucified One is seen falling in small drops that turn into roses, and the 13th-century stained-glass window in Angers Cathedral, where the divine blood, flowing in streams, also spreads out in the form of roses"⁴³. In the West, the rose, together with the lily, is one of the most common equivalents of what the lotus is in the East; here, it seems that the symbolism of the flower refers only to the production of manifestation⁴⁴ and that *Prākṛti* is rather represented by the soil itself that the blood enlivens; but there are also cases where this does not seem to be the case. In the same article just cited, Charbonneau-Lassay reproduces a design embroidered on an altar canon from the Abbey of Fontevrault, dating from the first half of the 16th century and

⁴⁰Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. V. Among the various cases in which the spear is used as a symbol, curious similarities can be found even in details: thus, among the Greeks, Achilles' spear was supposed to heal the wounds it caused; medieval legend attributes the same virtue to the spear of the Passion.

⁴¹ In certain respects, a connection could also be established here with the well-known symbolism of the pelican.

⁴² [On the symbolism of the boar and its "polar" nature, which also relates it precisely to the "Axis of the World", see chapter XI, "The Boar and the Bear".

⁴³ *Reg.*, January 1925. We should also point out, as related to a connected symbolism, the representation of the five wounds of Christ by five roses, one in the centre of the cross and the other four between its arms, a combination that also constitutes one of the main symbols of the Rosicrucians.

⁴⁴ It must be made very clear, so that this interpretation does not give rise to any objections, that there is a very close relationship between "Creation" and "Redemption", which are ultimately but two aspects of the operation of the divine Word.

It is now preserved in the museum in Naples, where the rose can be seen at the foot of a spear placed vertically, along which drops of blood rain down. That rose appears there associated with the spear in exactly the same way as the cup is in other cases, and it certainly seems to be collecting drops of blood rather than being the result of the transformation of one of them. Moreover, it is clear that the two meanings are in no way opposed but rather complement each other, for the drops, falling on the rose, enliven it and cause it to open; and it goes without saying that this symbolic role of blood has, in all cases, its *raison d'être* in its direct relationship with the vital principle, transposed here to the cosmic order. This rain of blood is also equivalent to the 'heavenly dew' which, according to Kabbalistic doctrine, emanates from the 'Tree of Life', another figure of the 'Axis of the World', and whose life-giving influence is mainly linked to the ideas of regeneration and resurrection, manifestly connected with the idea of Christian redemption; and dew also plays an important role in alchemical and Rosicrucian symbolism⁴⁵.

When the flower is considered as a representation of the development of manifestation, there is also an equivalence between it and other symbols, among which the wheel stands out in particular. The wheel is found practically everywhere, with a varying number of spokes depending on the design, but always with a particular symbolic value in itself. The most common types are six- and eight-spoked wheels; the Celtic "little wheel", which has been perpetuated throughout most of the Western Middle Ages, appears in one or other of these forms; the same figures, and especially the second, are very frequently found in Eastern countries, particularly in Chaldea and Assyria, India and Tibet. Now, the wheel is always, above all, a symbol of the World; in the symbolic language of the Hindu tradition, there is constant reference to the 'wheel of things' or the 'wheel of life', which clearly corresponds to this meaning; and references to the 'cosmic wheel' are no less frequent in the Far Eastern tradition. This is enough to establish the close relationship between such figures and symbolic flowers, whose opening is also a radiation around the centre, since they are also "centred" figures; and it is well known that in Hindu tradition the World is sometimes represented in the form of a lotus in the centre of which rises Meru, the "polar mountain". There are, moreover, obvious correspondences that further reinforce this equivalence between the number of petals on some of these flowers and the number of spokes on the wheel: thus, the lily has six petals and the lotus, in the most common representations, has eight, so that they correspond respectively

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. III. The similarity between the name for dew (*ros*) and that for rose (*rosa*) cannot fail to be noticed by those who are aware of how frequently certain phonetic symbolism is employed.

to the six- and eight-spoked wheels we have just referred to⁴⁶. As for the rose, it is depicted with a variable number of petals; we will only note in this regard that, in general, the numbers five and six refer respectively to the 'microcosm' and the 'macrocosm'; Furthermore, in alchemical symbolism, the five-petalled rose, located at the centre of the cross representing the quaternion of the elements, is also, as we have pointed out in another study, the symbol of the "quintessence", which, moreover, plays a role analogous to that of *Prākṛti*⁴⁷ with regard to bodily manifestation. Finally, we will mention the relationship between six-petalled flowers and the six-spoked wheel with some other equally widespread symbols, such as that of the 'chrism', to which we intend to return on another occasion⁴⁸. For now, it will suffice to have shown the two most important similarities of floral symbols: with the cup insofar as they refer to *Prākṛti*, and with the wheel insofar as they refer to cosmic manifestation; moreover, the relationship between these two meanings is ultimately one of principle and consequence, since *Prākṛti* is the very root of all manifestation.

⁴⁶We have recorded, as a very clear example of such equivalence in the Middle Ages, the eight-spoked wheel and eight-petalled flower facing each other on the same carved stone, embedded in the façade of the old church of Saint-Mexme in Chinon, which most likely dates from the Carolingian period. The wheel is also very often depicted in Romanesque churches, and the Gothic rose window itself, whose name assimilates it to floral symbols, seems to be derived from it, thus linking it, through an unbroken lineage, to the ancient Celtic 'little wheel'.

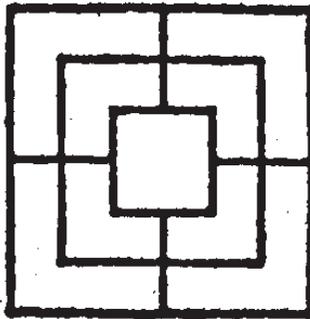
⁴⁷"La Théorie hindoue des cinq éléments" [*É. T.*, August-September 1935].

⁴⁸L. Charbonneau-Lassay has pointed out the association between the rose and the chrism (*Reg.*, March 1926 issue) in a figure of this type that he has reproduced based on a Merovingian brick; the central rose has six petals, oriented according to the branches of the chrism; furthermore, the chrism is enclosed in a circle, which shows as clearly as possible its identity with the six-spoked wheel. [On this point of symbolism, see also chapter VIII: "The idea of the Centre in ancient traditions", L: "The symbols of analogy", and LXVII: "The 'four of number'".]

X

*THE TRIPLE DRUIDIC ENCLOSURE*⁴⁹

In *Atlantis* (July-August 1928), Mr Paul Le Cour pointed out a curious symbol carved into a druidic stone discovered around 1800 in Suèvres (Loir-et-Cher) and studied before him by E. C. Florance, president of the Loir-et-Cher Natural History and Anthropology Society. He even believes that the location where the stone was found could have been the site of the annual meeting of the Druids, located, according to Caesar, on the borders of the country of the Carnutes⁵⁰. He was struck by the fact that the same sign was found on a Gallo-Roman optician's seal, discovered around 1870 in Villefranche-sur-Cher (Loir-et-Cher), and suggested that it could be the representation of a triple sacred enclosure. The symbol is indeed formed by three concentric squares joined together by four perpendicular lines (fig. 7).

**Fig. 7**

At the same time that the *Atlantis* article appeared, Mr Florance was shown the same symbol engraved on a large foundation stone of a buttress of the church of Sainte-Gemme (Loir-et-Cher), a stone that appears to predate the construction of the church and could even date back to the

⁴⁹ [Published in *V. I.*, June 1929].

⁵⁰ Caesar says: *in finibus Carnutum*; the interpretation, it seems to us, is open to some doubt, since *finis* does not always mean 'borders' but often refers to the country itself. On the other hand, nothing reminiscent of the *Omphalos* seems to have been found in Suèvres, which, in the *Mediolanon* or *Medionémeton* of Gaul, must have been represented by a menhir, according to the custom of the Celtic peoples.

druidism. It is true, however, that, like many other Celtic symbols, particularly that of the wheel, this figure remained in use until the Middle Ages, as L. Charbonneau-Lassay has pointed out among the graffiti on the tower of Chinon⁵¹, together with

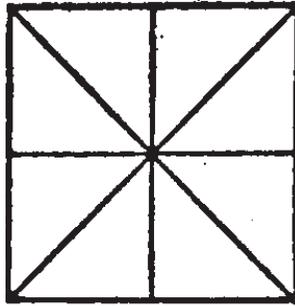


Fig. 8

another no less ancient symbol, formed of eight rays and circumscribed by a square (fig. 8), found on the "betyl" of Kermaria studied by J. Loth⁽⁵²⁾ -a monument to which we have had occasion to refer elsewhere⁵³. P. Le Cour indicates that the symbol of the

⁵¹ *The Radiant Heart of Chinon Keep.*

⁵² "L'Omphalos chez les Celtes," in *Revue des Études anciennes*, July-September 1915.

⁵³ *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. XI; 'V "L" 'Omphalos', symbole du centre' in *Reg.*, June 1926. [The article cited here was taken up again by the author in *Le Roi du Monde*, in the chapter mentioned, but without some details concerning the stone in question, which is why it is cited in this note. Here is the passage that is important to know:

A notable example of the representation of *the Omphalos* is the bethyl of Kermaria, near Point-l'Abbé (Finistère), whose general shape is that of a regular cone, rounded at the apex. At the bottom there is a sinuous line that could be nothing other than a stylised form of a serpent (...); the apex is surrounded by a fret. On one of the sides there is a *swastika*; and the presence of this sign (from which, incidentally, the fret is derived) would suffice to confirm in the clearest possible way the significance of this curious monument. On another side there is another symbol that is no less interesting: it is a figure with eight rays, circumscribed by a square instead of a circle, like a wheel; this figure is therefore entirely comparable to the British flag, which must also be of Celtic origin. The strangest thing is that this sign on the bethyl of Kermaria is reproduced exactly, in several copies, in the graffiti on the tower of Chinon (...); and in the same graffiti we also see the figure with eight rays drawn on the oval shield held by a kneeling figure. (*Note*: This shield clearly recalls the eight-spoked wheel, as does the allegorical figure of Albion, which has the same shape and recalls the six-spoked wheel, as we have pointed out). This symbol must have played a role

The triple square can also be found in Rome, in the 13th-century cloister of St. Paul's, and was also known in ancient times outside the Celtic world, as he himself has found it several times in the Acropolis of Athens and on the slabs of the Parthenon and the Erechtheion.

The interpretation of the symbol as representing a triple enclosure seems to us to be very accurate; and P. Le Cour, in this regard, establishes a connection with what Plato says when speaking of the metropolis of the Atlanteans, 'describing Poseidon's palace as built in the centre of three concentric enclosures linked by canals, which in effect forms a figure analogous to the one in question, but circular instead of square.

Now then, what could be the significance of these three enclosures? We immediately thought that they must represent three degrees of initiation, so that together they would have formed, in a way, the figure of the Druidic hierarchy; and the fact that the same figure is found among peoples other than the Celts would indicate that in other traditional forms there were hierarchies constituted according to the same model, which is entirely normal. The division of initiation into three degrees is, moreover, the most frequent and, we might say, the most fundamental; all the others represent, in short, only more or less complicated subdivisions or developments of it. This idea was suggested to us by our previous knowledge of documents which, concerning certain Masonic systems of high degrees, describe these degrees precisely as so many successive enclosures drawn around a central point⁵⁴; undoubtedly, such documents are incomparably less ancient than the monuments discussed here, but it is nevertheless possible to find in them an echo of traditions that are much older, and, in any case, they offered us an opportunity to establish interesting connections.

quite important in Templar symbolism (*note*: the same figure has also been preserved in modern Freemasonry, but there it is considered only as the 'key to numbers', and it is shown that it is indeed possible to break it down in order to obtain all the Arabic numerals in a more or less schematic form), as 'it is also found in ancient Templar commanderies; it is also seen as a heraldic sign on a large coat of arms, on the head of the funerary statue of a 13th-century Templar from the commandery of La Roche-en-Cloué (Vienna), and on a carved stone in the commandery of Mauleon, near Châtillon-sur-Sèvre (Deux-Sèvres) (Charbonneau-Lassay, *Le Coeur rayonnant du donjon de Chinon*, p. 16). This latter representation is, moreover, that of a wheel proper; and it is but one example among many others of the continuation of Celtic traditions throughout the Middle Ages. We have omitted to point out earlier, regarding this symbol, that one of the main meanings of the number 8 is 'justice' and 'balance', ideas which, as we have shown, are directly linked to that of the Centre (the importance of the *Ogdoad* for the Pythagoreans is also well known).

⁵⁴Le Cour observes that the central point is marked in most of the figures he has seen in the Acropolis of Athens.

It should be borne in mind that the explanation proposed here is by no means incompatible with others, such as that of P. Le Cour, who would refer the three enclosures to the three circles of existence recognised by Celtic tradition; these three circles, which are also found in Christianity in another form, are, moreover, the same as the 'three worlds' of Hindu tradition. In this tradition, moreover, the celestial circles are sometimes represented as concentric enclosures surrounding *Meru*, the sacred mountain symbolising the 'Pole' or 'Axis of the World', and this is also a most remarkable concordance. Far from being mutually exclusive, the two explanations harmonise perfectly, and it could even be said that in a certain sense they coincide, for if we are dealing with real initiation, its degrees correspond to so many states of being, and these states are what in all traditions are described as different worlds, for it must be borne in mind that the 'location' is purely symbolic. We have already explained, with reference to Dante, that the heavens are properly "spiritual hierarchies", that is, degrees of initiation⁵⁵, and it goes without saying that they refer at the same time to the degrees of universal Existence, for, as we said then⁵⁶, by virtue of the constitutive analogy of the macrocosm and the microcosm, the initiatory process rigorously reproduces the cosmogonic process. We would add that, in general, the characteristic of any truly initiatory interpretation is that it is never exclusive, but rather, on the contrary, it synthesises all other possible interpretations; that is why symbolism, with its multiple overlapping meanings, is the normal means of expression of all true initiatory teaching.

With this same explanation, the meaning of the four straight lines arranged in the shape of a cross linking the three enclosures becomes immediately clear: they are indeed channels through which the teaching of traditional doctrine is communicated from top to bottom, starting from the highest degree, which is its repository, and distributed hierarchically to the other degrees. The central part of the figure therefore corresponds to the "source of teaching" referred to by Dante and the "Fideli de Amor"⁵⁷, and the crucial arrangement of the four channels that depart from it identifies them with the four rivers of *Pardés*.

In this regard, it should be noted that there is an important distinction to be made between the two shapes, circular and square, of the figure of the three enclosures: they refer, respectively, to the symbolism of the earthly Paradise and that of the heavenly Jerusalem, according to

⁵⁵ *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chap. II.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. VI.

⁵⁷ See our article in *V. I.*, February 1929.

as we have explained in one of our works⁵⁸. Indeed, there is always an analogy and correspondence between the beginning and the end of any cycle; but, at the end, the circle is replaced by the square, and this indicates the realisation of what Hermeticists symbolically referred to as the 'squaring of the circle'⁵⁹: the sphere, which represents the development of possibilities through the expansion of the central primordial point, is transformed into a cube when that development has been completed and the final equilibrium has been reached by the cycle in question⁶⁰. To apply these observations more specifically to the question at hand, we will say that the circular shape must represent the starting point of a tradition, as is the case with Atlantis, and the square shape must represent its end point, corresponding to the establishment of a traditional form derived from it. In the first case, the centre of the figure would then be the source of the doctrine, while in the second it would more properly be its repository, with spiritual authority playing a primarily preservative role in the latter case; but, naturally, the symbolism of the 'source of teaching' applies to both cases⁶².

From the point of view of numerical symbolism, it should also be noted that the three squares together form the duodenary. Arranged differently (fig. 9), the three

⁵⁸ *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. XI; on the relationship between the earthly Paradise and the heavenly Jerusalem, see also *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chap. VIII.

⁵⁹ This squaring cannot be obtained in the 'becoming' or in the movement of the cycle itself, since it expresses the fixation resulting from the 'passage to the limit', and, since all cyclical movement is properly indefinite, the limit cannot be reached by successively and analytically traversing all the points corresponding to each moment of the development of the manifestation.

⁶⁰It would be easy to establish a connection here with the Masonic symbol of the "cubic stone," which also refers to the idea of completion and perfection, that is, the realisation of the fullness of possibilities implied in a given state. [Cf. chap. XLVIII: "Black Stone and Cubic Stone"].

⁶¹ On the other hand, it must be established that the Atlantean tradition is not, however, the primordial tradition for the present *Manvantara*, and that it is only secondary to the Hyperborean tradition; it can only relatively be taken as a starting point, as far as a certain period is concerned, which is only one of the subdivisions of *the Manvantara*. [*Manvantara*: a complete cycle of "humanity", divided into four periods, according to Hindu tradition. (*Translator's note*).]

⁶²The other figure reproduced *above* (fig. 8) is also often circular in shape: it is one of the most common varieties of the wheel, and this eight-spoked wheel is in a sense equivalent to the eight-petalled lotus, more typical of Eastern traditions, just as the six-spoked wheel is equivalent to the six-petalled lily (see our articles on "Le Christisme et le Coeur dans les anciennes marques corporatives" and "L'idée du Centre dans les traditions antiques", in *Reg.*, November 1925 and May 1926 [in this compilation, respectively, chap. L: "The symbols of analogy", and VIII, with the same title quoted]).

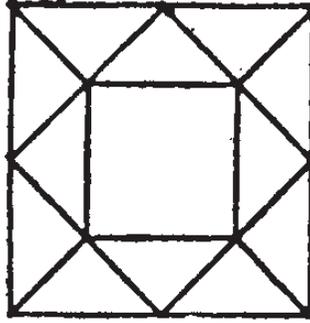


Fig. 9

squares, to which four cross lines are added, constitute the figure in which ancient astrologers inscribed the Zodiac⁶³; this figure was also considered to be that of heavenly Jerusalem, with its twelve gates, three on each side; and there is an obvious connection with the meaning we have just indicated for the square shape. Undoubtedly, many other connections could be explored, but we believe that these few notes, however incomplete, will already help to shed some light on the mysterious question of the triple Druidic enclosure⁶⁴.

⁶³The four straight lines of the cross are then situated diagonally with respect to the two extreme squares, and the space between them is divided into twelve equal right-angled triangles.

⁶⁴ [As a supplement to this article, we add here the following review, published by R. Guénon, in *V. I.*, July 1929:

In *Atlantis* (21 April issue), Paul Le Cour continues his research on the symbol of the three enclosures; he reproduces a curious document which appears, unfortunately without any indication of its origin, in Canon Edme Thomas's work on Autun Cathedral, and which is said to be a representation of the Gallic city of the Aedui. The same article quotes some reflections by L. Charbonneau-Lassay, who says, in particular, that he would not be surprised if Christians had made this symbol an image of heavenly Jerusalem. Now, in the article we devoted to this question last month, we pointed out some connections in the same vein, and we recalled that another arrangement of the three squares constitutes one of the usual figures of heavenly Jerusalem. We are pleased to point out this coincidence, which does not surprise us, since it has often happened that Charbonneau-Lassay and we have independently and by different means arrived at the same conclusions on many points concerning symbolism.

XI

THE GUARDIANS OF THE HOLY LAND ⁶⁵

Among the attributes of the orders of chivalry, and more particularly of the Templars, one of the best known, but not the best understood in general, is that of "guardians of the Holy Land". Surely, if one sticks to the most superficial meaning, an immediate explanation for this fact can be found in the connection between the origin of these orders and the Crusades, since, for Christians as well as Jews, it certainly seems that the "Holy Land" refers only to Palestine. However, the question becomes more complex when one notes that various Eastern organisations whose initiatory character is not in doubt, such as the Assassins and the Druze, have also taken the same title of "guardians of the Holy Land". Here, in fact, it can no longer be a question of Palestine; and, on the other hand, it is noteworthy that these organisations share a considerable number of features with the Western orders of chivalry, and that some of the latter have even been historically linked to the former. What, then, should actually be understood by "Holy Land", and what exactly does this role of "guardians" correspond to, which seems to be linked to a particular type of initiation that could be called "chivalric" initiation, giving this term a broader meaning than is usually attributed to it, but which the analogies between the various forms of what is at stake would amply justify?

We have already shown elsewhere, especially in our study on *Le Roi du Monde*, that the expression "Holy Land" has a number of synonyms: "Pure Land", "Land of the Saints", "Land of the Blessed", "Land of the Living," "Land of Immortality." These equivalent designations are found in the traditions of all peoples and always apply essentially to a spiritual centre whose location in a particular region can be understood, depending on the case, literally or symbolically, or both at the same time. Every "Holy Land" is also designated by expressions such as "Centre of the World" or "Heart of the World," which requires some explanation, since these uniform designations, although applied in different ways, could easily lead to certain confusions.

If we consider, for example, the Hebrew tradition, we see that the *Sefer Yetsiráh* speaks of the "holy Palace" or "inner Palace," which is the true "Centre of the World" in the cosmogonic sense of the term; and we also see that this "holy Palace" has its image in the human world in the residence, in a certain place, of the

⁶⁵ [Published in *V. I.*, August-September 1929].

Shechinah, which is the "real presence" of the Divinity⁶⁶. For the people of Israel, that residence of the *Shechinah* was the Tabernacle (*Mishkan*), which for that reason was considered by them to be the "Heart of the World", since it effectively constituted the spiritual centre of their own tradition. This centre, however, was not initially a fixed place; when dealing with a nomadic people, as was the case, their spiritual centre had to move with them, while always remaining at the heart of that movement. "The residence of the *Shechinah*," says P. Vuillaud, "was only fixed on the day the Temple was built, for which David had prepared the gold, silver and everything else Solomon needed to complete the work⁶⁷. The Tabernacle of the Holiness of *Jehovah*, the residence of the *Shechinah*, is the Holy of Holies, which is the heart of the Temple, which is in turn the centre of Zion (Jerusalem), just as holy Zion is the centre of the Land of Israel, just as the Land of Israel is the centre of the world." It can be noted that there is a series of extensions here, gradually given to the idea of centre in the applications made of it successively, so that the name "Centre of the World" or "Heart of the World" is finally extended to the Land of Israel in its entirety, insofar as it is considered the "Holy Land"; and it should be added that, in the same respect, it also receives, among other names, that of "Land of the Living". There is talk of the "Land of the Living comprising seven lands", and P. Vuillaud observes that "this Land is Canaan, in which there were seven peoples"⁶⁹, which is accurate in the literal sense, although a symbolic interpretation is equally possible. The expression "Land of the Living" is exactly synonymous with "abode of immortality," and Catholic liturgy applies it to the heavenly abode of the elect, which was in effect represented by the Promised Land, since Israel, upon entering it, was to see the end of its tribulations. From another point of view, the Land of Israel, as a spiritual centre, was an image of Heaven, for, according to Jewish tradition, "everything that the Israelites do on earth is fulfilled according to the types of what happens in the heavenly world"⁷⁰.

⁶⁶See our articles on "Le Coeur du Monde dans la Kabbale hébraïque" and "La Terre Sainte et le Coeur du Monde" in the magazine *Reg.*, July-August and September-October 1926. [These articles were reprinted in *Le Roi du Monde* (1927), chapters III and VI, and were to be reprinted again in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (1931), chapters IV and VII].

⁶⁷ It is worth noting that the expressions used here evoke the frequently established assimilation between the construction of the Temple, considered in its ideal significance, and the "Great Work" of the Hermeticists.

⁶⁸ *La Kabbale juive*, vol. I, p. 509.

⁶⁹ *The Kabbalah*, vol. II, p. 116.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, vol. I, p. 501.

What is said here about the Israelites can equally be said of all peoples who possess a truly orthodox tradition; and, indeed, the people of Israel are not the only ones who have assimilated their country to the 'Heart of the World' and considered it as an image of Heaven, both ideas which, moreover, are in reality one and the same. The use of identical symbolism is found among other peoples who also possessed a "Holy Land", that is, a region where a spiritual centre was established that played a role comparable to that of the Temple of Jerusalem for the Hebrews. In this respect, the "Holy Land" is like the "Omphalos", which was always the visible image of the "Centre of the World" for the people who inhabited the region where it was located⁷¹.

This symbolism is particularly prevalent among the ancient Egyptians; indeed, according to Plutarch, "the Egyptians give their country the name *Khemia*⁷², and compare it to a heart"⁷³. The reason given by this author is rather strange: "That country is indeed warm and humid, it is contained in the southern parts of the inhabited earth, extending to the south as in the body of man the heart extends to the left", for "the Egyptians consider the East as the face of the world, the North as the right and the South as the left"⁷⁴. These are nothing more than superficial similarities, and the real reason must be quite different, since the same comparison with the heart generally applies to any land to which a sacred and "central" character is attributed in a spiritual sense, regardless of its geographical location. Moreover, according to Plutarch himself, the heart, which represented Egypt, also represented Heaven: "The Egyptians," he says, "represent Heaven, which cannot grow old because it is eternal, by a heart placed on a brazier whose flame feeds its ardour"⁷⁵. Thus, while the heart is represented by a vessel that is none other than what Western medieval legends would refer to as the 'Holy Grail', it is at the same time and simultaneously the hieroglyphic symbol of Egypt and Heaven.

⁷¹ See our article on "Les pierres de foudre" [here, chap. XXV, "The 'lightning stones'"]

⁷² *Kēmi*, in the Egyptian language, means 'black earth', a designation whose equivalent is also found in other peoples; from this word comes the word *alchemy* (where *al-* is nothing more than the Arabic article), which originally designated the hermetic science, that is, the priestly science of Egypt.

⁷³ *Isis and Osiris*, 33; French translation by Mario Meunier, p. 116.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 32, p. 112. In India, on the contrary, the "right side" (*dākshina*) is midday, but, despite appearances, it amounts to the same thing in both cases, since it should be understood as the side that one has on the right when facing east, and it is easy to imagine the left side of the world as extending to the right of the observer, and vice versa, as is the case for two people facing each other.

⁷⁵ *Isis and Osiris*, 10, p. 49. It should be noted that this symbol, with the meaning given to it here, seems to be linked to that of the Phoenix.

The conclusion to be drawn from these considerations is that there are as many particular "Holy Lands" as there are regular traditional forms, since they represent the spiritual centres that correspond respectively to the different forms; but if the same symbolism applies uniformly to all these "Holy Lands", it is because the spiritual centres all have an analogous constitution, and often even in very precise details, because they are so many images of the same single and supreme centre, which alone is truly the "Centre of the World", but from which they take their attributes as participants in its nature through direct communication, in which traditional orthodoxy resides, and as effective representatives of it, in a more or less external manner, for specific times and places. In other words, there is a "Holy Land" par excellence, the prototype of all others, the spiritual centre to which all others are subordinate, the seat of the primordial tradition, from which all particular traditions derive by adaptation to such and such defined conditions of a people or an era. That "Holy Land" par excellence is the "supreme region", according to the meaning of the Sanskrit term *Paradeça*, from which the Chaldeans made *Pardès* and the Westerners *Paradise*; it is, in effect, the "Earthly Paradise", certainly the starting point of all tradition, which has at its centre the single source from which the four rivers flow towards the four cardinal points⁷⁶, and is at the same time the "abode of immortality", as is easy to see by referring to the first chapters of *Genesis*⁷⁷

We cannot return here to all the questions concerning the Supreme Centre, which we have dealt with more or less completely elsewhere: its preservation, in a more or less hidden manner depending on the period, from the beginning to the end of the cycle, that is, from the 'Earthly Paradise' to the 'Heavenly Jerusalem', which represent the two extreme phases; the many names by which it is designated, such as *Tula*, *Lûz*, *Salêm*, *Agarttha*; the different symbols that represent it, such as the mountain, the cave, the island and many others, most of which are directly related to the symbolism of the "Pole" or the "Axis of the World". To these representations we could also add those that present it as a city, a citadel, a temple or a palace, depending on the particular aspect from which it is viewed; and this is an opportunity to recall

⁷⁶ This source is identical to the "source of teaching" to which we have previously had occasion to make various references here.

⁷⁷ That is why the "source of teaching" is at the same time the "source of youth" (*fons iuventutis*), because whoever drinks from it is freed from the temporal condition; it is, moreover, located at the foot of the "Tree of Life" (see our study on "Le Langage secret de Dante et des Fidèles d'Amour" in *V. I.*, February 1929) and its waters are clearly identified with the "elixir of longevity" of the Hermeticists (the idea of "longevity" here has the same meaning as in Eastern traditions) or the "elixir of immortality", which is referred to everywhere under various names.

at the same time as Solomon's Temple, more directly linked to our subject, the triple enclosure we have recently discussed, considering it as a representation of the initiatory hierarchy of certain traditional centres⁷⁸, and also the mysterious labyrinth, which, in a more complex form, is linked to a similar conception, with the difference that it highlights above all the idea of "making one's way" towards the hidden centre⁷⁹.

We must now add that the symbolism of the "Holy Land" has a double meaning: whether it refers to the supreme Centre or to a subordinate centre, it represents not only this centre itself but also, by a very natural association, the tradition that emanates from it or is preserved in it, that is, in the first case, the primordial tradition, and in the second, a particular form of tradition⁸⁰. This double meaning is found analogously, and very clearly, in the symbolism of the "Holy Grail", which is both a vessel (*grasale*) and a book (*gradale or graduale*); the latter aspect clearly designates tradition, while the former more directly concerns the state corresponding to the effective possession of that tradition, that is to say, the 'Edenic state', in the case of primordial tradition; and whoever has reached such a state is, for that very reason, reintegrated into *the Pardes*, so that it can be said that their dwelling place is henceforth in the 'Centre of the World'⁸¹

It is not without reason that we have linked these two symbols here, for their close similarity shows that when we speak of the 'knighthood of the Holy Grail' or the 'Guardians of the Holy Land', both expressions should be understood to mean exactly the same thing.

⁽⁷⁸⁾See our article on "The triple druidic enclosure" [here, chap. X: "The triple druidic enclosure"]; there we have pointed out the relationship between this figure, in its two forms: circular and square, with the symbolism of the "Earthly Paradise" and the "Heavenly Jerusalem".

⁷⁹The Cretan labyrinth is the palace of *Minos*, whose name is identical to that of *Manu*, and therefore designates the primordial lawgiver. On the other hand, from what we have said here, we can understand why the labyrinth traced on the floor tiles of certain churches in the Middle Ages was considered a substitute for pilgrimage to the Holy Land for those who could not make the journey. it should be remembered that pilgrimage is one of the figures of initiation, so that the "pilgrimage to the Holy Land" is, in an esoteric sense, the same as the "search for the lost Word" or the "search for the Holy Grail".

⁸⁰ Analogously, from a cosmogonic point of view, the 'Centre of the World' is the original point from which the creative Word is uttered, which is also the Word itself.

⁸¹It is important to remember, in this regard, that in all traditions places essentially symbolise states. Furthermore, we will note that there is an obvious connection between the symbolism of the glass or cup and that of the fountain, which we discussed above: it has also been seen that, among the Egyptians, the glass was the hieroglyph for the heart, the vital centre of being. Finally, let us recall what we have already pointed out on other occasions with reference to wine as a substitute for the Vedic soma and as a symbol of occult doctrine; in all this, in one form or another, it is always a question of the 'elixir of immortality' and the restoration of the 'primordial state'.

same thing; we need to explain, as far as possible, what exactly the role of these "guardians" consists of, a role that was particularly that of the Knights Templar⁸²

To understand what this is all about, it is necessary to distinguish between the upholders of tradition, whose function is to preserve and transmit it, and those who merely receive from it, to a greater or lesser degree, a communication and, we might say, a participation.

The former, the custodians and dispensers of the doctrine, are close to the source itself, which is properly the centre; from there, the doctrine is communicated and distributed hierarchically to the various initiatory degrees, according to the currents represented by the rivers of *Pardés*, or, if we wish to return to the figuration we studied a moment ago, by the channels which, going from the interior to the exterior, link together the successive enclosures corresponding to these various degrees.

Thus, not all those who participate in the tradition have reached the same degree or perform the same functions; it would even be necessary to establish a distinction between the two, which, although they generally correspond in a certain way, are not strictly interdependent, since it may happen that a man is intellectually qualified to receive the higher degrees but is not therefore fit to perform all the functions in the initiatory organisation. Here, we must only consider the functions; and, from this point of view, we will say that the "guardians" are at the boundary of the spiritual centre, taken in its broadest sense, or in the last enclosure, through which the centre is both separated from the "outside world" and connected to it. Consequently, these 'guardians' have a dual function: on the one hand, they are properly the defenders of the 'Holy Land' in the sense that they deny access to those who do not possess the qualifications required to enter, and they constitute what we have called its 'external cover', that is, they hide it from profane eyes; on the other hand, they also ensure certain regular relations with the outside world, as we will explain below.

It is clear that the role of defender is, to use the language of Hindu tradition, a function of *the kshátriya*; and, precisely, all "chivalrous" initiation is essentially adapted to the nature of men belonging to the warrior caste, that is, the *kshátriya*. Hence the special characteristics of this initiation, the particular symbolism it uses, and especially the intervention of an affective element, very explicitly designated by the term "Love"; we have explained ourselves sufficiently on this subject so that it is unnecessary to dwell further on it.

⁸²Saint-Yves d'Alveidre uses the expression "Templars of Agartha" to designate the "guardians" of the Supreme Centre; the considerations we formulate here will show the accuracy of this term, the meaning of which he himself may not have fully grasped.

him⁸³. But in the case of the Templars, there is something else to take into account: although their initiation was essentially "chivalrous", as befitted their nature and function, they had a dual character, both military and religious; and so it had to be if they belonged, as we have good reason to believe, to the 'guardians' of the supreme Centre, where spiritual authority and temporal power come together in their common principle, and which communicates the mark of this union to everything directly linked to it. In the Western world, where the spiritual takes a specifically religious form, the true "Guardians of the Holy Land", insofar as they had a somewhat "official" existence, had to be knights, but knights who were also monks; and, in fact, that is precisely what the Templars were.

This brings us directly to the second role of the "Guardians" of the supreme Centre, a role which consists, as we said, in ensuring certain external relations and, above all, we would add, in maintaining the link between the primordial tradition and the secondary traditions derived from it. For this to be so, it is necessary that in each traditional form there be one or more organisations constituted in that same form, according to all appearances, but composed of men who are aware of what lies beyond all forms, that is to say, of the single doctrine that is the source and essence of all others, and which is none other than the primordial tradition.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, such an organisation naturally had to take Solomon's Temple as its symbol; However, since this had long since ceased to exist in physical form, it could only have a purely ideal significance, as an image of the supreme Centre, just as every spiritual centre is subordinate to it; and the very etymology of the name Jerusalem indicates quite clearly that it is nothing more than a visible image of the mysterious *Salem* of Melchizedek. If such was the character of the Templars, in order to play the role assigned to them, which concerned a specific tradition, that of the West, they had to remain outwardly linked to the form of this tradition; but at the same time, their inner awareness of true doctrinal unity had to enable them to communicate with the representatives of other traditions⁸⁴: this explains their relations with certain Eastern organisations, and above all, naturally, with those that played a similar role to theirs in other parts of the world.

On the other hand, it is understandable, in such circumstances, that the destruction of the Order of the Temple brought with it the breakdown of relations in the West

⁸³ See "Le Langage secret de Dante et des 'Fidèles d'Amour'", in *V. I.*, February 1929.

⁸⁴This refers to what has been symbolically called the "gift of tongues"; on this subject, we refer to our article contained in the special issue of *V. I.*, dedicated to the Rosicrucians [reprinted in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XXXVII].

regular contact with the "Centre of the World"; and, indeed, the deviation that was bound to result from such a rupture can be traced back to the 14th century, and has gradually become more pronounced until our own time.

This does not mean, however, that all ties were severed once and for all; for quite some time, relations may have been maintained to a certain extent, but only in a hidden manner, through organisations such as the *Holy Fede* or the 'Faithful of Love', such as the '*Massenie* of the Holy Grail', and undoubtedly many others, all heirs to the spirit of the Order of the Temple, and mostly linked to it by a more or less direct affiliation. Those who kept this spirit alive and inspired such organisations without ever forming a definite group themselves were those who were called, with an essentially symbolic name, the Rosicrucians; but the day came when the Rosicrucians themselves had to leave the West, where conditions had become such that they could no longer carry out their work, and it is said that they then withdrew to Asia, reabsorbed in a certain way into the supreme Centre, from which they were like an emanation. For the Western world, there is no longer a "Holy Land" to guard, since the path that leads to it has been completely lost. How long will this situation last, and can we even hope that communication will be re-established sooner or later? This is a question to which we cannot give an answer; apart from the fact that we do not wish to venture any prediction, the solution depends solely on the West itself, for only by returning to normal conditions and recovering the spirit of its tradition, if it still has the possibility, will it be able to see the path leading to the 'Centre of the World' open up again.

XII

*THE LAND OF THE SUN*⁸⁵

Among the locations, often difficult to identify, that play a role in the legend of the Holy Grail, some attach particular importance to Glastonbury, which is said to be the place where Joseph of Arimathea settled after his arrival in Britain, and where many other things have been seen, as we shall discuss later. Undoubtedly, there are some more or less questionable assimilations, some of which seem to imply real confusion; but it could be that there are some reasons for this confusion that are not without interest from the point of view of 'sacred geography' and the successive locations of certain traditional centres. This is what the remarkable discoveries presented in a recently published anonymous work⁸⁶would seem to indicate, some of whose points might perhaps call for certain reservations — for example, with regard to the interpretation of place names whose origin is, in all likelihood, quite recent — but whose essential part, with the maps that support it, could hardly be considered purely fanciful. Glastonbury and the neighbouring region of Somerset would have constituted, in a very remote era that can be called 'prehistoric', an immense 'star temple' determined by the layout on the ground of gigantic effigies representing the constellations and arranged in a circular figure, a kind of image of the celestial vault projected onto the earth's surface. This would have been a series of works reminiscent of those of the ancient *mound builders* of North America; the natural layout of the rivers and hills, on the other hand, could have suggested this layout, which would indicate that the site was not chosen arbitrarily, but by virtue of a certain 'predetermination'; Nevertheless, in order to complete and perfect this design, it was necessary to employ what the author calls 'an art based on the principles of geometry'⁸⁷. If these figures have been preserved in such a way that they are still recognisable today, it is assumed that this is because the monks of Glastonbury, until the time of the Reformation, carefully preserved them, which implies that they must have maintained the knowledge of the tradition inherited from their distant predecessors, the Druids, and undoubtedly others even earlier than them, since, if the deductions drawn from the

⁸⁵ [Published in *É. T.*, January 1936].

⁸⁶ *A Guide to Glastonbury's Temple of the Stars, its giant effigies described from aerial views, maps, and from "The High History of the Holy Grail"* John M. Watkins, London.

⁸⁷ This expression is clearly intended to imply that the tradition to which this art belonged has been continued in what later became the Masonic tradition.

If the positions of the constellations represented are accurate, the origin of these figures would date back to around three thousand years before the Christian era⁸⁸.

As a whole, the circular figure in question is an immense zodiac, in which the author sees the prototype of the "Round Table"; and, indeed, this table, around which twelve main characters are seated, is truly and genuinely linked to a representation of the zodiacal cycle; but this does not in any way mean that these characters are nothing more than constellations, an overly 'naturalistic' interpretation, since the truth is that the constellations themselves are nothing more than symbols, and it should also be remembered that this 'zodiacal' constitution is found in a very general way in spiritual centres corresponding to various traditional forms⁸⁹. Thus, it seems highly doubtful to us that all the stories concerning the "Knights of the Round Table" and the "quest for the Grail" could be nothing more than a "dramatised" description, so to speak, of the stellar effigies of Glastonbury and the topography of the region; but the fact that they correspond to these is all the less implausible in that, fundamentally, it is entirely in accordance with the general laws of symbolism; and there would be no reason to be surprised if such correspondences were precise enough to be verified even in the secondary details of the legend, a matter which, moreover, we do not propose to examine here. That said, it is important to note that the Glastonbury Zodiac has certain peculiarities which, from our point of view, could be considered as marks of its 'authenticity'; first of all, it seems certain that the symbol of Libra or the Scales is absent. However, as we have explained elsewhere⁹⁰, the celestial Scales were not always zodiacal, but were primarily polar, as that name was originally applied either to the Big Dipper or to the Big and Little Dippers as a whole, constellations whose symbolism, by remarkable coincidence, is directly referred to in the name of *Arcturus*. It could be argued that this figure, in the centre of which the Pole is marked by a serpent's head clearly referring to the 'celestial Dragon'⁹¹, should be traced back to a period prior to the transfer of the Scales to the

⁽⁸⁸⁾ It would also appear, according to various indications, that the Knights Templar played a part in this preservation, which would be consistent with their supposed connection to the "Knights of the Round Table" and the role of "guardians of the Grail" attributed to them. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Templar establishments often seem to have been located near megalithic monuments or other prehistoric remains, and perhaps this is more than mere coincidence.

⁸⁹See *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. V.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, chap. X.

⁹¹ Cf. the *Sefer Yetzirah*: "The Dragon is in the middle of the sky like a king on his throne." The "wisdom of the serpent" to which the author alludes in this regard could, in a certain sense, be identified here with that of the

Zodiac; and, on the other hand, something that is particularly important to consider, the symbol of the polar Balance is related to the name *Tula*, originally given to the Hyperborean centre of the primordial tradition, the centre of which the "stellar temple" in question was undoubtedly one of the images constituted, in the course of time, as seats of spiritual powers emanating or derived more or less directly from that same tradition⁹².

On another occasion⁹³, in connection with the designation of the "Adamic" language as "Syriac", we mentioned primitive Syria, whose name properly means "sun land", and which Homer refers to as an island located "beyond Ogygia", which can only be identified as *Thule* or Hyperborean *Tula*; and "there are the revolutions of the Sun", an enigmatic expression which, naturally, may refer to the "circumpolar" nature of those revolutions, but which, at the same time, may also allude to a tracing of the zodiacal cycle on this very land, which would explain why such a tracing has been reproduced in a region destined to be an image of that centre. Here we arrive at the explanation for the confusion we pointed out at the beginning, as this may have arisen, in a somewhat normal way, from the assimilation of the image to the original centre; and, in particular, it is very difficult to see anything other than confusion of this kind in the identification of Glastonbury with the island of Avalon⁹⁴. Indeed, such an identification is incompatible with the fact that this island is always considered an inaccessible place; and, on the other hand, it also contradicts the much more plausible opinion that sees in the same region of Somerset the "kingdom of Logres", which is said to have been located in Great Britain; and it could be that this "kingdom of Logres", which would have been considered sacred territory, derived its name from *the Celtic Lug*, which evokes both the idea of "Word" and that of "Light". As for the name *Avalon*, it is clearly identical to *Ablun or Belen*, that is, to the Celtic and Hyperborean Apollo⁹⁵, so that the island of Avalon is nothing more than another designation for the "solar land", which, moreover, was symbolically transported from the

the seven polar *Rishis*. It is also curious that the dragon, among the Celts, is the symbol of the chief, and that Arthur is the son of *Uther Pendragon*. [*Rishi*; each of the ancient sages to whom Hindu tradition attributes the composition of the Vedic hymns, by direct revelation. (*Translator's note*)]

⁹² This also allows us to understand certain relationships highlighted by the author between this symbolism of the Pole and that of the "Earthly Paradise", especially in terms of the presence of the tree and the serpent; in all of this, in fact, it is always a question of the figuration of the primordial centre, and the "three vertices of the triangle" are also related to this symbolism.

⁹³ See our study on *The Science of Letters* [chapter VI of this compilation].

⁹⁴ Some have also sought to identify it with the "island of glass" mentioned in certain parts of the legend of the Grail; it is likely that here too there is a confusion with some other more hidden centre, or, if you will, one more distant in space and time, although that designation certainly does not apply to the primordial centre itself.

north to west at a certain time, corresponding to one of the major changes that occurred in traditional forms during the course of our *Manvantara*⁹⁶.

These considerations lead us to other verifications that are perhaps even stranger: an idea that seems inexplicable at first glance is that of attributing the origin of the Glastonbury Zodiac to the Phoenicians. It is true that many more or less hypothetical things are usually attributed to this people, but the very assertion of their existence in such a remote era seems even more questionable to us. However, it should be noted that the Phoenicians inhabited 'historic' Syria; could the name of the people have been subject to the same transfer as that of the country itself? What would at least suggest this is their connection with the symbolism of the Phoenix; indeed, according to Josephus, the capital of early Syria was Heliopolis, the 'City of the Sun', a name that was later given to the Egyptian city of On; and it is the first Heliopolis, and not the one in Egypt, that should in fact be credited with the cyclical symbolism of the Phoenix and its rebirths. Now, according to Diodorus Siculus, one of the sons of *Helios*, or the Sun, named *Actis*, founded the city of Heliopolis; and it so happens that the term *Actis* exists as a place name in the vicinity of Glastonbury, and in conditions that place it precisely in relation to the Phoenix, into which, according to other references, that same 'prince of Heliopolis' would have been transformed. Naturally, the author, misled by the multiple and successive applications of the same names, believes that this refers to the Egyptian Heliopolis, just as he believes he can speak literally of the 'historical' Phoenicians, which is all the more excusable given that the ancients, in the 'classical' era, often fell into such confusion; knowledge of the true Hyperborean origin of the traditions, which the author does not seem to suspect, is the only thing that can restore the real meaning of all these designations.

In the Glastonbury Zodiac, the sign of Aquarius is represented, rather unexpectedly, by a bird which the author rightly believes to be the Phoenix, carrying an object that is none other than the 'cup of immortality', that is, the Grail

⁹⁵ It is well known that Mont-Saint-Michel was formerly called Tombelaine, meaning the *Tumulus* or Mount of *Bethlehem* (and not the "tomb of Helena", according to a completely recent and fanciful interpretation); Replacing the name *Bethlehem* with that of a solar archangel does not alter the meaning in any way, as is evident; and, curiously, "Saint Michael's Hill" is also found in the region corresponding to the ancient "kingdom of Logres".

⁹⁶This transfer, as well as that of *Sapta-Rksha* from the Big Dipper to the Pleiades, corresponds particularly to a change in the starting point of the year, first solstitial and then equinoctial. The meaning of 'apple' given to the name *Avalon*, undoubtedly secondarily, in the Celtic languages, is in no way contrary to what we have just said, for it refers to the golden apples of the 'Garden of the Hesperides', that is, the solar fruits of the 'World Tree'. [On the *Sapta-Rksha*, see chap. XXIV. (*Translator's note*)].

same; and the connection that has been established in this regard with the Hindu *Garuda* is certainly accurate⁹⁷. On the other hand, according to Arab tradition, the *Ruj* or Phoenix never alights on land anywhere other than the mountain of *Qáf*, or the "polar mountain"; and from this same "polar mountain", designated by other names, comes the *soma* in Hindu and Persian traditions, which is identified with the *ámṛta*, or "ambrosia", the drink or food of immortality⁹⁸.

There is also the figure of another bird, more difficult to interpret exactly, which perhaps occupies the place of the sign of Libra, but whose position is, in any case, much closer to the Pole than to the Zodiac, since one of its wings even corresponds to the stars of the Big Dipper, which, according to what we said earlier, could only confirm this assumption. As for the nature of this bird, there are two hypotheses: that of a dove, which could indeed have some connection with the symbolism of the Grail, and that of a goose or, rather, a swan brooding over the "Egg of the World", that is, an equivalent of the Hindu *Hamsa*; to tell the truth, we find this second hypothesis much more preferable, since the symbol of the swan is closely linked to the Hyperborean Apollo, and this is even more so in the aspect we have considered here, since the Greeks made *Cycnus* the son of Apollo and *Hyria*, that is, of the Sun and the "solar earth", since *Hyria* is nothing more than another form of *Syria*, so that it is always the "sacred island", and it would be very surprising if the swan were not found in its representation⁹⁹.

Many other points would certainly deserve our attention, such as the connection between the name "Somerset" and that of the "land of the Cimmerians" and various names of peoples, whose similarity most likely indicates a community of tradition rather than a racial kinship; but this would take us too far afield, and we have said enough to show the extent of a field of research that is still almost entirely unexplored, and to give a glimpse of the conclusions that could be drawn concerning the links between different traditions and their common affiliation with the primordial tradition.

⁹⁷See our study on *The Language of Birds* [chap. VII of this compilation]. The sign of Aquarius is usually represented by Ganymede, whose relationship with "ambrosia" on the one hand and with Zeus' eagle, identical to *Garuda*, on the other, is well known.

⁹⁸ See *Le Roi du Monde*, chapters V and VI.

⁹⁹The relationship thus established between the two figures, the *Hamsa* and the *Garuda*, is also quite normal, as it even happens that both are combined in a single bird, in which the original origin of the heraldic double-headed eagle seems to be seen, although this appears more like a double *Garuda*, as the *Hamsa-Garuda* bird naturally has one swan's head and one eagle's head.

XIII

THE ZODIAC AND THE CARDINAL POINTS¹⁰⁰

In a book on castes, A. M. Hocart points out that "in the organisation of the city, the four groups are located at the different cardinal points within the quadrangular or circular enclosure"; this distribution, moreover, is not peculiar to India, but numerous examples of it can be found among the most diverse peoples; and, most often, each cardinal point is correlated with one of the elements and one of the seasons, as well as with a colour emblematic of the caste located there¹⁰¹. In India, the Brahmins occupied the north, the *Kshatriyas* the east, the *Vaishyas* the south, and the *Shudras* the west; there was thus a division into "quarters" in the sense

proper to this word*, which, in its origin, clearly designates a room in a city, although in modern usage this precise meaning seems to have been more or less completely forgotten. It goes without saying that this division is closely related to the question of orientation in general, which, as is well known, played an important role in all ancient traditional civilisations, both for cities as a whole and for individual buildings.

H o w e v e r , A. M. Hocart finds it difficult to explain the situation of each caste¹⁰²; and this perplexity stems solely from his mistake in considering the royal caste, that of the *kshátriya*s, as the first; starting from the east, he cannot find any regular order of succession, and the situation of the Brahmins in the north becomes completely unintelligible. On the contrary, there is no difficulty whatsoever if one observes the normal order, that is, if one begins with the caste that is actually first, that of the Brahmins; it is

necessary, then, to start from the north and, turning in the direction of *pradákshinâ**, the four castes are found in a perfectly regular order of succession; all that remains, then, is to understand more fully the symbolic reasons for this distribution according to the cardinal points.

¹⁰⁰ [Published in *É. T.*, October–November 1945].

¹⁰¹ *Les Castes*, pp. 46 and 49.

* The French text is based on the word *quartier*, meaning 'neighbourhood'. In the translation, it has been replaced by 'barracks', which has the same origin and originally referred to the division of a city into administrative districts

a city (the meaning of 'troop encampment' is later and secondary; and, as for the word 'neighbourhood', it originally referred more to the suburbs or outskirts). (*Translator's note*)

¹⁰² *Les Castes*, p. 55.

* *Pradákshinâ*: in Hindu tradition, ritual circumambulation from left to right. (*Translator's note*)

These reasons are essentially based on the fact that the traditional layout of the city is an image of the Zodiac; and thus we immediately find the correspondence between the cardinal points and the seasons. Indeed, as we have explained on another occasion, the winter solstice corresponds to the north, the spring equinox to the east, the summer solstice to the south, and the autumn equinox to the west. In the division into 'quarters' or 'neighbourhoods', each of these must naturally correspond to the set formed by three of the twelve zodiac signs: one of the solstice or equinoctial signs, which can be called 'cardinal' signs, and the two signs adjacent to it. There will therefore be three signs included in each 'quadrant' if the enclosure is circular, or on each side if it is quadrangular; this second shape is, moreover, more appropriate for a city, because it expresses an idea of stability that suits a fixed and permanent establishment, and also because what is at stake is not the celestial Zodiac itself, but only an image and a kind of terrestrial projection of it. In this regard, we will recall incidentally that, undoubtedly for similar reasons, ancient astrologers drew their horoscopes in a square shape, in which each side was also occupied by three zodiac signs; we will find this arrangement again in the considerations that follow¹⁰³.

According to what we have just said, it can be seen that the distribution of castes in the city follows exactly the course of the annual cycle, which normally begins at the winter solstice; it is true that some traditions begin the year at another solstice or equinox, but these are traditional forms more specifically related to certain secondary cyclical periods; The question does not arise for the Hindu tradition, which represents the most direct continuation of the primordial tradition and which also places particular emphasis on the division of the annual cycle into its two halves, ascending and descending, which open, respectively, at the two solstice "gates" of winter and summer, a point of view that can be called fundamental in this regard. On the other hand, the north, considered the highest point (*úttara*) and also corresponding to the starting point of tradition, naturally suits the Brahmins; the *Kshatriyas* are located at the next point in the cyclical correspondence, that is, in the east, the side of the rising sun; From a comparison of both positions, it could legitimately be inferred that, while the character of the priesthood is 'polar', that of royalty is 'solar', which would also be confirmed by many other symbolic considerations; and perhaps even that 'solar' character is not unrelated

be related to the fact that the *Avatāras** of "historical" times

¹⁰³ [Cf. figure 9, inserted in chapter X].

**Avatāra*: in Hindu tradition, the descent of a god, who takes human form, to restore the cyclical order; see chap. XXII and chap. LVI, n. 3. (*Translator's note*).

come from the *kṣatriya* caste. The *vaiśyas*, in third place, are located in the south, and with them ends the succession of the "twice-born" castes; all that remains for the *sūdras* is the west, which everywhere is considered the side of darkness.

All this is perfectly logical, provided we are not mistaken about the starting point we should take; and, to justify more fully the "zodiacal" nature of the traditional layout of cities, we will now cite some facts that demonstrate that, although the division of cities mainly corresponded to the quaternary division of the cycle, there are cases in which a duodenary subdivision is clearly indicated. We have an example in the founding of cities according to the rite received by the Romans from the Etruscans: the orientation was marked by two orthogonal roads: the *cardo*, running from south to north, and the *decumanus*, from west to east; at the ends of both roads were the city gates, which were thus located exactly at the four cardinal points. The city was thus divided into four quarters or neighbourhoods, which, however, in this case did not correspond precisely to the cardinal points, as in India, but rather to the intermediate points; it goes without saying that the difference in traditional forms, which requires various adaptations, must be taken into account; but the principle of division remains the same. Furthermore, and this is the point that needs to be highlighted here, this division into quarters was superimposed by a division into 'tribes', that is, according to the etymology of this word, a ternary division; each of the three 'tribes' comprised four 'curiae', distributed across the four quarters, so that, ultimately, there was a duodenary division.

Another example is that of the Hebrews, cited by Hocart himself, although the importance of the duodenary seems to escape him: "The Hebrews," he says ¹⁰⁴, "knew social division into four sectors; their twelve territorial tribes were divided into four groups of three tribes, one of them principal: Judah camped in the east, Reuben in the south, Ephraim in the west, and Dan in the north. The Levites formed an inner circle around the Tabernacle, and were also divided into four groups located at the four cardinal points, with the main branch to the east" ¹⁰⁵. In truth, this is not a question of the organisation of a city but originally of a camp and later of the territorial division of an entire country; but, obviously, this is irrelevant from the point of view we are taking here. The difficulty in establishing an exact comparison with what exists elsewhere stems from the fact that no defined social functions seem to have ever been assigned to each tribe, which does not allow them to be assimilated into castes proper; however, at least on one point, a very striking similarity can be noted

¹⁰⁴ *Les Castes*, p. 127.

¹⁰⁵ *Numbers*, II and III.

This is consistent with the arrangement adopted in India, since the royal tribe, that of Judah, was also located in the east. On the other hand, there is also a notable difference: the priestly tribe, that of Levi, which was not counted among the twelve, had no place on the sides of the quadrangle and, consequently, was not to be assigned any territory of its own; its location within the camp can be explained by the fact that it was expressly intended for the service of a single sanctuary, originally the Tabernacle, whose normal position was in the centre. In any case, what is important here is the confirmation that the twelve tribes were divided into three on each of the four sides of a quadrangle, with the sides located respectively towards the four cardinal points; and it is well known that there was, in fact, a symbolic correspondence between the twelve tribes of Israel and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, which leaves no doubt as to the nature and meaning of such a distribution; we will only add that the main tribe on each side clearly corresponds to one of the four "cardinal" signs and the other two to the two adjacent signs.

If we now refer to the apocalyptic description of the "heavenly Jerusalem", it is easy to see that its layout exactly reproduces that of the Hebrew camp we have just discussed; and, at the same time, that layout is also identical to the square horoscopic figure we mentioned earlier. The city, which is indeed built in a square shape, has twelve gates, on which are written the names of the twelve tribes of Israel; and these gates are distributed in the same way on the four sides: "three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west". It is clear that the twelve gates also correspond to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and the four main gates, that is, those located in the middle of the sides, to the solstice and equinoctial signs; and the twelve aspects of the Sun referring to each of the signs, that is, the twelve *Adityas* of the Hindu tradition, appear in the form of the twelve fruits of the "Tree of Life", which, located in the centre of the city, "bears fruit every month", that is, precisely according to the successive positions of the Sun in the Zodiac during the annual cycle. Finally, this city, which 'descends from heaven to earth', clearly represents, in at least one of its meanings, the projection of the celestial 'archetype' in the constitution of the earthly city; and we believe that what we have just explained sufficiently shows that this 'archetype' is essentially symbolised by the Zodiac.

XIV

THE TETRAKTYS AND *THE 'SQUARE OF FOUR'*¹⁰⁶

On several occasions, in the course of our studies¹⁰⁷, we have referred to the Pythagorean *Tetraktys*, and we have indicated the numerical formula: $1+2+3+4=10$, which shows the relationship that directly links the denarius to the quaternary. Moreover, it is well known that the Pythagoreans attributed particular importance to it, which was notably manifested in the fact that they swore an oath "by the sacred *Tetraktys*"; perhaps it has not been so widely observed that the Pythagoreans also had another oath formula: "by the square of four"; and there is an obvious relationship between the two, since the number four is, one might say, their common basis. It could be deduced from this, among other consequences, that Pythagorean doctrine should be presented as more "cosmological" than purely metaphysical, which, on the other hand, is by no means exceptional when it comes to Western traditions, as we have already had occasion to make a similar observation with regard to Hermeticism. The reason for this inference, which may seem strange at first glance to those who are not accustomed to the use of numerical symbolism, is that the quaternary has always and everywhere been considered the number proper to universal manifestation; it therefore marks, in this respect, the very starting point of 'cosmology', while the preceding numbers, namely unity, the binary and the ternary, refer strictly to 'ontology'; thus, the particular importance given to the quaternary corresponds perfectly to that given to the 'cosmological' point of view itself.

At the beginning of the *Rasà'i-l-Ijwàn es-safà'*, the four terms of the quaternary The fundamental principles are listed as follows: 1) the Principle designated as *el-Bâri*, "the Creator" (which indicates that it is not the supreme Principle, but only the Being, as the first principle of manifestation, which, moreover, is, in effect, metaphysical Unity); 2) the universal Spirit; 3) the universal Soul; 4) primordial *Hylé* ['matter']. We will not develop for now the various points of view according to which these terms could be considered; in particular, they could be made to correspond respectively to the four 'worlds' of Hebrew Kabbalah, which also have their exact equivalent in Islamic esotericism. What is interesting for the moment is that the

¹⁰⁶ [Published in *É. T.*, April 1927].

¹⁰⁷ [Cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. VI, endnote, and *Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*].

* "Epistles of the Sincere Brothers": the Sincere Brothers (or "Brothers of Purity") were an esoteric organisation of the 10th century, with which the origins of Islamic philosophy are partly associated. (*Translator's note*).

The quaternary thus constituted is seen as a prerequisite for manifestation, in the sense that the presence of all its terms is necessary for the complete development of the possibilities it entails; and that is why — it is added — in the order of manifested things, the sign (one could say, in a way, the "signature") of the quaternary is always particularly found: hence, for example, the four elements (excluding here the Ether, since it is only a question of the 'differentiated' elements), the four cardinal points (or the four corresponding regions of space, with the four 'pillars' of the world), the four phases into which every cycle is naturally divided (the ages of human life, the seasons in the annual cycle, the lunar phases in the monthly cycle, etc.), and so on; in this way, an indefinite multitude of applications of the quaternary could be established, all linked together by rigorous analogical correspondences, since they are, in essence, nothing more than so many more or less special aspects of the same general 'scheme' of manifestation.

This "diagram", in its geometric form, is one of the most widespread symbols, one of those that are truly common to all traditions: the circle divided into four equal parts by a cross formed by two perpendicular diameters; and it should be noted immediately that this figure expresses precisely the relationship between the quaternary and the denary, as expressed numerically by the formula we referred to at the beginning. In fact, the quaternary is represented geometrically by the square, if viewed in its 'static' aspect; but in its 'dynamic' aspect, as is the case here, it is represented by the cross; when the cross revolves around its centre, it engenders the circumference, which, together with the centre, represents the denary, which, as we have said before, is the complete numerical cycle. This is called the "circulation of the quadrant," a geometric representation of what is arithmetically expressed by the formula $1+2+3+4=10$. Conversely, the hermetic problem of "squaring the circle" (an expression that is generally misunderstood) is nothing more than what is represented by the quaternary division of the circle, assumed as given previously, by two perpendicular diameters, and will be expressed numerically with the same formula, but written in reverse: $10=1+2+3+4$, to show that the entire development of manifestation is thus reduced to the fundamental quaternary.

That said, let us return to the relationship between the *Tetraktys* and the square of four: the numbers 10 and 16 occupy the same row, the fourth, respectively in the series of triangular numbers and in that of square numbers. It is well known that triangular numbers are obtained by adding consecutive integers from unity to each of the successive terms of the series; unity itself is the first triangular number, as it is also the first square number, since, being the beginning and origin of the series of integers, it must also be so for all other

series thus derived. The second triangular number is $1+2=3$, which, moreover, shows that, as soon as the unit has produced the binary by its own polarisation, the ternary is immediately obtained; and the geometric representation is evident: 1 corresponds to the vertex of the triangle, 2 to the ends of its base, and the triangle itself as a whole is, naturally, the figure of the number 3. If we now consider the three terms of the ternary as having independent existence, their sum gives the third triangular number: $1+2+3=6$; this senary number, being double the ternary, implies, so to speak, a new ternary that is a reflection of the first, as in the well-known symbol of the 'Seal of Solomon'; but this could give rise to other considerations that would exceed our subject. Following the series, we have, for the fourth triangular number, $1+2+3+4=10$, that is, the *Tetraktys*; and thus we see, as we have explained, that the quaternary contains in a certain way all the numbers, since it contains the denary, hence the formula from *the Tao-te King* that we have quoted on a previous occasion: "one produced two, two produced three, three produced all numbers", which is also equivalent to saying that all manifestation is involved in the quaternary or, conversely, that the latter constitutes the complete basis for the integral development of the former.

The *Tetraktys*, as a triangular number, was naturally represented by a symbol that was ternary in shape, with each of its outer sides comprising four elements; this symbol was composed of a total of ten elements, represented by ten dots, nine of which were located on the perimeter of the triangle and one in the centre. It should be noted that in this arrangement, despite the difference in geometric shape, we find the equivalent of what we have indicated about the representation of the denarius by the circle, since in this case too, 1 corresponds to the centre and 9 to the circumference. In this regard, let us also note, in passing, that precisely because the number of the circumference is 9, and not 10, its division is normally carried out according to multiples of 9 (90 degrees for the quadrant, and therefore 360 for the circumference as a whole), which, moreover, is directly related to the whole question of 'cyclical numbers'.

The square of four is, geometrically, a square whose sides comprise four elements, like those of the triangle we have just discussed; if we consider the sides themselves as measured by the number of their elements, it turns out that the sides of the triangle and those of the square will be equal. The two figures can then be joined by making the base of the triangle coincide with the upper side of the square, as in the following diagram (where, for clarity, we have not marked the points on the

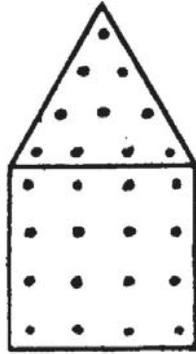


Fig. 10

sides themselves but inside the figures, which allows us to count separately those belonging to the triangle and those belonging to the square); and the set thus obtained gives rise to several important observations. Firstly, if we consider only the triangle and square as such, the set is a geometric representation of the septenary, insofar as it is the sum of the ternary and the quaternary: $3+4=7$; more precisely, it can be said, according to the arrangement of the figure itself, that the septenary is formed by the union of a higher ternary and a lower quaternary, which allows for various applications. To stick to what concerns us more particularly here, it will suffice to say that, in the correspondence between triangular and square numbers, the former must be referred to a higher domain than the latter, from which it can be inferred that, in Pythagorean symbolism, the *Tetraktys* must have had a higher role than the square of four; and, indeed, everything that is known about that school seems to indicate that this was indeed the case.

Now, there is something even more remarkable, which, although it refers to a different traditional form, cannot certainly be considered a mere "coincidence": the numbers 10 and 16, contained respectively in the triangle and the square, add up to 26; and 26 is the total numerical value of the letters that form the Hebrew tetragrammaton: *yod he vav he*. Furthermore, 10 is the value of the first letter, *yod*, and 16 is that of the other three letters, *he-vav-he*; this division of the tetragrammaton is entirely normal, and the correspondence between its two parts is also very significant: the *Tetraktys* is thus identified with *the yod* in the triangle, while the rest of the tetragrammaton is inscribed in the square below it.

On the other hand, the triangle and the square both contain four lines of dots; it should be noted, although this is of secondary importance, and only to better highlight the concordances of different traditional sciences, that the four lines of dots are also found in the figures of geomancy, which, in addition, due to the quaternary combinations of 1 and 2, are $16=4$ in number²; and geomancy, as its name indicates, has a special relationship with the earth, which, according to Far Eastern tradition, is symbolised by the square shape¹⁰⁸.

Finally, if we consider the solid forms in three-dimensional geometry that correspond to the flat figures in question, the square corresponds to a cube and the triangle to a quadrangular pyramid whose base is the upper face of that cube; the whole forms what Masonic symbolism designates as the "pointed cubic stone" and which, in the Hermetic interpretation, is seen as a figure of the "philosopher's stone". There are other considerations to be made about this last symbol, but as they are no longer related to the subject of the *Tetraktys*, it would be preferable to deal with them separately.

¹⁰⁸ [Cf. *La Grande Triade*, chap. III. See also, in this compilation, chap. XXXIX: "The symbolism of the dome," and the following chapters].

XV

*A HIEROGLYPH OF THE POLE*¹⁰⁹

To return to certain considerations regarding the figure of the "cubic stone" to which we have just alluded, we will say first of all that this figure, in ancient documents, is completed, quite unexpectedly, with the addition of an axe that appears to be balanced on the very apex of the pyramid. This peculiarity has often intrigued specialists in Masonic symbolism, most of whom have been unable to offer any satisfactory explanation; However, it has been suggested that the axe could very well be nothing more than the hieroglyphic representation of the Hebrew letter *qâf*, and we thought it would be interesting to present some general guidelines in this regard, despite the strangeness that such things may assume in the eyes of Western readers, who are inevitably unaccustomed to this kind of consideration.

The most general meaning associated with the letter in question, whether in Hebrew or Arabic, is that of "strength" or "power" (in Arabic, *qowah*), which, depending on the context, can be either material or spiritual¹¹⁰; and it is certainly to this order that the symbolism of a weapon such as the axe most immediately corresponds. In the case at hand, it must obviously be a spiritual power; this results from the fact that the axe is placed in direct relation, not with the cube, but with the pyramid; and we may recall here what we have already stated on other occasions about the

equivalence of the axe with the *vajra**, which is also, above all, the sign of spiritual power. Furthermore, the axe is not located at just any point, but, as we have said, at the apex of the pyramid, which is often considered to represent the summit of a spiritual or initiatory hierarchy; this position seems to indicate, therefore, the highest spiritual power at work in the world, that is to say, what all traditions designate as the "Pole"; here too, we recall the "axial" character of symbolic weapons in general and of the axe in particular, which is clearly in perfect accord with this interpretation.

But what is most remarkable is that the name of the letter *qâf* itself is also, in Arabic tradition, that of the sacred or polar mountain¹¹¹; the pyramid, which is essentially an image of this, thus bears, through the letter or the axe that replaces it, its own

¹⁰⁹ [Published in *É. T.*, May 1937].

¹¹⁰ The distinction between these two meanings is indicated in Arabic by a difference in the spelling of the word: *qowah* for the first, *qowâ* for the second.

* On the *vajra*, see chaps. XXVI and LII. (*Translator's note*).

designation as such, so as to leave no doubt as to the meaning that should traditionally be recognised. Furthermore, if the symbol of the mountain or pyramid refers to the "Axis of the World", its apex, where the letter is located, is more specifically identified with the Pole itself; but *qâf* is numerically equivalent to *maqâm*¹¹², which designates that point as the "Place" par excellence, that is, the only point that remains fixed and unchanging in all the revolutions of the world.

The letter *qâf* is also the first letter of the Arabic name for the Pole, *Qutb*, and as such can be used to refer to it in abbreviated form, according to a very common practice¹¹³; but there are also other, no less notable correspondences. Thus, the seat (the Arabic word is *mârkaz*, which properly means 'centre') of the supreme Pole (called *el-Qutb el-Gawth*, to differentiate it from the seven *Aqtâb* or secondary and subordinate poles)¹¹⁴ is symbolically described as being located between heaven and earth at a point exactly above the *Ka'bah*, which is precisely cube-shaped and is also one of the representations of the 'Centre of the World'. The pyramid, invisible because it is purely spiritual in nature, can therefore be considered as rising above this cube, which is visible because it refers to the elemental world, signified by the number four; and, at the same time, this cube, on which the base of the pyramid rests, or the hierarchy of which it is a figure and at whose apex corresponds the *Qutb*, is also, by its shape, a symbol of perfect stability.

The supreme *Qutb* is assisted by the two *Imams*, the one on the left and the one on the right, and the ternary thus formed is also represented in the pyramid by the triangular shape of each of its faces. On the other hand, the unity and the binary that constitute this ternary correspond to the letters 'alif and bâ', according to the numerical values

¹¹¹Some wish to identify the mountain of *Qâf* with the Caucasus (*Qâfqâsiyah*); if this assimilation were to be taken literally, in the current geographical sense, it would certainly be erroneous, as it would in no way correspond to what is said about the sacred mountain, which cannot be reached "neither by land nor by sea" (*lâ bi-l-barr wa-lâ bi-l-bahr*); but it should be noted that the name "Caucasus" was formerly applied to various mountains located in very different regions, which suggests that it may well have been originally one of the designations of the Sacred Mountain, of which the other Caucases would then be only secondary "locations".

¹¹² $Qâf=100+1+80=181$; $maqâm=40+100+1+40=181$. In Hebrew, the same numerical equivalence exists between *qôph* and *maqôm*; these words, moreover, do not differ from their Arabic counterparts except for the substitution of *alif* with *vav*, of which there are many other examples (*nâr* and *nûr*, 'âlam and 'ôlam, etc.); the total is then 186.

¹¹³ Thus, the letter *mîm*, for example, sometimes serves to designate the *Mahdi*; Mohyiddîn ibn 'Arabi, in particular, gives it this meaning in certain cases.

¹¹⁴ The seven *Aqtâb* correspond to the "seven Earths", which are also found in other traditions; and these seven terrestrial Poles are a reflection of the seven celestial Poles, which preside respectively over the seven planetary Heavens.

respective letters. The letter '*alif*' has the shape of a vertical axis; its upper end and the two horizontally opposed ends of the letter *bâ*' form, according to a pattern whose equivalents can be found in various symbols belonging to other traditions, the three angles of the initiatory triangle, which, in effect, should be considered properly as one of the "signatures" of the Pole.

Let us add, on this last point, that the letter '*alif*' is considered to be especially 'polar' (*qutbânîya*); its name and the word *Qutb* are numerically equivalent: '*alif*' = $1+30+80 = 111$; *Qutb* = $100+9+2 = 111$. The number 111 represents unity expressed in the three worlds, which is perfectly suited to characterise the function of the Pole.

These observations could undoubtedly have been developed further, but we believe we have said enough so that even those most unfamiliar with the traditional science of letters and numbers must at least recognise that it would be very difficult to claim to see in all this nothing more than a mere collection of 'coincidences'.

XVI

THE 'BLACK HEADS' ¹¹⁵

The name of the Ethiopians literally means "burnt faces" (*aithi-ôps*)¹¹⁶, and, consequently, "black faces"; it is commonly interpreted as referring to a black-skinned people, or at least those with dark complexions¹¹⁷. However, this overly "simplistic" explanation seems unsatisfactory since it is noted that the ancients gave the same name of "Ethiopia" to very diverse countries, including some to which it would not be appropriate in any way, since Atlantis itself, it is said, was also called "Ethiopia"; on the contrary, it does not appear that this name was ever applied to countries inhabited by peoples belonging to the black race proper. There must therefore be something else, and this becomes even more evident when the existence of similar words or expressions is verified elsewhere, so that one is naturally led to investigate what symbolic meaning they may actually have.

The Chinese formerly referred to themselves as the "black people" (*li-min*); this expression is found particularly in the *Shu King* (reign of Emperor *Shun*, 2317-2208 BC). Much later, at the beginning of the *Tsing* dynasty (3rd century BC), the emperor gave his people another similar name¹¹⁸, that of "black heads" (*kion-shou*); and, curiously enough, exactly the same expression is found in Chaldea (*nishi salmat kakkadi*), at least a thousand years before that time. Furthermore, it should be noted that the characters *kien* and *hei*, meaning 'black', represent the flame; thus, the meaning of the expression 'black heads' is even closer to that of the name of the Ethiopians. Orientalists, who most often deliberately ignore all symbolism, want to explain these terms "black people" and "black heads" as designations for "black-haired people"; unfortunately, while this characteristic does indeed apply to the Chinese, it does not distinguish them in any way from neighbouring populations, so that such an explanation appears to be entirely insignificant.

¹¹⁵ [Published in *É.T.*, January-February 1948].

¹¹⁶ The word *Aithêr* also derives from the same root *aith-*, since Ether can be considered in a certain way as a superior fire, that of the "Empyrean Heaven".

¹¹⁷ The inhabitants of the country still known today as "Ethiopia", although they have dark skin, do not belong to the black race.

¹¹⁸It is well known that in China, attributing the "correct designations" to beings and things was traditionally part of the sovereign's duties.

On the other hand, some have thought that the "black people" were actually the masses, to whom the colour black was attributed, as it is in India to the *Sudras*, and with the same sense of indistinctness and anonymity; but it seems that in reality the entire Chinese people were designated as such, without any distinction being made between the masses and the minority; and if this is the case, the symbolism in question is no longer valid. Furthermore, if we consider that not only have expressions of this kind been used so extensively in space and time as we have indicated (and it is very possible that there are even other examples), but also that the ancient Egyptians, for their part, gave their country the name *Kēmi* or 'black land', it will be noted that it is undoubtedly extremely unlikely that so many different peoples would have adopted, for themselves or for their country, a designation that had a pejorative meaning. It is therefore appropriate to refer here not to the inferior meaning of the colour black, but rather to its superior meaning, since, as we have explained on other occasions, this colour has a double symbolism, just as, moreover, anonymity, to which we alluded earlier with regard to the masses, also has two opposite meanings¹¹⁹.

It is well known that, in its superior sense, the colour black essentially symbolises the principal state of non-manifestation, and that this is how the name *Krishna*, 'black', should be understood, as opposed to *Arjuna*, which means 'white', representing, respectively, the unmanifest and the manifest, the immortal and the mortal, the 'Self' and the 'I'. *Paramâtma* and *jīvâtma*¹²⁰. However, one may wonder how a symbol of the unmanifest can be applied to a people or a country; we must acknowledge that the relationship is not clear at first glance, but nevertheless it does exist in the cases in question. Moreover, it is not without reason that the colour black, in several of these cases, refers more particularly to "faces" or "heads", terms whose symbolic meaning we have indicated elsewhere, in connection with the ideas of "summit" or "peak" and "beginning"¹²¹

To understand what this is about, it should be remembered that the peoples we have just mentioned are those who consider themselves to be occupants of a

¹¹⁹ On the double meaning of anonymity, see *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. IX.

¹²⁰ See especially "Le blanc et le noir" [here chap. XLVII: "White and Black"]. [The "Self" (*Âtmā*) is the designation given in the Hindu tradition to the ineffable Principle in what could be called its immanent aspect, and it can be approached in two ways: the *Paramâtma* or "supreme *Âtmā*" insofar as it resides unitarily in the totality of the manifested universe, permeating it, and the *jīvâtma* or "living *Âtmā*", inasmuch as it resides in each of the beings that make up that universe; the author deals with these points in particular in *L'homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chaps. II, X, XI and *passim*. (*Translator's note*)]

¹²¹ See "La pierre angulaire" [here, chap. XLIII: "The Cornerstone"].

"central" position; particularly well known is the designation of China as the "Kingdom of the Centre" (*Chung-kuo*), as well as the fact that Egypt was considered by its inhabitants to be the "Heart of the World". This "central" position is, moreover, entirely justified from a symbolic point of view, since each of the regions to which it was attributed was effectively the seat of the spiritual centre of a tradition, an emanation and image of the supreme spiritual centre and representative of it for those who belonged to that particular tradition, so that for them it was truly and effectively the "Centre of the World"¹²². But the centre is, by virtue of its principal character, what could be called the 'place' of non-manifestation; as such, the colour black, understood in its higher sense, really suits it. It should be noted, however, that, on the contrary, the colour white also suits the centre in another respect; that is to say, insofar as it is the starting point of a 'radiation' assimilated to that of light¹²³; it could therefore be said that the centre is "white" externally and with regard to the manifestation that proceeds from it, while it is "black" internally and in itself; and this latter point of view is, naturally, that of beings who, for a reason such as the one just mentioned, are symbolically situated at the very centre.

¹²² See *La Grande Triade*, chap. XVI.

¹²³ See "Les sept rayons et l'arc-en-ciel" [here, chap. LVII: "The Seven Rays and the Rainbow"].

XVII

*THE LETTER G AND THE SWASTIKA*¹²⁴

In *La Grande Triade*, on the subject of polar symbolism and the Chinese word *yi*, which designates unity (the North Star is called *T'ai-yi*, or 'Great Unity'), we gave some indications about the Masonic symbolism of the letter G, whose normal position is also 'polar', and to establish a relationship with the letter I, which represented 'the first name of God' for *the Fedeli d'Amore*¹²⁵. This relationship was justified by the fact that the letter G, which in itself could not be considered a true symbol, as it belongs to modern languages, devoid of any sacred or traditional character, but which *stands for God*, according to English Masonic rituals, and is, in fact, the initial letter of the word *God*, has been, at least in certain cases, considered a substitute for *the* Hebrew *yod*, symbol of the Principle or Unity, by virtue of a phonetic assimilation between *God and yod*¹²⁶. These brief indications were the starting point for research that has led to new and very interesting findings¹²⁷; for this reason, we believe it useful to return to the subject to complete what we have already said.

Firstly, it should be noted that in an old catechism of the Fellow Craft degree¹²⁸, the question: *What does that G denote?* is answered expressly: *Geometry or the Fifth Science* (that is, the science that occupies fifth place in the traditional enumeration of the "seven liberal arts", whose esoteric transposition in medieval initiations we have pointed out on other occasions); this interpretation in no way contradicts the statement that the same letter *stands for God*, since God is specially designated in that degree as "the Great Geometer of the Universe"; and, on the other hand, what gives it its full importance is that, in the oldest manuscripts

¹²⁴ [Published in *É. T.*, July-August 1950.]

¹²⁵ *La Grande Triade*, chap. XXV.

¹²⁶ The author of a work on Masonic symbolism felt compelled to address us with criticism on this matter, formulated in rather discourteous terms, as if we were responsible for this phonetic assimilation. However, we are not responsible for this, nor are we responsible for the fact that English Freemasons also once identified the three letters of the word *God* with the initials of three Hebrew words: *Gamal, 'Oz, Dabar* (Beauty, Strength, Wisdom); whatever one may think of such connections (and there are others besides), one is obliged, in any case, to take them into account, at least historically.

¹²⁷ Marius Lepage, "La lettre G," in *Le Symbolisme*, November 1948 issue; article in *Speculative Mason*, July 1949 issue, written on the occasion of the former, and from which most of the information used here has been extracted.

¹²⁸ Prichard, *Masonry Dissected*, 1730.

known to operative masonry, "Geometry" is constantly identified with masonry itself; there is therefore something in this that cannot be considered negligible. It also turns out, as we shall see shortly, that the letter G, as the initial of *Geometry*, has taken the place of its Greek equivalent Γ , which is sufficiently justified by the very origin of the word "geometry" (and, here at least, it is no longer a question of a modern language); moreover, this Greek letter is interesting in itself from the point of view of Masonic symbolism because of its shape, that of a square¹²⁹, which is clearly not the case with the Latin letter G¹³⁰. Now, before going any further, one might ask whether this does not contradict the explanation of the substitution of the Hebrew *yod*, or, at least, since this has also existed, whether it might not be thought, in such circumstances, that it was introduced secondarily and at a later date; indeed, as it certainly seems to have belonged properly to the degree of master, so it must be for those who follow the most common opinion on the origin of this degree. On the other hand, for those who, like us, refuse for more than one reason to consider this degree as the product of an 'speculative' elaboration of the 18th century, but see in it a kind of 'condensation' of the content of certain higher degrees of operative Masonry, intended to fill as far as possible a gap due to the ignorance of the founders of the Grand Lodge of England with regard to those degrees, the matter appears in a very different light: it is then a superimposition of two different meanings, but which are in no way mutually exclusive, which is certainly nothing exceptional in symbolism; Furthermore, something that no one seems to have noticed until now is that both interpretations, the Greek and the Hebrew respectively, agree perfectly with the character of the two corresponding degrees, the second being "Pythagorean" and the third "Solomonic", and perhaps this is what ultimately allows us to understand what it is really about.

That said, we can return to the 'geometric' interpretation of the degree of Fellow Craft, about which what we have explained is not yet the most interesting part in terms of the symbolism of operative Masonry. In the catechism we quoted a moment ago, we also find this kind of enigma: *By letters four and science five*,

¹²⁹ Let us remember that the square with unequal arms, precisely the shape of this letter, represents the two legs of the 3-4-5 right-angled triangle, which, as we have explained elsewhere, is of particular importance in operative Masonry (see "Parole perdue et mots substitués", in *É. T.*, December 1948).

¹³⁰ All the interpretations that some have sought to derive from the shape of the letter G (resemblance to the shape of a knot, to the alchemical symbol for salt, etc.) are clearly entirely artificial and even rather fanciful; they have no connection whatsoever with the recognised meanings of that letter and are not based on any authentic data.

this *G* aright doth stand in a due art and proportion¹³¹. Here, obviously, *science five* refers to the "fifth science", i.e. geometry; as for the meaning of *letters four*, at first glance, and for the sake of symmetry, one might be tempted to assume that there is an error and that it should read *letter*, in the singular, so that it would refer to the "fourth letter", namely, in the Greek alphabet, the letter Θ , which is symbolically interesting because of its triangular shape; but, as this explanation would have the major flaw of not presenting any intelligible relationship with the letter *G*, it is much more plausible that it really refers to "four letters", and that the otherwise abnormal expression "*science five*" instead of "*fifth science*" has been intentionally used to make the statement even more enigmatic. Now, the point that may seem most obscure is this: why is there mention of four letters, or, if it is always the initial letter of the word *Geometry*, why must it be quadrupled to *stand aright in due art and proportion*? The answer, which must be related to the "central" or "polar" position of the letter *G*, can only be given through operative symbolism, and this is where the need to take this letter, as we indicated earlier, in its Greek form Γ . In effect, the set of four gammas placed at right angles to each other the others forms the *swastika*, "a symbol, as is the letter *G*, of the North Star, which is in turn the symbol and, for the operative mason, the effective seat of the hidden central Sun of the Universe, *Iah*"¹³², which is obviously very close to *the T'ai-yi* of the Far Eastern tradition¹³³. In the passage from *La Grande Triade* that we recalled at the beginning, we had pointed out the existence, in the operative ritual, of a very close relationship between the letter *G* and the *swastika*; however, at that time we did not

¹³¹ We should not fail to mention, incidentally, that in response to the question: "*Who doth that G denote?*" (*who* and no longer *what*, as before, when it came to *Geometry*), that catechism contains the following phrase: "*The Great Architect and contriver of the Universe, or He that was taken up to the Pinnacle of the Holy Temple*"; it will be noted that "the Great Architect of the Universe" is here identified with Christ (and therefore with the *Logos*), since he himself is related to the symbolism of the "cornerstone", understood in the sense we have explained [here, chap. XLIII]; the "pinnacle of the Temple" (and note the curious similarity of the word "pinnacle" to the Hebrew *pinnáh* 'angle') is, naturally, the summit or highest point and, as such, is equivalent to what is the "*keystone*" in *Arch Masonry*.

¹³²In the article in *Speculative Mason* from which this quotation is taken, the *swastika* is inaccurately called a *gammadion*, a designation which, as we have pointed out several times, was actually applied in ancient times to very different figures (see especially [here, chap. XLV] "El-Arkân", where we have provided a reproduction), but this does not detract from the fact that the *swastika*, even though it has never been given this name, can also be considered as formed by the union of four gammas, so that this correction of terminology in no way affects what is said here.

¹³³We would add that the divine name *Yah*, just mentioned, is more specifically associated with the first of the three Great Masters in the seventh degree of operative Masonry.

We had not yet become aware of the information which, by introducing the Greek letter gamma, makes this relationship even more direct and completes its explanation¹³⁴. It should also be noted that the broken part of the *swastika's* arms is considered here to represent the Big Dipper, seen in four different positions during its revolution around the North Star, which naturally corresponds to the centre where the gammas meet, and that these four positions are related to the four cardinal points and the four seasons; the importance of the Big Dipper in all traditions involving polar symbolism is well known¹³⁵. If one considers that all this belongs to a symbolism that can truly be called 'ecumenical' and that for this very reason indicates a fairly direct link with the primordial tradition, it is easy to understand why 'polar theory has always been one of the greatest secrets of true Masonic masters'¹³⁶.

¹³⁴It could perhaps be objected that the unpublished documentation provided by *Speculative Mason* on the *swastika* comes from Clement Stretton, who was, said to be the main author of a 'restoration' of operative rituals in which certain elements, lost due to circumstances that have never been entirely clarified, were replaced by others taken from speculative rituals, whose conformity with what existed in ancient times cannot be guaranteed; but this objection is not valid in the present case, since it concerns precisely something of which there is no trace in speculative Freemasonry.

¹³⁵See also *La Grande Triade*, chap. XXV, on the "City of Willows" and its symbolic representation by a moyo filled with rice.

¹³⁶It may be interesting to note that in Kabbalah, the *yod* is considered to be formed by the union of three points, representing the three supreme *middot* ['dimensions'], arranged in a square; this, on the other hand, is turned in the opposite direction to the Greek letter gamma, which could correspond to the two opposite directions of rotation of *the swastika*.

SYMBOLS OF CYCLICAL MANIFESTATION

XVIII

*SOME ASPECTS OF THE SYMBOLISM OF JANUS*¹³⁷

We have referred to the symbolism of Janus several times in our works; to fully develop this symbolism, with its multiple and complex meanings, and to point out all its links with a large number of analogous figurations found in other traditions, an entire volume would be required¹³⁸. Nevertheless, we thought it would be interesting to gather some information about certain aspects of this symbolism and, in particular, to revisit, in a more comprehensive manner than we have been able to do until now, the considerations that explain the connection sometimes established between Janus and Christ, in a way that may seem strange at first glance but is nonetheless perfectly justified.

Indeed, a curious document expressly depicting Christ with the features of Janus was published several years ago by L. Charbonneau-Lassay in *Regnabit*¹³⁹, and we commented on it later in the same journal¹⁴⁰ (fig. 11). It is a kind of double medallion painted on a separate page of a 15th-century manuscript liturgical book found in Luchon, and it forms the closure of the page corresponding to the month of January in the book's liminal calendar. At the top of the inner medallion is the monogram IHS, with a heart superimposed on it; the rest of it is occupied by a bust of Janus Bifrons, with one male and one female face, as is often seen; he wears a crown on his head and holds a sceptre in one hand and a key in the other.

"In Roman monuments," wrote Charbonneau-Lassay when reproducing the document, "Janus is shown, as in the medallion of Luchon, with a crown on his head and a sceptre in his right hand, because he is king; in his other hand he holds a key that opens and closes the ages: for this reason, by extension of the idea, the Romans consecrated the gates of

¹³⁷ [Published in *V. I.*, July 1929].

¹³⁸ [The author added: "which we may write one day". He will regret that this project has not been realised, but in this compilation itself there are a number of studies that could be included in a volume on Janus].

¹³⁹ "Un ancien emblème du mois de janvier", in *Regnabit*, May 1925.

¹⁴⁰ "À propos de quelques symboles hermétiques-religieux" (On Certain Hermetic-Religious Symbols), in *Reg.*, December 1925. [The subject matter of this article is revisited in the present study].



Fig. 11

houses and cities (...) Christ too, like the ancient Janus, carries the royal sceptre, to which he has a right conferred by his Father in Heaven and by his earthly ancestors; in his other hand he holds the key to eternal secrets, the key stained with his blood, which has opened the door of life to lost humanity. That is why, in the fourth of the great preparatory antiphons for Christmas, the sacred liturgy acclaims him thus: 'O *Clavis David, et Sceptrum domus Israel!* ...' You are, O long-awaited Christ, the Key of David and the Sceptre of the house of Israel. You open, and no one can close; and when you close, no one can open..."¹⁴¹ .

The most common interpretation of Janus' two faces is that they represent the past and the future, respectively. Although incomplete, this interpretation is accurate from a certain point of view. For this reason, in a considerable number of depictions, the two faces are those of an elderly man and a young man; but this is not the case in the emblem of Luchon, where careful examination leaves no doubt that it is the androgynous Janus, *Ianus-Iana*¹⁴² ; and it is hardly necessary to point out the close relationship between this form of Janus and certain hermetic symbols such as the *Rebis*¹⁴³ .

¹⁴¹ *Roman Breviary*, office of 20 December.

¹⁴² The name *Diana*, the moon goddess, is simply another form of *Iana*, the female aspect of *Ianus*.

¹⁴³ The only difference is that these symbols are generally *Sun-Moon*, in various forms, while *Ianus-Iana* appears to be more *Lunus-Moon*, as his head is often crowned with a crescent moon.

From the point of view that Janus' symbolism refers to time, a very important observation can be made: between the past that is no longer and the future that is not yet, Janus' true face, the one that looks at the present, is said to be neither of the two visible ones. This third face is invisible because the present, in its temporal manifestation, is nothing more than an unattainable instant¹⁴⁴; but when one rises above the conditions of this transitory and contingent manifestation, the present, on the contrary, contains all reality. The third face of Janus corresponds, in another symbolism—that of the Hindu tradition—to the frontal eye of *Shiva*, also invisible, since it is not represented by any bodily organ, which represents the "sense of eternity". It is said that a glance from this third eye reduces everything to ashes, that is, it destroys all manifestation; but when succession is transmuted into simultaneity, all things dwell in the 'eternal present', so that apparent destruction is in truth nothing but a 'transformation' in the most rigorous etymological sense of the word.

Based on these brief considerations, it is easy to understand that Janus truly represents the One who is not only the "Lord of the triple time" (a designation that also applies to *Shiva* in Hindu doctrine)¹⁴⁵, but also and above all the "Lord of Eternity". "Christ," wrote L. Charbonneau-Lassay on this subject, "dominates the past and the future; coeternal with his Father, he is, like him, the 'Ancient of Days': 'in the beginning was the Word,' says St John. He is also the Father and Lord of future ages: *Jesu pater futuri saeculi*, the Roman Church repeats every day, and He Himself has proclaimed Himself the beginning and the end of all things: 'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end'. He is the 'Lord of Eternity'."

It is quite evident, in fact, that the "Lord of time" cannot be subject to time, which has its beginning in him, just as, according to Aristotle's teaching, the prime mover of all things, or the principle of universal motion, is necessarily immobile. It is certainly the eternal Word whom the biblical texts often refer to as the 'Ancient of Days', the Father of ages or cycles of existence (this is the proper and original meaning of the Latin word *saeculum*, as well as the Greek *aîôn* and the Hebrew *'olam*, which it translates); and it is important to note that Hindu tradition also gives him the title *Purâna-Pûrusha*, whose meaning is strictly equivalent.

Let us now return to the image we took as the starting point for these observations: in it, we said, we see the sceptre and the key in Janus' hands: the

¹⁴⁴ This is also why certain languages, such as Hebrew and Arabic, do not have a verbal form corresponding to the present tense.

¹⁴⁵ The trident (*triçûla*), attribute of *Shiva*, is the symbol of the triple time (*trikâla*).

Like the crown (which can also be considered a symbol of power and elevation in the broadest sense, both in the spiritual and temporal realms, and which in this case seems to us to have that meaning), the sceptre is the emblem of royal power, and the key, for its part, is more specifically the emblem of priestly power. It should be noted that the sceptre is on the left of the figure, on the side of the male face, and the key on the right, on the side of the female face; now, according to the symbolism used by the Hebrew Kabbalah, the right and left sides correspond respectively to two divine attributes: Mercy (*Hesed*) and Justice (*Din*)¹⁴⁶, which also clearly apply to Christ, especially when considering his role as Judge of the living and the dead. The Arabs, making a similar distinction in the divine attributes and the names corresponding to them, say "Beauty" (*Djemâl*) and "Majesty" (*Djelâl*); and it could thus be understood, with these latter designations, that the two aspects have been represented by a female face and a male face, respectively¹⁴⁷. In short, the key and the sceptre, replacing here the set of two keys, perhaps the most common emblem of Janus, only serve to further clarify one of the meanings of this emblem, which is that of the dual power coming from a single principle: priestly power and royal power, united, according to Judeo-Christian tradition, in the person of Melchizedek, who, as St. Paul says, is "made like the Son of God"¹⁴⁸.

We have just said that Janus most often carries two keys; these are the keys to the two solstice doors, *Ianua Caeli and Ianua Inferni*, corresponding respectively to the winter and summer solstices, that is, to the two extreme points of the sun's course in the annual cycle; for Janus, as "Lord of Time," is the *Ianitor* [or 'doorkeeper'] who opens and closes that cycle. On the other hand, he was also the god of initiation into the mysteries: *initiatio* derives from *in-ire*, 'to enter' (which is also linked to the symbolism of the 'door'), and, according to Cicero, the name Janus (*Ianus*) has the same root as the verb *ire*, 'to go'; this root *i-* is also found in Sanskrit with the same meaning as in Latin, and in that language one of its derivatives is the word *yâna*,

¹⁴⁶In the symbol of the Sephirothic tree, which represents the combination of two divine attributes, the two side 'columns' are, respectively, those of Mercy and Justice; at the top of the 'middle column', and dominating the two side 'columns', is the 'Crown' (*Keter*); the analogous position of Janus' crown, in our figuration, with respect to the key and the sceptre, seems to us to give rise to a connection that justifies what we have just said about its meaning: it would be the principal, unique and total power from which the two aspects designated by the other two emblems proceed.

¹⁴⁷ In *Le Roi du Monde*, we have explained more fully the symbolism of the left and right hands, the "hand of justice" and the "hand of blessing," as pointed out by various Church Fathers, especially St. Augustine.

¹⁴⁸ *Epistle to the Hebrews*, VII, 3.

'way', whose form is singularly close to that of the name *Janus*. "I am the Way," said Christ¹⁴⁹; is it possible to see another connection here? What we have just said seems to justify it; and one would be greatly mistaken, when it comes to symbolism, if one did not take into consideration certain verbal similarities, the reasons for which are often very profound, although unfortunately they escape modern philologists, who are ignorant of everything that can legitimately be called "sacred science".

Be that as it may, since Janus was considered the god of initiation, his two keys, one of gold and the other of silver, were those of the 'great mysteries' and the 'lesser mysteries' respectively; to use other, equivalent language, the silver key is that of 'earthly paradise', and the gold key that of 'heavenly paradise'. These same keys were one of the attributes of the supreme pontificate, to which the function of "hierophant" was essentially linked; like the boat, which was also a symbol of Janus¹⁵⁰, they have remained among the principal emblems of the Papacy; and the evangelical words relating to the "power of the keys" are in perfect agreement with the ancient traditions, all emanating from the great primordial tradition. On the other hand, there is a fairly direct relationship between the meaning we have just indicated and that according to which the golden key represents spiritual power and the silver key temporal power (the latter sometimes being replaced by the sceptre, as we have seen)¹⁵¹ : Dante, in fact, assigns to the Emperor and the Pope the functions of leading humanity to the "earthly Paradise" and the "heavenly Paradise", respectively¹⁵² .

Furthermore, by virtue of a certain astronomical symbolism that seems to have been common to all ancient peoples, there are also very close links between the two meanings according to which Janus' keys were either those of the two solstice gates or those of the "great" and "small mysteries"¹⁵³. The symbolism to which we refer is that of

¹⁴⁹ In Far Eastern tradition, the word *Tao*, whose literal meaning is also "Way", is used to designate the supreme Principle, and the ideographic character that represents it is formed by the signs of the head and the feet, equivalent to the alpha and the omega.

¹⁵⁰ This boat of Janus could sail in both directions, forwards or backwards, corresponding to the two faces of Janus himself.

¹⁵¹ The sceptre and the key are, moreover, symbolically related to the "Axis of the World".

¹⁵² *From Monarchia*, III, 16. We provide an explanation of this passage by Dante in *Autorité spirituelle et Pouvoir temporel*.

¹⁵³ We should remember, in passing, although we have already pointed this out on several occasions, that Janus also had another function: he was the god of the craft guilds or *Collegia fabrorum*, which celebrated the two solstice festivals of winter and summer in his honour. Later, this custom was maintained in the builders' guilds; but with the advent of Christianity, these solstice festivals became identified with those of the two Saint Johns, the winter and summer ones (hence the expression "Lodge of Saint John", preserved even in modern Freemasonry); This is an example of the adaptation of pre-Christian symbols, often unknown or misinterpreted by modern people.

zodiacal cycle, and it is not without reason that this cycle, with its two ascending and descending halves, which have their respective starting points at the winter and summer solstices, is depicted on the portals of so many medieval churches¹⁵⁴. Here we see another meaning of Janus' faces: he is the "Lord of the Two Ways" to which the two solstice doors give access; these two ways, the left and the right (for here we find that other symbolism we pointed out earlier), represented by the Pythagoreans with the letter Y¹⁵⁵, and also represented, in an exoteric form, by the myth of Hercules between virtue and vice. These are the same two paths that Hindu tradition designates as the "path of the gods" (*deva-yāna*) and the "path of the ancestors" (*pitṛ-yāna*); and *Ganesha*, whose symbolism has numerous points of contact with that of Janus, is also the "Lord of the Two Paths", as an immediate consequence of his character as "Lord of Knowledge", which brings us back to the idea of initiation into the mysteries. Finally, these two paths are also, in a certain sense, like the gates through which they are reached, those of heaven and hell¹⁵⁶; and it will be noted that the two sides to which they correspond, the right and the left, are also those on which the elect and the damned are respectively distributed in representations of the Last Judgement, which, by a highly significant coincidence, is also so often found at the portal of churches, and not in any other part of the building¹⁵⁷. Such representations, like those of the Zodiac, express, we believe, something absolutely fundamental in the conception of the builders of cathedrals, who sought to give their works a

¹⁵⁴ This is clearly linked to what we indicated in the previous note about the traditions preserved by builders' guilds.

¹⁵⁵ This ancient symbol has survived until fairly recently: we found it, in particular, in Nicolas du Chemin's colophon, designed by Jean Cousin, in *Le Champ fleuri* by Geoffroy Tory (Paris, 1529), where it is referred to as the 'Pythagorean letter'; and also in the Louvre Museum, on various pieces of Renaissance furniture.

¹⁵⁶ In the Renaissance symbols just mentioned, the two paths are designated, in this context, as *via arcta* and *via lata*: 'narrow path' and 'broad path'.

¹⁵⁷ Sometimes it seems that what is referred to on the right in certain cases is referred to on the left in others, and vice versa; on the other hand, this contradiction may be only apparent, since it is always necessary to consider what is taken as the right and the left; when the contradiction is real, it can be explained by certain rather complex 'cyclical' concepts that influence the correspondences in question. We point this out solely in order not to conceal a difficulty that must be taken into account in order to correctly interpret a considerable number of symbols [cf. *La Grande Triade*, chap. VII].

"pantacular" character in the true sense of the term¹⁵⁸, that is, to make them a kind of synthetic compendium of the Universe¹⁵⁹.

¹⁵⁸ It should be spelled "pantacle" (*pantaculum*, literally 'little Everything') and not "pentacle", as is often done; this spelling error has led some to believe that the word was related to the number 5 and should be considered synonymous with "pentagram".

¹⁵⁹ This concept is, moreover, implied in a certain way in the very layout of the cathedral; but, for the moment at least, we cannot undertake to justify this assertion, which would take us much further afield.

XIX

*THE HIEROGLYPH OF CANCER*¹⁶⁰

In the course of our various studies, we have frequently had occasion to refer to the symbolism of the annual cycle, with its two ascending and descending halves, and especially to that of the two solstice gates, which respectively open and close these two halves of the cycle and are related to the figure of Janus among the Latins and that of *Ganesha* among the Hindus¹⁶¹. To fully understand the importance of this symbolism, it must be remembered that, by virtue of the analogy of each part of the Universe with the whole, there is a correspondence between the laws of all cycles, of whatever order they may be, so that the annual cycle, for example, can be understood as a reduced and therefore more accessible image of the great cosmic cycles (an expression such as "great year" indicates this quite clearly), and as a compendium, if one may say so, of the very process of universal manifestation; it is, moreover, what gives astrology its full significance as a properly "cosmological" science.

That being the case, the two "points of detention" of the solar course (which is the etymological meaning of the word "solstice") must correspond to the two extreme terms of manifestation, either as a whole or in each of the cycles that constitute it, cycles that are in an indefinite multitude and are nothing more than the different states or degrees of universal Existence. If this is applied more particularly to a cycle of individual manifestation, such as that of existence in the human state, it can be easily understood why the two solstice gates are traditionally designated as "the gate of men" and "the gate of the gods". The "gate of men", corresponding to the summer solstice and the zodiacal sign of Cancer, is the entrance into individual manifestation; the "gate of the gods", corresponding to the winter solstice and the zodiacal sign of Capricorn, is the exit from that same manifestation and the passage to the higher states, since the "gods" (the *deva* of the Hindu tradition), like the "angels," according to other terminology, properly represent, from a metaphysical point of view, the supra-individual states of being¹⁶².

¹⁶⁰ [Published in *V. I.*, July 1931].

¹⁶¹ See especially *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. III.

¹⁶² This point is explained in greater detail in *Les États multiples de l'Être*.

If we consider the distribution of the zodiacal signs according to the four elemental trigons, we see that the sign of Cancer corresponds to the 'bottom of the Waters', that is, in a cosmological sense, to the embryonic medium in which the seeds of the manifested world are deposited, seeds corresponding, in the "macrocosmic" order, to *the Brahmānda* or "Egg of the World", and, in the "microcosmic" order, to *the pinda*, the formal prototype of individuality, pre-existing in a subtle mode since the origin of cyclical manifestation, as one of the possibilities that must develop in the course of that manifestation¹⁶³. This can also be referred to the fact that the sign of Cancer is the domicile of the Moon, whose relationship with the Waters is well known, and which, like the Waters themselves, represents the passive and plastic principle of manifestation: the lunar sphere is properly the "world of formation", or the domain of the elaboration of forms in the subtle state, the starting point of existence in individual mode¹⁶⁴.

In the astrological symbol for Cancer, ☊, we see the seed in æmi-developed state, which is precisely the subtle state; it is therefore not the embryo. corporeal, but rather the formal prototype we have just referred to, whose existence lies in the psychic realm or "intermediate world". On the other hand, its figure is that of the Sanskrit *u*, a spiral element which, in the *akshara* or sacred monosyllable *Om*, constitutes the intermediate term between the point (*m*), which represents the principal non-manifestation, and the straight line (*a*), which represents the complete development of manifestation in the dense or gross (corporeal) state¹⁶⁵

Furthermore, this germ is double in the sign of Cancer, and its two identical parts are situated in inverse positions, representing two complementary terms: it is the *yang* and *yin* of the Far Eastern tradition, where the *yin-yang* symbol that unites them has precisely the same shape. This symbol, as representative of cyclical revolutions, whose phases are linked to the alternating predominance of *yang* and *yin*, is related to other figures of great importance from a traditional point of view, such as the *swastika*, and also the

¹⁶³See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chapters XIII and XIX. The constitutive analogy of the "microcosm" and the "macrocosm", considered in this respect, is expressed in Hindu doctrine with this formula: "*Yathā pinda, tathā Brahmānda*", 'such is the individual (subtle) embryo, such is the Egg of the World'.

¹⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, chap. XXI. We have pointed out on several occasions the identity of the "world of formation" or *Yetsiráh*, according to the terminology of the Hebrew Kabbalah, and the domain of subtle manifestation.

¹⁶⁵Regarding these geometric forms corresponding respectively to the three *mātrā* of *Om*, see *ibid.*, chap. XVI. It should be remembered in this regard that the point is the primordial principle of all geometric figures, just as the unmanifest is the principle of all states of manifestation, and that, being non-formal and "dimensionless," it is in its order the true and indivisible unity, which makes it a natural symbol of pure Being.

double spiral, which refers to the symbolism of the two hemispheres. These, one light and the other dark (*yang*, in its original sense, is the side of light, and *yin* that of shadow), are the two halves of the "Egg of the World", assimilated respectively to Heaven and Earth¹⁶⁶. They are also, for each being, and always by virtue of the analogy between 'microcosm' and 'macrocosm', the two halves of the primordial Androgyne, which is generally described, symbolically, as spherical in shape¹⁶⁷; this spherical form is that of the complete being that is virtually present in the original germ, and which must be reconstituted in its effective fullness at the end of individual cyclical development.

It should also be noted that its shape is also that of the conch shell (*çankha*), which is clearly directly related to the Waters and is also represented as a receptacle for the seeds of the future cycle during periods of *pralaya* or 'external dissolution' of the world. This conch contains the primordial and imperishable sound (*ākshara*), the monosyllable *Om*, which is, through its three sound elements (*mātrā*), the essence of the triple *Veda*; and this is how the *Veda* subsists perpetually, being in itself prior to all worlds, but in a certain way hidden or enveloped during the cosmic cataclysms that separate the different cycles, to be then manifested again at the beginning of each one of them¹⁶⁸. On the other hand, the diagram can be completed as a representation of *the ākshara* itself: the straight line (*a*) covers and encloses the shell (*u*), which contains within it the point (*m*) or essential principle of beings¹⁶⁹; the straight line then represents at the same time, by its horizontal direction, the "surface of the Waters", that is, the substantial medium in which the development of the germs will take place (represented in Eastern symbolism by the opening of the lotus flower) after the end of the intermediate period of darkness.

¹⁶⁶These two hemispheres were represented among the Greeks by the round headdresses of the *Dioscuri*, which are the two halves of Leda's egg, that is, the swan's egg, which, like the serpent's egg, represents the 'Egg of the World' (cf. the *Hamsa* ['swan' or 'wild goose'] of Hindu tradition).

¹⁶⁷ See, for example, the speech that Plato puts into the mouth of Aristophanes in the *Symposium*, whose symbolic value, although evident, modern commentators mistakenly fail to recognise. We have developed our considerations concerning this spherical form in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*.

¹⁶⁸ The assertion of the perpetuity of *the Veda* must be directly linked to the cosmological theory of the primordially of sound (*çabda*) among the sensible qualities (as a quality proper to Ether, *Akāça*, which is the first of these elements); and this theory in turn must be related to that of 'creation by the Word' in Western traditions: the primordial sound is the divine Word 'by which all things were made'.

¹⁶⁹ By a very remarkable coincidence, this scheme is also that of the human ear, the organ of hearing, which must, in order to be capable of perceiving sound, have a structure in accordance with the nature of sound.

(*sandhyá*) between two cycles. Continuing with the same schematic representation, we will then have a figure that can be described as the shell turned upside down and opening to let the seeds out, following the straight line now oriented in a vertical downward direction, which is that of the development of manifestation from its unmanifested principle¹⁷⁰.

Of these two positions of the shell, found in the two halves of the symbol of Cancer, the first corresponds to the figure of Noah's Ark (or *Satyávrata* in the Hindu tradition), which can be represented as the lower half of a circumference, closed by its horizontal diameter, inside which is contained the point where all germs are synthesised in a state of complete withdrawal¹⁷¹. The second position is symbolised by the rainbow that appears "in the cloud", that is, in the region of the upper Waters, at the moment that marks the restoration of order and the renewal of all things, while the ark, during the cataclysm, floated on the ocean of the lower Waters; it is, therefore, the upper half of the same circumference; and the union of the two figures, mutually inverse and complementary, forms a single complete circular or cyclical figure, a reconstitution of the primordial spherical form: this circumference is the vertical section of the sphere, whose horizontal section is represented by the circular enclosure of the earthly Paradise¹⁷². In the Far Eastern *yin-yang*, the two semicircles are found in the inner part, but displaced by a splitting of the centre, which represents a polarisation, which for each state of manifestation is analogous to that of *Sat* or pure Being in *Purusha-Prakriti* for universal manifestation¹⁷³.

These considerations do not claim to be complete, and undoubtedly correspond only to some of the aspects of the sign of Cancer; but they may at least serve as an example to show that there is much more to traditional astrology than a "divinatory art" or a "conjectural science," as moderns think. In reality, it contains everything that is also found, under different expressions, in other sciences of the same order, as we have already indicated in our study on

¹⁷⁰ This new figure is the one given in the *Archaeometer* for the letter *het*, the zodiacal letter of Cancer.

¹⁷¹ The semicircle should be considered here as a morphological equivalent of the spiral element referred to above; but in this case, the development can be clearly seen taking place from the initial germ point.

¹⁷² See *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. XI. This also has a connection with the mysteries of the letter *nûn* of the Arabic alphabet [cf. chap. XXIII: "The mysteries of the letter *Nûn*"].

¹⁷³ This is a first distinction or differentiation, but still without separation of the complementary elements; this stage corresponds precisely to the constitution of the Androgyne, whereas prior to this differentiation, one can only speak of the "neutrality" of pure Being [see *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XXVIII].

"the science of letters"¹⁷⁴, which gives these sciences an initiatory value, allowing them to be considered truly as an integral part of "Sacred Science".

¹⁷⁴ [See Chapter VI].

XX

*SHET*¹⁷⁵

Kâna el-insânu háyyatan fi-l-qídam
 ('Man was a serpent in ancient times')

In a curious English book on the "end times", *The Antichrist (Personal. Future)*, by E. H. Moggridge¹⁷⁶, there is a point that has particularly attracted our attention and on which we would like to shed some light: it is the interpretation of the names Nimrod and Shet. To tell the truth, the author's assimilation of the two names raises many reservations, but there is at least some real connection, and the links established on the basis of animal symbolism seem to us to be well founded.

Let us establish, first of all, that *namar* in Hebrew, like *nimr* in Arabic, is properly the "spotted animal", a name common to the tiger, the panther and the leopard; and it can be said, even sticking to the most external meaning, that these animals adequately represent, in effect, the "hunter" that Nimrod was according to the Bible. But in addition, the tiger, viewed in a sense that is not necessarily unfavourable, is, like the bear in Norse tradition, a symbol of *the kshátriya*; and the founding of Nineveh and the Assyrian empire by Nimrod seems to be, in fact, the result of a rebellion by the *kshátriya* against the authority of the Chaldean priestly caste. Hence the legendary relationship established between Nimrod and the *Nefilím* or other antediluvian "giants", who also appear as *kshátriyas* in earlier periods; and hence, too, Nimrod has remained proverbially as an image of temporal power asserting itself independently of spiritual authority.

Now then, what does all this have to do with Shet? The tiger and other similar animals are, as 'destroyers', emblems of *the Egyptian Set*, brother and slayer of Osiris, whom the Greeks named Typhon; and it can be said that the 'Nimrodic' spirit comes from the dark principle designated by the name of *Set*, without this implying that Set is to be identified with Nimrod himself: there is a distinction here that is more than a mere nuance. But the point that seems to offer the greatest difficulty is the evil significance of the name *Set or Shet*, which, on the other hand, as it designates the son of Adam, far from signifying destruction, evokes the opposite idea of

¹⁷⁵ [Published in *V. I.*, October 1931.] [The Hebrew forms of the names Set and Nemrod are retained here, as in the original. (*Translator's note*).]

¹⁷⁶ [Commented on by Argos in a chronicle in *V. I.*, July 1931, entitled: "...d'un curieux livre sur les derniers temps".]

stability and restoration of order. Furthermore, if one wishes to establish biblical connections, Set's role in relation to Osiris would be reminiscent of Cain's role in relation to Abel; and in this regard, we should note that some consider Nimrod to be one of the "Cainites" who are said to have escaped the antediluvian cataclysm. But the Shet of *Genesis* is opposed to Cain, far from being assimilated to him: how, then, is his name associated here?

In fact, the word *Shet* has two opposite meanings in Hebrew itself: "foundation" and "tumult" and "ruin"¹⁷⁷; and the expression *beni Shet* ("son of Shet") also has this double meaning. It is true that linguists want to see in this double meaning two different words, coming from two different verbal roots: *shyt* for the first and *shat* for the second; but the distinction between the two roots appears to be entirely secondary, and in any case their essential constituent elements are certainly identical. In reality, this should be seen as nothing more than an application of the double meaning of symbols, to which we have frequently referred; and such an application is particularly evident in the case of the symbolism of the serpent.

Indeed, if the tiger or leopard is a symbol of *the Egyptian Set*, the serpent is the other¹⁷⁸; and this is easily understood if one considers it in terms of its malevolent aspect, which is most commonly attributed to it; but it is almost always forgotten that the serpent also has a beneficial aspect, which is also found in the symbolism of ancient Egypt, especially in the form of the royal serpent, the *uraeus* or basilisk¹⁷⁹. Even in Christian iconography, the serpent is sometimes a symbol of Christ¹⁸⁰; and the biblical Shet, whose role in the legend of the Grail we have pointed out on another occasion¹⁸¹, is often considered a 'prefiguration' of Christ¹⁸². It can be said that the two Shets are basically nothing more than the two serpents of the Hermetic caduceus¹⁸³: they are, if you like, life and

¹⁷⁷ The word is identical in both cases, but, curiously enough, it is masculine in the first and feminine in the second.

¹⁷⁸ It is very noteworthy that the Greek name *Typhôn* is anagrammatically formed from the same elements as *Pythôn*.

¹⁷⁹ Let us also recall the serpent that appears in *Knef* and produces the 'Egg of the World' from its mouth (symbol of the Word); it is well known that for the Druids, this was also the 'serpent's egg' (represented by the fossil sea urchin).

¹⁸⁰ In *Le Roi du Monde*, chapter III, we have pointed out in this regard the representation of the amphibiaena, a two-headed serpent, one head representing Christ and the other Satan.

¹⁸¹ *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. V.

¹⁸² It is likely that the Gnostics known as "Setians" did not in fact differ from the "Ophites", for whom the serpent (*ophis*) was a symbol of the Word and Wisdom (*Sophia*).

¹⁸³ It is very curious that the name Shet, reduced to its essential elements S T in the Latin alphabet (which is nothing more than a form of the Phoenician alphabet), gives the figure of the "bronze serpent".

death, both produced by a power that is single in its essence but double in its manifestation¹⁸⁴.

If we dwell on this interpretation in terms of life and death, even though it is ultimately only a particular application of the consideration of two opposing or antagonistic terms, this is because the symbolism of the serpent is linked above all to the very idea of life¹⁸⁵; in Arabic, the serpent is called *el-hayyah*, and life *el-hayàh* (Hebrew *hayàh*, meaning both 'life' and 'animal', from the root *hay*, common to both languages)¹⁸⁶. This, which is linked to the symbolism of the 'Tree of Life'¹⁸⁷, also allows us to glimpse a unique relationship between the serpent and Eve (*Hawà*, the 'living one'); and we may recall here the medieval figurations of 'temptation', where the body of the serpent, coiled around the tree, has a woman's bust on top of it¹⁸⁸. No less strange is the Chinese symbolism of *Fu-hsi* and his sister *Nü-kua*, who, it is said, reigned together as a fraternal couple, as was also found in ancient Egypt (even as late as the Ptolemaic period), and are sometimes represented with the body of a serpent and a human head; and it even happens that the two snakes intertwine like those of the caduceus, undoubtedly alluding to the complementarity of *yang* and *yin*¹⁸⁹. Without going into further detail, which would take us too far afield, we can see in all this an indication that the serpent, since undoubtedly very remote times, has had an importance that is unsuspected today; and if all aspects of its symbolism were to be studied carefully, especially in Egypt and India, we would undoubtedly arrive at some very unexpected conclusions.

Regarding the double meaning of symbols, it should be noted that the number 666 does not have an exclusively evil significance either; although it is "the number of the Beast", it is above all a solar number, and, as we have said elsewhere¹⁹⁰, that of *Hajatrî'el* or "Angel

purpose of the latter, let us point out that in Hebrew the same word actually means "serpent" (*nahash*) and "bronze" (*nehash*); in Arabic there is another no less strange relationship: *nahas* ('calamity') and *nahàs* ('copper').

¹⁸⁴ On this point, reference may be made to the study we have devoted to "thunderstones" [chapter XXV of this compilation].

¹⁸⁵ This meaning is particularly evident in the serpent coiled around the rod of Asclepius.

¹⁸⁶ *El-Hay* is one of the principal divine names; it should be translated, not as 'the Living One', as is often done, but as 'the Life-Giver', the one who gives life or is the principle of life.

¹⁸⁷ See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XXV.

¹⁸⁸ An example can be found on the left portal of Notre-Dame de Paris.

¹⁸⁹ It is said that *Nü-kua* melted stones of the five colours (white, black, red, yellow, blue) to repair a tear in the celestial vault, and also that she cut off the four legs of the tortoise to set the four corners of the world upon them.

¹⁹⁰ *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. V.

of the Crown". On the other hand, the same number results from the name *Sôrat*, which is, according to Kabbalists, the solar demon, opposed as such to the archangel *Mîja'el*, and this refers to the two faces of *Metatron*¹⁹¹; *Sôrat* is also an anagram of *setûr*, which means "hidden thing": is this the "mystery name" mentioned in the *Apocalypse*? But if *satar* means 'to hide', it also means 'to protect'; and in Arabic, the same word *satar* evokes almost exclusively the idea of 'protection', and often even that of divine and providential protection¹⁹²; here too, things are much less simple than those who see them from only one side believe.

But let us return to the symbolic animals of the Egyptian *Set*, among which are also the crocodile, which is self-explanatory, and the hippopotamus, in which some have wanted to see the *Behemoth* of the *Book of Job*, and perhaps not without some reason, although that word (plural of *behemâh*, in Arabic *bahîrnah*) is properly a collective designation for all large quadrupeds¹⁹³. But another animal that, although it may seem very strange, is at least as important here as the hippopotamus is the donkey, and more especially the red-haired donkey¹⁹⁴, which was represented as one of the most fearsome entities among all those that the deceased had to encounter in the course of his journey to the afterlife, or, esoterically speaking, the initiate in the course of his trials; could this, rather than the hippopotamus, be the "scarlet beast" of the *Apocalypse*?¹⁹⁵. In any case, one of the most sinister aspects of the "Typhonian" mysteries was the cult of the "donkey-headed god", to which, as is well known, the early Christians were accused of adhering¹⁹⁶; we have certain reasons to believe that, in one or

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, chap. III.

¹⁹² Could these words be related to the Greek *sôtêr*, 'saviour', without excessive linguistic imagination? And should it be said, in this regard, that there can and even must be a singular similarity between the designations of Christ [in Arabic] (*el-Messih*) and the Antichrist (*el Messîj*)? [See on this subject *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XXXIX].

¹⁹³ The root *baham* or *abham* means 'to be mute' and also 'to be hidden'; if the general meaning of *Behemoth* is linked to the first of these two ideas, the second may evoke more specifically the animal 'that hides among the reeds'; and here the relationship with the meaning of the other root, *satar*, to which we have just referred, is also quite curious.

¹⁹⁴ Yet another strange linguistic similarity: in Arabic, 'donkey' is *himar* (in Hebrew: *hemôr*), and 'red' is *âhmar*; the 'red donkey' would therefore be, like the 'bronze serpent', a kind of 'pleonasm' in phonic symbolism.

¹⁹⁵ In India, the donkey is the symbolic mount of *Mudêvî*, the infernal aspect of *Çakti*.

¹⁹⁶ The role of the donkey in the Gospel tradition, at the birth of Christ and at his entry into Jerusalem, may seem to contradict the evil character attributed to it in almost all other traditions; and the "feast of the donkey" celebrated in the Middle Ages does not seem to have ever been satisfactorily explained; we shall be very careful not to venture the slightest interpretation on this very obscure subject. [The two points touched upon in this note were dealt with much later by the author in an article entitled "On the significance of 'carnival' festivals", in *É. T.*, December 1945, which

In another way, this cult has continued to the present day, and some even claim that it will last until the end of the current cycle.

From this last point, we wish to draw at least one conclusion: when a civilisation declines, what persists longest is the lowest aspect of its own tradition, particularly the 'magical' aspect, which, moreover, due to the deviations it gives rise to, contributes to completing its ruin; this is what is said to have happened to Atlantis¹⁹⁷. This is also the only thing whose remnants have survived in the case of civilisations that have disappeared entirely; this is easy to verify in the case of Egypt, Chaldea, and even Druidism; and undoubtedly the "fetishism" of black peoples has a similar origin. It could be said that sorcery is made up of vestiges of dead civilisations; is this why, in more recent times, the serpent has retained almost nothing but its evil significance, and why the dragon, the ancient Eastern symbol of the Word, now evokes only 'diabolical' ideas in the minds of modern Westerners?¹⁹⁸ .

constitutes the following chapter. It may seem curious, however, that, even though he mentions the points in question, R. Guénon did so for the first time in such a carefully limited manner. The explanation could be sought in the circumstantial and very special reasons that led the author to address the very subject of this article at a time when he was responding to certain attacks directed against him and his work by several contributors to the *Revue internationale des Sociétés secrètes*. It is a very complex and instructive matter, moreover, concerning the forces at work in this order of things, but one which we can only mention here without dwelling on it. It may only be noted that the following sentence in the text refers to the preservation of these dark 'typhonic' mysteries in our own day.

¹⁹⁷ [Cf. *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XXXVIII: 'De l'anti-tradition à la contre-tradition', p. 258 and n. 1].

¹⁹⁸ [Cf. *ibid.*, chap. XXX: "The reversal of symbols," p. 200].

XXI

*ON THE MEANING OF 'CARNIVAL' CELEBRATIONS*¹⁹⁹

On the occasion of a certain "theory of the festival" formulated by a sociologist, we had pointed out²⁰⁰ that this theory, among other flaws, sought to reduce all festivals to a single type, which constitutes what could be called "carnival" festivals, an expression that seems clear enough to be understood by all, since carnival effectively represents what still survives of them in the West; and we said then that this type of festival raises issues worthy of closer examination. Indeed, the impression they give is always, and above all, one of 'disorder' in the fullest sense of the term; How is it, then, that these festivals exist not only in an era such as ours, where they could be considered, if they were peculiar to it, as simply one of the many manifestations of general imbalance, but also, and even more extensively, in traditional civilisations, with which they would seem at first glance to be incompatible?

It is not useless to cite some specific examples here, and we will mention first of all, in this regard, certain festivals of a truly strange nature that were celebrated in the Middle Ages: the "festival of the donkey", in which this animal, whose "satanic" symbolism is well known in all traditions²⁰¹, was brought into the very choir of the church, where it occupied the place of honour and received the most extraordinary signs of veneration; and the "feast of fools", where the lower clergy indulged in the worst improprieties, parodying both the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the liturgy itself²⁰².

How is it possible to explain such things, whose most obvious characteristic is

¹⁹⁹ [Published in *É. T.*, December 1945].

²⁰⁰ See *É. T.*, April 1940, p. 169.

²⁰¹ It would be a mistake to contrast this with the role played by the donkey in the Gospel tradition, since, in reality, the ox and the donkey, placed on either side of the manger at the birth of Christ, symbolise respectively the forces of good and the forces of evil; both sets are found again, moreover, in the Crucifixion, in the form of the good thief and the bad thief. On the other hand, Christ riding on a donkey at his entry into Jerusalem represents the triumph over evil forces, a triumph whose realisation constitutes the 'Redemption' itself. [This note provides the answer to the first of the two points left unresolved by the author in one of the notes in chapter XX: Shet; the explanation of the second point is given in the body of the article].

²⁰² These "madmen" also wore a cap with long ears, clearly intended to evoke the idea of a donkey's head, and this feature is no less significant from the point of view we have taken.

How is it possible that such acts, unquestionably parodies and even sacrilegious²⁰³, could have been not only tolerated but even officially accepted in a period such as that?

We will also mention the Saturnalia of ancient Rome, from which, moreover, the modern carnival seems to derive directly, although in truth only as a very diminished vestige: during these festivities, slaves commanded their masters and the latter served them²⁰⁴; the image of a truly inverted world was created, where everything was done in reverse of the normal order. Although it is commonly claimed that these festivals evoked a "golden age," this interpretation is manifestly false, since it is not a kind of "equality" that could strictly be considered a representation, insofar as present conditions allow²⁰⁶, of the original indifference of social functions: it is an inversion of hierarchical relationships, which is something entirely different, and such an inversion constitutes, in general, one of the clearest characteristics of "Satanism". We must therefore see in them something that refers to the 'sinister' aspect of Saturn, an aspect that certainly does not belong to him as the god of the 'golden age', but, on the contrary, insofar as he is now only the fallen god of a period that has come to an end²⁰⁷.

These examples show that there is invariably a "sinister" and even "satanic" element in festivals of this kind, and it is particularly noteworthy that

²⁰³The author of the theory we refer to certainly recognises the existence of this parody and sacrilege, but, referring to his conception of the 'festival' in general, he attempts to make them characteristic elements of the 'sacred' itself, which is not only a somewhat excessive paradox, but, it must be said clearly, a pure and simple contradiction.

²⁰⁴ There are even cases in very diverse regions of similar celebrations in which a slave or criminal was temporarily conferred the insignia of royalty, with all the power that this entailed, only to be put to death once the celebration was over.

²⁰⁵The same author also speaks in this regard of "acts in reverse" and even of a "return to chaos," which contains at least a grain of truth, but, due to an astonishing confusion of ideas, he wants to equate this chaos with the Golden Age.

²⁰⁶ We mean the conditions of *the Kali-Yuga* or "iron age", of which the Roman era is as much a part as our own.

²⁰⁷That the ancient gods should in a sense become demons is a generally established fact, of which the attitude of Christians towards the gods of 'paganism' is but a simple particular case; but it seems that this has never been properly explained; we cannot, moreover, dwell on this point here, as it would take us beyond our subject. It should be clearly understood that this, which refers only to certain cyclical conditions, does not in any way affect or modify the essential character of these same gods insofar as they symbolise timeless principles of a superhuman order, so that, alongside this accidental malevolent aspect, the beneficial aspect always subsists despite everything, even when it is completely unknown to 'outsiders'; the astrological interpretation of Saturn could offer an example in this regard.

It is precisely this element that appeals to the masses and excites their joy: it is, in fact, something that is more suited than anything else to satisfying the tendencies of "fallen man," insofar as these tendencies lead him to develop above all the lowest possibilities of his being. And precisely in this lies the true *raison d'être* of such festivals: in short, it is a matter of 'channelling' these tendencies in some way and making them as harmless as possible by giving them the opportunity to manifest themselves, but only for very short periods and in very specific circumstances, and also by assigning strict limits to this manifestation that they are not allowed to exceed²⁰⁸. If this were not the case, these same tendencies, lacking the minimum satisfaction required by the current state of humanity, would risk producing an explosion, so to speak, and spreading their effects to the whole of existence, both collective and individual, causing a disorder much more serious than that which occurs only during a few days expressly reserved for this purpose, and moreover, all the less fearsome because it is thereby "regularised", since, on the one hand, those days are as if placed outside the normal course of things, so as not to exert any appreciable influence on it, and yet, on the other hand, the fact that there is nothing unexpected "normalises" the disorder itself in a certain way and integrates it into the total order.

In addition to this general explanation, which is perfectly obvious if one cares to reflect on it, there are some useful observations to be made concerning more specifically the "masquerades" that play an important role in carnival itself and in other more or less similar festivals; and these observations will confirm what we have just said. Indeed, carnival masks are generally ugly and most often evoke animal or demonic forms, so that they constitute a kind of figurative 'materialisation' of those lower, even 'infernal', tendencies, which are then allowed to express themselves. Moreover, each person will naturally choose from among these masks the one that suits them best, that is, the one that represents what is most in accordance with their own tendencies of this order, so that it could be said that the mask, which is supposed to hide the individual's true face, on the contrary, reveals to everyone what they really carry within themselves, but which they must usually

²⁰⁸ This is related to the subject of the symbolic "box", to which we intend to return [see chap. LXVI].

²⁰⁹ At the end of the Middle Ages, when the grotesque festivals we have mentioned were suppressed or fell into disuse, there was an expansion of witchcraft on a scale unprecedented in previous centuries. these two events are quite directly related, although this is generally overlooked, which is all the more surprising given that there are certain striking similarities between these festivals and the witches' sabbath, where everything was also done 'backwards'.

conceal. It is worth noting, as this shows even more precisely the nature of these events, that there is a kind of parody of this "reversal" * which, as we have explained elsewhere²¹⁰, occurs to a certain degree during initiatory development; a parody, we say, and a truly "satanic" counterfeit, for there this "reversion" is an externalisation, not of spirituality, but, quite the contrary, of the inferior possibilities of the being²¹¹.

To conclude this brief overview, we will add that if festivals of this type are becoming increasingly rare and no longer seem to arouse much interest among the masses, it is because, in an era such as ours, they have truly lost their *raison d'être*²¹²: how, indeed, could one "circumscribe" disorder and confine it within strictly defined limits when it is widespread everywhere and manifests itself continuously in all areas of human activity? Thus, the almost complete disappearance of these festivals, which, if one were to stick to external appearances and a purely 'aesthetic' point of view, might tempt one to rejoice because of their inevitable 'ugliness', is, on the contrary, when one gets to the bottom of things, a very disturbing symptom, as it testifies that disorder has invaded the entire course of existence and has become so widespread that we are actually living, one might say, in a sinister "perpetual carnival".

* "Reversal" attempts to translate the French original *retournement*, with the meaning of 'turning something inside out'. (*Translator's note*).

²¹⁰ See "L'Esprit est-il dans le corps ou le corps dans l'esprit" [*Initiation et réalisation spirituelle*, chap. XXX].

²¹¹ In certain traditional civilisations, there were also special periods when, for similar reasons, "wandering influences" were allowed to manifest freely, while taking all necessary precautions in such cases; these influences correspond, naturally, in the cosmic order, to what is the lower psyche in human beings, and, consequently, there is the same inverse relationship between their manifestations and those of spiritual influences as between the two kinds of externalisation just mentioned; moreover, under these conditions, it is not difficult to understand that the masquerade itself seems to represent in a certain way an appearance of "larvae" or evil spectres. [Having had the opportunity to communicate to the author some personal reflections on the technical role of the manifestations organised in "carnival" celebrations, we received this reply from René Guénon, which we transcribe to complete his exposition: "...there is certainly a certain relationship with the 'exhaustion of lower possibilities', but it must be approached in a certain 'collective' way" (letter of 18 December 1945 to M. Vâlsan). On the question of the 'exhaustion of lower possibilities', cf. *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chap. VI: 'Les trois mondes', and *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XXVI: 'De la mort initiatique'.

²¹² This is equivalent to saying that they are no longer, strictly speaking, but "superstitions", in the etymological sense of the word.

XXII

*SOME ASPECTS OF THE SYMBOLISM OF THE FISH*²¹³

The symbolism of the fish, found in numerous traditional forms, including Christianity, is very complex and has multiple aspects that need to be distinguished with precision. As for the earliest origins of this symbol, it seems that it should be recognised as having a Nordic, and even Hyperborean, provenance: indeed, its presence has been noted in Northern Germany and Scandinavia²¹⁴, and in those regions it is probably closer to its point of origin than in Central Asia, where it was undoubtedly brought by the great current that, coming directly from the primordial Tradition, was soon to give birth to the doctrines of India and Persia. It should also be noted that, in general, certain aquatic animals play a role above all in the symbolism of the peoples of the North: we will cite as an example the octopus, particularly widespread among the Scandinavians and Celts, and also present in archaic Greece as one of the main motifs of Mycenaean ornamentation²¹⁵.

Another fact that also supports these considerations is that, in India, the manifestation in the form of a fish (*Matsyaavatâra*) is considered to be the first of all manifestations of *Vishnu*²¹⁶, which is situated at the very beginning of the current cycle, and therefore in immediate relation to the starting point of the primordial Tradition. It should not be forgotten in this regard that *Vishnu* represents the divine Principle considered especially in its aspect as preserver of the world; this role is very close to that of the 'Saviour', or rather, the latter is like a particular case of the former; and indeed *Vishnu* appears as 'Saviour' in some of his manifestations, corresponding to critical phases in the history of the world²¹⁷. Now, the idea of

²¹³ [Published in *É. T.*, February 1936].

²¹⁴ Cf. L. Charbonneau-Lassay, "Le Poisson", in *Reg.*, December 1926 issue.

²¹⁵ The tentacles of the octopus are generally straight in Scandinavian depictions, whereas they are coiled in a spiral in Mycenaean ornaments; in the latter, the *swastika* or figures clearly derived from it also appear very frequently. The symbol of the octopus refers to the zodiac sign of Cancer, which corresponds to the summer solstice and the 'bottom of the Waters'; it is easy to understand why it has sometimes been taken in a 'malevolent sense', since that solstice is the *Ianua Inferni*.

²¹⁶We should note that we do not say 'incarnations', as is customary in the West, since this word is entirely inaccurate; the proper meaning of the word *avatâra* is 'descent' of the divine Principle into the manifested world.

²¹⁷ Let us also point out, in this regard, that the last manifestation, the *Kalkin-Avatâra*, "He who rides the white horse," which is to occur at the end of this cycle, is described in the *Purânas*

"Savior" is also explicitly linked to the Christian symbolism of the fish, since the last letter of the Greek *ikhthys* is interpreted as the initial of *sôtèr*²¹⁸; This is not surprising, of course, when it comes to Christ, but there are emblems that allude more directly to some of his other attributes and do not formally express this role of "Savior."

In the form of a fish, *Vishnu*, at the end of the *Manvantara* preceding ours, appears to *Satyávratā*, who, under the name of *Vaivásvata*, will be the *Manu* or Lawgiver of the current cycle. The god announces that the world will be destroyed by water and orders him to build the ark in which the seeds of the future world must be enclosed; then, still in the form of a fish, he himself guides the ark over the waters during the cataclysm; and this representation of the ark led by the divine fish is all the more remarkable in that it has its equivalent in Christian symbolism²²¹.

There is another aspect of the *Matsya-avatāra* that deserves our particular attention: after the cataclysm, that is, at the very beginning of the present *Manvantara*, he brings men the *Veda*, which must be understood, according to the etymological meaning of the word (derived from the root *vid-*, 'to know'), as the Science par excellence or sacred Knowledge in its entirety: this is one of the clearest allusions to the primordial Revelation, or to the 'non-human' origin of Tradition. It is said that the *Veda* subsists perpetually, being in itself prior to all worlds; but it is in a certain way hidden or enclosed during the cosmic cataclysms that separate the different cycles, and must then be manifested.

in terms that are strictly identical to those found in the *Apocalypse*, where they refer to the "second coming" of Christ.

²¹⁸When the fish is taken as a symbol of Christ, its Greek name *ikhthys* is considered to be formed from the initial letters of the words *Iēsoûs KHRistós THEoûs hYiós Sôtèr* ['Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour'].

²¹⁹This name literally means 'consecrated to truth'; and this idea of 'Truth' is found in the designation of *Satya-Yuga*, the first of the four ages into which *Manvantara* is divided. One may also note the similarity of the word *Satya* to the name *Saturn*, considered in ancient Western times to be the ruler of the 'golden age'; and, in Hindu tradition, the sphere of Saturn is called *Satya-Loka*.

²²⁰Born of *Vivásvat*, one of the twelve *Adityas*, who are considered to be as many forms of the Sun, corresponding to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and who are said to appear simultaneously at the end of the cycle. (Cf. *Le Roi du Mondo*, chaps. IV and XI).

²²¹L. Charbonneau-Lassay cites, in the aforementioned study, "the pontifical ornament decorated with embroidered figures that enveloped the remains of an eighth- or ninth-century Lombard bishop, on which was seen a boat driven by a fish, an image of Christ sustaining his Church." The ark has often been considered a figure of the Church, as has the boat (which was formerly, along with the keys, one of the emblems of Janus; cf. *Autorité spirituelle et Pouvoir temporel*, chap. VIII); it is, therefore, certainly the same idea that we find expressed in Hindu and Christian symbolism.

once again. The assertion of the perpetuity of *the Veda* is, moreover, directly related to the cosmological theory of the primordially of sound among the sensible qualities (as a quality proper to Ether, *Ākāṣa*, which is the first of the elements)²²² ; and this theory is essentially no different from that expressed by other traditions when they speak of creation by the Word: the primordial sound is that divine Word by which, according to the first chapter of *the Hebrew Genesis*, all things were made²²³ . That is why it is said that the *Rshi* or Sages of the early ages have "heard" the *Veda*: Revelation, being the work of the Word, like creation itself, is properly an "hearing" for the one who receives it; and the term that designates it is *Ṣruti*, which literally means "the heard"²²⁴.

During the cataclysm that separates this *Manvantara* from the previous one, the *Veda* was enclosed, in a state of retreat, in the conch shell (*ṣankha*), which is one of the main attributes of *Vishnu*. For the conch shell is considered to be the container of the primordial and imperishable sound (*ākshara*), that is, of the monosyllable *Om*, which is par excellence the name of the Word manifested in the three worlds, and at the same time, by another correspondence of its three sound elements or *mātrā*, the essence of *the triple Veda*²²⁵. On the other hand, these three elements, reduced to their essential geometric forms²²⁶ and arranged graphically in a certain way, form the very outline of the conch; and, by a very singular concordance, it so happens that this outline is also that of the human ear, the organ of hearing, which must, in fact, if it is to be fit for the perception of sound, have an arrangement in accordance with the nature of sound²²⁷. All this visibly touches on some of the deepest mysteries of cosmology; but who, in the state of mind that constitutes the modern mentality, can still comprehend the truths belonging to this traditional science?

Like *Vishnu* in India, and also in the form of a fish, the Chaldean *Oannes*, whom some have expressly considered to be a figure of Christ²²⁸, also teaches men the primordial doctrine: a notable example of the unity that exists between

²²² Cf. our study on "La Théorie hindoue des cinq éléments" (The Hindu Theory of the Five Elements), in *É. T.*, August-September 1935.

²²³ Cf. also the beginning of the Gospel of St John.

²²⁴ On the distinction between *Ṣruti* and *Smṛti* and their relationships, see *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. I. It should be made clear that if we use the word "revelation" here instead of "inspiration," it is to better highlight the concordance of the different traditional symbolisms, and that, moreover, like all theological terms, it is susceptible to a transposition that goes beyond the specifically religious meaning given to it exclusively in the West.

²²⁵ On the presence of this same *AVM* ideogram in ancient Christian symbolism, cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. IV.

²²⁶ See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. XVI.

²²⁷ [All the points mentioned here in relation to the symbolism of the shell had already been examined in "The Hieroglyph of Cancer", which forms chapter XIX here].

traditions that appear to be more diverse, and which would remain inexplicable if their belonging to a common source were not acknowledged. It seems, moreover, that the symbolism of *Oannes* or *Dagon* is not only that of the fish in general, but must be related more specifically to that of the dolphin: among the Greeks, the dolphin was linked to the cult of *Apollo*²²⁹ and had given its name to *Delphi*; and it is very significant that the Hyperborean origin of this cult was formally recognised. What suggests that such a link can be established (which is not clearly indicated, however, in the case of the manifestation of *Vishnu*) is above all the close connection between the symbol of the dolphin and that of the 'Woman of the Sea' (the *Aphrodite Anadyomene* of the Greeks)²³⁰; precisely, she appears, under various names (particularly those of *Ishtar*, *Atargatis* and *Derceto*) as the female consort of *Oannes* or his equivalents, that is, as a representation of a complementary aspect of the same principle (what Hindu tradition would call his *çakti*)²³¹. She is the "Lady of the Lotus" (*Ishtar*, like *Esther* in Hebrew, means "lotus" and also sometimes "lily", two flowers that, in symbolism, often replace each other)²³², like the Far Eastern *Kwan-yin*, who is also, in one of her forms, the "Goddess of the Deep Seas".

To complete these observations, we will add that the figure of the Babylonian *Ea*, the "Lord of the Abyss" represented as a being half goat and half fish²³³, is identical to that of the zodiacal Capricorn, of which he may even have been the prototype; and it is important to remember, in this regard, that the sign of Capricorn corresponds in the annual cycle to the winter solstice. The *Mâkara*, which in the Hindu zodiac has the place of

²²⁸ It is interesting to note in this regard that the fish head headdress worn by the priests of *Oannes* is also the mitre worn by Christian bishops.

²²⁹ This explains the link between the symbolism of the dolphin and the idea of light (cf. L. Charbonneau-Lassay, "Le Dauphin et le crustacé", in *Reg.*, January 1922 issue, and *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, chap. XCVIII, V). It is also worth noting the role of saviour of shipwrecked sailors attributed by the ancients to the dolphin, of which the legend of Arion offers one of the best-known examples.

²³⁰ This "Woman of the Sea" should not be confused with the mermaid, even though she is sometimes depicted in a similar way.

²³¹ The *Dea Syra* is properly the "Sun Goddess", just as primitive Syria is the "Land of the Sun", as we have already explained, since her name is identical to *Sûrya*, the Sanskrit designation for the Sun.

²³² In Hebrew, the names *Esther* and *Sushana* [whose initial letter is *sin*] have the same meaning, and are also numerically equivalent: their common number is 661, and by placing the letter *he*, the sign of the article, whose value is 5, in front of each of them, we obtain 666, from which some have drawn more or less fanciful conclusions; for our part, we offer this information merely as a matter of curiosity.

²³³ Furthermore, *Ea* has before him, like the Egyptian scarab, a ball representing the "Egg of the World".

Capricorn bears a certain resemblance to the dolphin; the symbolic opposition between the two must therefore be reduced to that between the two solstice signs of Capricorn and Cancer (the latter being represented in India by the crab), or to that between *Ianua Caeli* and *Ianua Inferni*²³⁴; and this also explains why the two animals have been associated in certain cases, for example under the tripod of Delphi and under the feet of the steeds of the solar chariot, as indicating the two extreme points touched by the Sun in its annual course. It is important not to confuse this with another zodiac sign, that of Pisces, whose symbolism is different and should be referred exclusively to the common fish, particularly in its relationship with the idea of the 'beginning of life' and 'fertility' (understood above all in the spiritual sense, as 'posterity' in the traditional language of the Far East); these are other aspects, which may also be referred to the Word, but which should nevertheless be clearly distinguished from those that make it appear, as we have seen, under its two attributes of "Revealer" and "Saviour".

²³⁴The role of the dolphin as the conductor of blessed souls to the "Fortunate Islands" also clearly refers to the *Ianua Caeli*.

XXIII

THE MYSTERIES OF THE LETTER NŪN²³⁵

The letter *nūn*, in both the Arabic and Hebrew alphabets, has the ordinal number 14 and the numerical value 50; but in Arabic, it also occupies a particularly notable position, at the centre of the alphabet, since the total number of letters in the Arabic alphabet is 28, instead of 22 as in Hebrew. As for its symbolic correspondences, this letter is considered above all, in Islamic tradition, as representing *el-Hūt*, the whale, which is also in accordance with the original meaning of the word *nūn* that designates it, which also means 'fish'; and because of this meaning, *Seyyidnâ Yūnus* (the prophet Jonah) is called *Dhū-n-Nūn* ['Lord of the Fish']. This is, of course, related to the general symbolism of the fish, and more particularly to certain aspects that we have considered in the preceding study; especially, as we shall see, to that of the 'fish-savior', whether it be the *Matsya-avatāra* of the Hindu tradition or the *Ikthys* of the early Christians. In this respect, the whale also plays the same role as the dolphin plays elsewhere, and, like the dolphin, corresponds to the zodiacal sign of Capricorn as the solstice gate giving access to the 'ascending way'; but perhaps the similarity is more notable with the *Matsya-avatāra*, as shown by the considerations derived from the shape of the letter *nūn*, especially when related to the biblical story of the prophet Jonah.

To fully understand what this is about, it is necessary to remember that *Vishnu*, manifesting himself in the form of a fish (*Matsya*), orders *Satyāvratā*, the future *Manu Vaivāsvatā*, to build the ark in which the seeds of the future world must be enclosed, and that, in that same form, he then guides the ark over the waters during the cataclysm that marks the separation of the two successive *Manvantaras*. The role of *Satyāvratā* here is similar to that of *Seyyidnâ Nū* (Noah), whose ark also contains all the elements that will serve to restore the world after the flood; it matters little, moreover, that the application made is different, in the sense that the biblical flood, in its most immediate meaning, seems to mark the beginning of a cycle more restricted than the *Manvantara*: if it is not the same event, it is at least two analogous events, in which the previous state of the world is destroyed to make way for a new state²³⁶. If we now compare the story of Jonah with what we have just recalled, we see that the whale, instead of merely playing the role of a fish carrying the ark, is in fact identified with the ark itself; indeed, Jonah

²³⁵ [Published in *É. T.*, August-September 1938].

²³⁶ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. XI.

He remains enclosed in the body of the whale, like *Satyávrata* and Noah in the ark, during a period that is also for him, if not for the outside world, a period of 'darkening', corresponding to the interval between two states or two modes of existence; here too, the difference is secondary, since the same symbolic figures are always in fact susceptible to a double application: 'macrocosmic' and 'microcosmic'. It is also well known that Jonah's emergence from the belly of the whale has always been considered a symbol of resurrection, and therefore of passage to a new state; and this must be related, on the other hand, to the meaning of "birth" which, especially in Hebrew Kabbalah, is linked to the letter *nûn* and must be understood in a spiritual sense, as a "new birth", that is, as a regeneration of the individual or cosmic being.

This is clearly indicated by the shape of the Arabic letter *nûn*: this letter consists of the lower half of a circle and a dot at its centre. Now, the lower semicircle is also the shape of the ark floating on the waters, and the dot inside it represents the seed contained or enclosed there; the central position of the dot shows, moreover, that it is in fact the 'seed of immortality' of the indestructible 'core' that escapes all external dissolution. It should also be noted that the semicircle, with its convexity facing downwards, is one of the schematic equivalents of the cup; like the latter, it therefore has, in a certain sense, the meaning of a "matrix" in which that as yet undeveloped germ is enclosed and which, as we shall see shortly, is identified with the lower or "earthly" half of the "World Egg"²³⁷. According to this aspect of the "passive" element of spiritual transmutation, *el-Hût* is also, in a certain way, the figure of all individuality, insofar as it carries the "seed of immortality" at its centre, symbolically represented as the heart; and we may recall in this regard the close relationships, which we have already discussed on other occasions, between the symbolism of the heart, that of the cup, and that of the "World Egg". The development of the spiritual germ implies that the being leaves its individual state and the cosmic environment that is the domain of that state, just as Jonah "resurrects" when he leaves the body of the whale; and, if we recall what we have written before, it will be easy to understand that this emergence is also the same as the emergence from the initiatory cave, whose concavity is also represented by the semicircle of the *nûn*. The "new birth" necessarily implies death to the previous state, whether it be an individual or a world; death and birth or resurrection are two mutually inseparable aspects, for they are in reality nothing more than the two opposite sides of

²³⁷ By a curious connection, this sense of "womb" (the Sanskrit *yoni*) is also implied in the Greek *delphys*, which is both the name of the "dolphin"

the same change of state. The *nûn* in the Arabic alphabet immediately follows the *mîm*, which among its main meanings has that of death (*el-mawt*), and whose form represents the being completely withdrawn into itself, reduced in a certain way to pure virtuality, which ritually corresponds to the attitude of prostration; but this virtuality, which may seem like a temporary annihilation, immediately becomes, through the concentration of all the essential possibilities of being in a single, indestructible point, the very seed from which all its developments in higher states will emerge.

It should be noted that the symbolism of the whale does not only have a 'beneficial' aspect, but also a 'malevolent' one, which, apart from general considerations about the double meaning of symbols, is justified more particularly by its connection with the two forms: death and resurrection, under which every change of state appears depending on whether it is approached from one side or the other, that is, in relation to the preceding state or the consequent state. The cave is both a place of burial and a place of 'resurrection', and in the story of Jonah, the whale plays precisely this dual role; moreover, could it not be said that the *Matsya-avatâra* itself first appears in the ominous guise of a harbinger of cataclysm, before becoming its 'savior'? On the other hand, the "malevolent" aspect of the whale is clearly related to the Hebrew Leviathan²³⁸; but it is represented above all, in the Arabic tradition, by the "sons of the whale" (*benât el-*

Hût), who, from an astrological point of view, are equivalent to *Râhu* and *Ketu* in the tradition. Hindu, especially with regard to eclipses, and of whom it is said that they "will drink the sea" on the last day of the cycle, that day when "the stars will rise in the West and set in the East". We cannot dwell on this point any further without straying entirely from our subject, but we must at least draw attention to the fact that here we find another immediate connection with the end of the cycle and the consequent change of state, for this is very significant and provides further confirmation of the preceding considerations.

Let us now return to the shape of the letter *nûn*, which gives rise to an important observation from the point of view of the relationships between the alphabets of the various traditional languages: in the Sanskrit alphabet, the corresponding letter, *na*, reduced to its fundamental geometric elements, is also composed of a semicircle and a dot; but here, with the convexity facing upwards,

²³⁸ The Hindu *Mâkara*, which is also a sea monster, although it primarily has a 'beneficial' meaning linked to the sign of Capricorn, whose place it occupies in the Zodiac, nevertheless has features in many of its representations that are reminiscent of the 'typhonic' symbolism of the crocodile.

*Name of two *Asuras* ("demons") associated with eclipses. (*Translator's note*).

It is the upper half of the circumference, and not the lower half, as in the Arabic *nûn*. It is, therefore, the same figure placed in reverse, or, to be more precise, they are two figures that are strictly complementary to each other; in fact, if they are joined together, the two central points naturally merge, and we have the circle with the point in the centre, the figure of the complete cycle, which is both the symbol of the Sun in the astrological order and that of gold in the alchemical order²³⁹. Just as the lower semicircle is the figure of the ark, the upper one is that of the rainbow, which is analogous to the former in the strictest sense of the word, that is, with the application of the 'reverse direction'; they are also the two halves of the "Egg of the World", one "earthly", in the "lower waters", and the other "celestial", in the "upper waters"; and the circular figure, which was complete at the beginning of the cycle, before the separation of these two halves, must be reconstituted at the end of it²⁴⁰. It could therefore be said that the reunion of the two figures in question represents the completion of the cycle, through the union of its beginning and its end, all the more so since, if we refer more particularly to "solar" symbolism, the Sanskrit *na* corresponds to the rising sun and the Arabic *nûn* to the setting sun. On the other hand, the complete circular figure is usually the symbol of the number 10, with 1 being the centre and 9 the circumference; but here, as it is obtained by the union of two *nûn*, it is worth $2 \times 50 = 100 = 10^2$, which indicates that this union must take place in the 'intermediate world'; it is, in fact, impossible in the lower world, which is the domain of division and "separateness", and, on the contrary, it always exists in the upper world, where it is realised in a principled, permanent and immutable way, in the "eternal present".

To these already lengthy observations, we will add just a few words to point out the relationship with a matter that was recently alluded to here²⁴¹: what we have just said lastly allows us to glimpse that the fulfilment of the cycle, as we have approached it, must bear a certain correlation, in historical order, with the encounter of the two traditional forms that correspond to its beginning and its end, and which have Sanskrit and Arabic as their sacred languages respectively: the tradition

²³⁹ One may recall here the symbolism of the "Spiritual Sun" and the "Golden Embryo" (*Hiranyagarbha*) in the Hindu tradition; moreover, according to certain correspondences, the *nûn* is the planetary letter of the Sun.

²⁴⁰ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. XI.

²⁴¹F. Schuon, "Le Sacrifice," in *É.T.*, April 1938, p. 137, n. 2. [The passage referred to reads: "...to return to India, there is reason to say that the spread of a foreign orthodox tradition, Islam, seems to indicate that Hinduism no longer possesses the full vitality or relevance of a tradition that is entirely in keeping with the conditions of a given cyclical era. This encounter between Islam, which is the last possibility emanating from the primordial tradition, and Hinduism, which is undoubtedly the most direct branch of it, is otherwise very significant and would give rise to highly complex considerations."]

Hinduism, insofar as it represents the most direct inheritance of the primordial Tradition, and the Islamic tradition, insofar as it is the "seal of Prophecy" and, consequently, the ultimate form of traditional orthodoxy in the current cycle.

XXIV

*THE BOAR AND THE BEAR*²⁴²

Among the Celts, the boar and the bear symbolised respectively the representatives of spiritual authority and those of temporal power, that is, the two castes, the druids and the knights, equivalent, at least originally and in their essential attributes, to what *the Brahmins and Kshatriyas* are in India. As we have indicated elsewhere²⁴³, this symbolism, of purely Hyperborean origin, is one of the signs of the direct link between the Celtic tradition and the primordial Tradition of *the present Manvantara*, whatever other elements, coming from earlier but now secondary and derivative traditions, may have been added to this main current and been reabsorbed into it in a certain way. What we mean here is that the Celtic tradition could plausibly be considered one of the "points of union" between the Atlantean and Hyperborean traditions, after the end of the secondary period in which the Atlantean tradition represented the predominant form and as the "substitute" for the original centre, now inaccessible to ordinary humanity²⁴⁴; and, on this point too, the symbolism we have just mentioned may provide some interesting indications.

First of all, let us note the importance given to the symbol of the boar in Hindu tradition, which in turn comes directly from the primordial Tradition and expressly affirms its own Hyperborean origin in the *Veda*. The boar (*varāha*) not only appears in it, as is well known, as the third of the ten *avatāras* of *Vishnu* in the current *Manvantara*, but also our entire *kalpa*, that is, the entire cycle of manifestation of our world, is designated as the *Çveta-varāha-kalpa*, or the 'cycle of the white boar'. This being the case, and considering the analogy that necessarily exists between the greater cycle and the subordinate cycles, it is natural that the mark of *the kalpa*, if it may be expressed in this way, should be found at the starting point of *the Manvāntara*; that is why the polar 'sacred land', seat of the primordial spiritual centre of this *Manvāntara*, is also called *Vārāhī* or 'land of the boar'²⁴⁵. On the other hand,

²⁴² [Published in *É.T.*, August-September 1936].

²⁴³ *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power*, chap. I.

²⁴⁴ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. X, particularly with regard to the relations between Hyperborean *Tula* and Atlantean *Tula* (*Tula* was one of the earliest names given to spiritual centres); see also our article 'Atlantide et Hyperborée', in *V. I.*, October 1929.

²⁴⁵ See also on this subject "Atlantide et Hyperborée", cit. There we have pointed out that, contrary to what Saint-Yves d'Alveydre seems to have believed, the name *Vārāhī* does not apply in any way to Europe; in fact, it was never anything other than the "Land of the Bull", which refers to a period

since the primary spiritual authority resided there, from which all other legitimate authority of the same order is but an emanation, it is no less natural that the representatives of such authority should also have received the symbol of the boar as their distinctive sign and maintained it throughout the succession of time; that is why the Druids called themselves "boars", although at the same time, since symbolism always has multiple aspects, it can be seen in this, incidentally, as an allusion to the isolation in which the Druids kept themselves from the outside world, for the boar was always considered the "loner"; and it should be added, moreover, that this very isolation, carried out materially, among the Celts as among the Hindus, in the form of retreat into the forest, is not unrelated to the characteristics of 'primordially', a reflection of which, at least, must always have been maintained in any spiritual authority worthy of the function it performs.

But let us return to the name of *Vārāhī*, which gives rise to particularly important observations: she is considered to be an aspect of the *Çakti* [energy, "feminine" aspect] of *Vishnu*, and more specifically in relation to his third *avatāra*, which, given the "solar" nature of the god, immediately shows that she is identical to the primitive "solar earth" or "Sirius", which we have discussed on other occasions²⁴⁶, and which is also one of the names given to Hyperborean *Tula*, that is, the primordial spiritual centre. On the other hand, the root *var-*, for the name of the boar, is found in the Nordic languages in the form *bor*-²⁴⁷; the exact equivalent of *Vārāhī* is therefore "Boreas"; and the truth is that the usual name "Hyperborea" was only used by the Greeks at a time when they had already lost the meaning of that ancient designation; it would therefore be more appropriate, despite the prevailing usage since then, to describe the primordial tradition not as "Hyperborean" but simply as "Borean", thus unequivocally affirming its connection with "Boreas" or "the land of the boar".

There is even more: the root *var-* or *vr-*, in Sanskrit, has the meaning of 'to cover', 'to protect' and 'to hide'; and, as shown by the name of *Varuna* and its Greek equivalent *Ouranos*, it serves to designate the cycle, both because it covers the earth and because it represents the higher worlds, hidden from the senses²⁴⁸. Now, all this applies perfectly to spiritual centres, either because they are hidden from the eyes of the uninitiated, or because they protect the world through their invisible influence, or because they constitute images of the celestial world itself on earth. Let us add that the same root

very far from its origins.

²⁴⁶ See "The Science of Letters" [here chap. VI] and "The Land of the Sun" [here chap. XIII].

²⁴⁷Hence the English word *boar* and also the German *Eber*.

²⁴⁸ See *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. VII, where we have also indicated that the same word *caelum* originally had the same meaning.

It has yet another meaning, that of 'election' or 'selection' (*vara*), which obviously also applies to the region that is everywhere referred to by names such as 'land of the chosen', 'land of the saints' or 'land of the blessed'²⁴⁹.

In what we have just said, we can see the union of the symbols of the 'polar' and the 'solar'; but, as far as the boar is concerned, it is the 'polar' aspect that is most important; and this is evident from the fact that the boar formerly represented the constellation later called the Great Bear²⁵⁰. This substitution of names is one of the signs of what the Celts symbolised precisely through the struggle between the boar and the bear, that is, the rebellion of the representatives of temporal power against the supremacy of spiritual authority, with the various vicissitudes that ensued in the course of successive historical epochs. The first manifestations of this rebellion, in fact, date back much further than ordinary history, and even further than the beginning of *the Kali-Yuga*, in which it reached its maximum extent; that is why the name *bor* could be transferred from the boar to the bear²⁵¹, and "Borea" itself, the "land of the boar", could then, at a given moment, become the "land of the bear" during a period of *Kshatriya* dominance which, according to Hindu tradition, was ended by *Parasu Rama*²⁵².

In the same tradition, the most common name for the Big Dipper is *Sapta-Rksha*; and the Sanskrit word *rksha* is the name for bear, linguistically identical to that given in other languages: the Celtic *arth*, the Greek *árktos*, and even the Latin *ursus*. However, it is worth asking whether this is the primary meaning of the expression *Sapta-Rksha*, or whether, in line with the substitution we have just referred to, it is not rather a kind of superimposition of etymologically distinct but linked words, even identified by the application of a certain phonetic symbolism. In fact, *rksha* is also, in a general sense, a star, that is, in short, a 'light' (*archis*, from the root *arch-* or *ruch-* 'to shine' or 'to illuminate'); and on the other hand, *Sapta-Rksha* is the symbolic dwelling place of the seven *Rshis*, who, apart from the fact that their name refers to 'vision' and therefore to light, are also the seven 'Lights' through which the Wisdom of previous cycles was transmitted to the current cycle²⁵³. The link thus established between the bear and light is not, moreover, an isolated case in animal symbolism, since it is

²⁴⁹ We should also point out, as a possible connection, the Germanic root *ur*, meaning 'primordiality'.

²⁵⁰ We recall that this constellation has also had many other names, including *Libra* (the Scales); but it would be beyond the scope of our purpose to deal with that now.

²⁵¹ In English *bear*, in German *Bär*.

²⁵² We have already had occasion to point out in this regard that Fabre d'Olivet and his followers, such as Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, seem to have made a rather strange confusion between *Páraçu-Râma* and *Râma-Chandra*, that is, between the sixth and seventh *avatâras* of *Vishnu*.

We find something similar for the wolf, both among the Celts and among the Greeks²⁵⁴, which resulted in the attribution of this animal to the sun god, Belen or Apollo.

At a certain period, the name *Sapta-Rksha* was no longer applied to the Big Dipper but to the Pleiades, which also comprise seven stars: this transfer from a polar constellation to a zodiacal constellation corresponds to a shift from solstice to equinoctial symbolism, implying a change in the starting point of the annual cycle as well as in the order of predominance of the cardinal points, which are related to the different phases of that cycle²⁵⁵. Such a change is from north to west, which refers to the Atlantean period; and this is clearly confirmed by the fact that, among the Greeks, the Pleiades were the daughters of Atlas and, as such, called the Atlanteans. Transfers of this kind are, on the other hand, a frequent cause of much confusion, since the same names have been given different meanings according to the period, both for terrestrial regions and for constellations, so that it is not always easy to determine exactly what they refer to in each case, and it is not really possible unless the various "locations" are referred to the characteristics of the corresponding traditional forms, as we have just done for those of *the Sapta-Rksha*.

Among the Greeks, the rebellion of the *Kshatriyas* was represented by the hunt for the Calydonian boar, which clearly represents a version in which the *Kshatriyas* themselves express their claim to a definitive victory, since they kill the boar. Athenæus, following earlier authors, reports that this Calydonian boar was white²⁵⁶, which identifies it with the *Çveta-varâha* of Hindu tradition²⁵⁷. No less significant, from our point of view, is that the first blow was struck by Atalanta, who, it is said, had been nursed by a bear; and this name could indicate that the rebellion began either in Atlantis itself or at least among the heirs of its tradition²⁵⁸. On the other hand, the name Calydon is found in

²⁵³ Note the persistence of these "seven Lights" in Masonic symbolism: the presence of the same number of people representing them is necessary for the constitution of a "just and perfect" lodge, as well as for the validity of the initiatory transmission. It should also be noted that the seven stars mentioned at the beginning of *the Apocalypse* (1, 16 and 20) are, according to certain interpretations, those of the Big Dipper.

²⁵⁴ In Greek, wolf is *lykos* and light is *lykê*; hence the double-meaning epithet of Apollo Lycian.

²⁵⁵ The transfer of Libra to the Zodiac naturally has a similar meaning.

²⁵⁶ *Deipnosophistarum*, IX, 13.

²⁵⁷ It is hardly necessary to recall that white is also the colour symbolically attributed to spiritual authority; and it is well known that the Druids, in particular, wore white robes.

²⁵⁸ There are also other curious connections in this regard, particularly between the golden apples mentioned in the legend of Atalanta and those in the garden of the Hesperides or "Maidens of the West", who were also, like the Pleiades, daughters of Atlas.

This is particularly true in *Caledonia*, the ancient name for Scotland: apart from any question of specific "location", it is properly the country of the "kaldes" or Celts²⁵⁹; and the forest of Calydon does not really differ from that of Brocelianda, whose name is also the same, although in a somewhat modified form and preceded by the word *bro-* or *bor-*, that is, the name of the boar.

The fact that the bear is often symbolically taken in its feminine aspect — as we have just seen in the case of Atalanta and as can also be seen in the names of the constellations Ursa Major and Ursa Minor — is not without significance either in terms of its attribution to the warrior caste, holder of temporal power, and this for various reasons. Firstly, this caste normally plays a 'receptive' role, that is, a feminine role, with respect to the priestly caste, from which it receives not only the teaching of traditional doctrine but also the legitimisation of its power, which strictly consists of the 'divine right'. Furthermore, when the warrior caste, reversing the normal relations of subordination, assumes primacy, its dominance is generally accompanied by that of feminine elements in the symbolism of the traditional form modified by it, and sometimes even, as a consequence of this modification, a feminine form of priesthood is instituted, as was the case with the priestesses among the Celts. We will merely indicate this point here, as its development would take us too far afield, especially if we wanted to investigate corresponding elements elsewhere; but at least this indication will suffice to understand why the female bear rather than the male bear appears symbolically opposed to the boar.

It should be added that the two symbols, the boar and the bear, do not always necessarily appear in opposition or struggle, but in certain cases may also represent spiritual authority and temporal power, or the castes of druids and knights, in their normal harmonious relations, as seen particularly in the legend of Merlin and Arthur. Indeed, Merlin, the druid, is also the boar of the forest of Brocelianda (where, incidentally, he is not killed, like the Calydonian boar, but only put to sleep by a female power); and King Arthur bears a name derived from that of the bear, *arth*²⁶⁰; more precisely, this name *Arthur* is identical to that of the star *Arcturus*, taking into account the slight difference due to their respective derivations from Celtic and Greek. This star is found in the

²⁵⁹ On the other hand, it is likely that the name of the Celts, like that of the Chaldeans, which is identical, was not originally that of a particular people but that of a priestly caste that exercised spiritual authority among different peoples.

²⁶⁰ The surname *MacArth*, or "Son of the Bear," is also found in Scotland, clearly indicating membership in a warrior clan.

constellation of the Oxherd, and in these names we can also see the signs of two different periods: the "guardian of the Bear" became the Oxherd when the Bear itself, or the *Sapta-Rksha*, became the *Septem triones*, that is, the "Seven Oxen" (hence the name "septentrion" to designate the north); but we shall not concern ourselves now with these transformations, which are relatively recent in relation to what we have discussed here²⁶¹.

From the considerations we have just made, a conclusion seems to emerge about the respective roles of the two currents that contributed to the formation of the Celtic tradition: in the beginning, spiritual authority and temporal power were not separated as distinct functions, but were united in their common principle, and a vestige of that union can still be found in the very name of the druids (*dru-vid*, 'strength-wisdom', terms symbolised respectively by the oak and mistletoe)²⁶²; as such, and also insofar as they represented more particularly spiritual authority, to which the higher part of the doctrine is reserved, they were the true heirs of the primordial tradition, and the essentially 'boreal' symbol, that of the boar, belonged properly to them. As for the knights, whose symbol was the bear (or the she-bear of *Ata-lanta*), it can be assumed that the part of the tradition most especially intended for them included above all elements from the Atlantean tradition; and this distinction could perhaps even help to explain certain more or less enigmatic points in the later history of Western traditions.

²⁶¹ Arthur is the son of Uther Pendragon, 'the Chief of the Five', that is, the supreme king who resides in the fifth kingdom, that of *Mide* or the 'middle', located in the centre of the four subordinate kingdoms corresponding to the four cardinal points (see *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. IX); and this situation is comparable to that of the Celestial Dragon when, containing the North Star, it was 'in the middle of the sky like a king on his throne', according to the expression in *the Sefer Yetzirah*. Cf. 'The Land of the Sun' [here chap. XII].

²⁶² See *Autorité spirituelle et Pouvoir temporel*, chap. IV, where we have indicated the equivalence of this symbolism with that of the Sphinx.

SOME SYMBOLIC WEAPONS

XXV

THE "STONES OF THE LIGHTNING" ²⁶³

In an article in the special issue of *Le Voile d'Isis* devoted to the Tarot, Mr Auriger, referring to Arcanum XVI, wrote the following: "There seems to be a connection between the hailstones surrounding the struck Tower and the word *Beyt-el*, 'divine dwelling', from which came 'betyl', the word used by the Semites to designate aerolites or 'stones of lightning'." This relationship has been suggested by the name 'Dwelling Place of God' given to this arcane, a name which is, in fact, the literal translation of the Hebrew *Beyt-el*; but it seems to us that there is some confusion in this consideration between several quite different things, and that it might be of some interest to clarify this matter.

Firstly, it is true that the symbolic role of meteorites or stones fallen from the sky is of great importance, as these are the 'black stones' referred to in so many different traditions, from that which was the figure of Cybele or the 'Great Goddess' to that which is embedded in the *Ka'ba* in Mecca and is linked to the story of Abraham. In Rome, there was also the *lapis niger*, not to mention the sacred shields of the Salii priests, which were said to have been carved from a meteorite in the time of Numa ²⁶⁴. Such "black stones" can certainly be placed in the category of "betyls", that is, stones considered to be "divine dwellings" or, in other words, supports for certain "spiritual influences"; but did all "betyls" have this origin? We do not believe so, and in particular we see no evidence to suggest that this was the case for the stone which Jacob, according to the account in *Genesis*, named *Bethel*, a name applied by extension to the very place where he had his vision while his head rested on that stone.

The "betyl" is properly the representation of the *Ômphalos*, that is, a symbol of the "Centre of the World", which is very naturally identified with the "divine dwelling place"²⁶⁵. This stone could take various forms, particularly that of a pillar; thus, Jacob says: "And this stone which I have set up as a pillar shall be God's house"; and among the peoples

²⁶³ [Published in *V. I.*, May 1929].

²⁶⁴F. Ossendowski recounted the story of a "black stone" sent by the "King of the World" to the Dalai Lama, later transported to Urga, in Mongolia, and disappeared a hundred years ago; not knowing what it was, he tried to explain certain phenomena, such as the appearance of characters on the surface of the stone, assuming that it was a kind of slate. [The work to which the author refers exists in an anonymous Spanish translation: F. Ossendowski, *Beasts, Men, Gods*, Buenos Aires, Cenit, 1956. (*Translator's note*)].

²⁶⁵ This designation of "divine dwelling place", in Hebrew *rnishkán*, was also later given to the Tabernacle: as the word itself indicates, it is the seat of the *Shechinah* ["Divine Presence"].

Certain Celtic menhirs, if not all, had the same meaning. The *Ômphalos* could also be represented by a conical stone, such as the "black stone" of Cybele, or an ovoid stone; the cone recalled the sacred Mountain, symbol of the "Pole" or "Axis of the World"; as for the ovoid shape, it refers directly to another very important symbol, that of the "Egg of the World". In all cases, the 'betyl' was a 'prophetic stone', a 'speaking stone', that is, a stone that gave oracles or next to which oracles were given, thanks to the 'spiritual influences' it supported; and the example of *the Omphalos* of Delphi is very characteristic in this regard.

The "betilos" are, therefore, essentially sacred stones, but not all of them are of celestial origin; however, it may be true that, at least symbolically, the idea of a "stone fallen from the sky" could be linked to them in some way. What leads us to believe that this must have been the case is their relationship with the mysterious *lûz* of Hebrew tradition; such a relationship is certain for the "black stones", which are indeed aerolites, but it should not be limited to this single case, for it is said in *Genesis*, on the occasion of Jacob's *Beyt-el*, that the first name of that place was precisely *Lûz*. We may even recall that the *Grail* was said to have been carved from a stone that had also fallen from the sky; and there are very close relationships between all these facts, which we will not dwell on further, however, as such considerations would risk taking us too far from our subject²⁶⁶.

In fact, whether we are talking about "betilos" in general or "black stones" in particular, neither of these have anything in common with "thunderstones"; and on this point, the phrase we quoted at the beginning contains a serious confusion, which is otherwise quite naturally explainable. One is tempted to assume, of course, that "thunderstones" or "lightning stones" must be stones that have fallen from the sky, aerolites; however, this is not the case; one could never guess what they are without having learned it from the peasants who, through oral tradition, have preserved the memory of them. The peasants, on the other hand, make their own mistake in interpretation, which shows that the true meaning of the tradition escapes them, when they believe that these stones have fallen with the lightning or that they are the lightning itself. They say, in fact, that thunder falls in two ways: 'in fire' or 'in stone'; in the first case it sets things on fire, while in the second it only breaks things; but they know very well about 'thunder stones' and are only mistaken in attributing to them, because of their name, a celestial origin that they do not have and never have had.

The truth is that "thunderstones" are stones that symbolise lightning; they are nothing more than prehistoric flint axes, just like the "serpent's egg", a symbol

²⁶⁶We have provided more extensive developments on the question of *the lûz*, as well as on that of *the Ômphalos*, in our study on *Le Roi du Monde*.

The Druidic symbol of the "Egg of the World" is nothing other than, in terms of its material representation, the fossilised sea urchin. The stone axe is the stone that breaks and splits, and therefore represents the lightning bolt; this symbolism dates back to a very remote era and explains the existence of certain axes, called "votive axes" by archaeologists, ritual objects that could never have had any practical use as weapons or instruments of any kind.

This naturally leads us to recall a point that has already been discussed: the stone axe of *Páraçu Râma* and *Thor's* stone hammer are one and the same weapon²⁶⁷, and we will add that this weapon is the symbol of lightning. This also shows that the symbolism of the "stones of lightning" is of Hyperborean origin, that is, it is linked to the most ancient of the traditions of present-day humanity; to what is truly the primitive tradition for the present *Manvantara*²⁶⁸.

It should also be noted that lightning plays a very important role in Tibetan symbolism: the *vajra*, which represents it, is one of the main insignia of Lamaism dignitaries²⁶⁹. At the same time, the *vajra* symbolises the masculine principle of universal manifestation, and thus lightning is associated with the idea of 'divine paternity', an association that is equally clear in Western antiquity, since lightning is the main attribute of *Zeus Patèr* or *Jupiter*, the "father of gods and men", who, on the other hand, strikes down the Titans and Giants, just as *Thor and Páraçu Râma* destroy their equivalents with their stone weapons²⁷⁰.

There is even, in this regard, and in the modern West itself, another truly unique connection: Leibniz, in his *Monadology*, says that "all created monads

²⁶⁷ See the article by P. Genty on "Thor et Purashu-Râma" in *V. I.*, December 1928.

²⁶⁸ Let us point out in this regard that some, due to a strange confusion, speak today of "Hyperborean Atlantis"; Hyperborea and Atlantis are two distinct regions, just as north and west are two different cardinal points, and, as the starting point of a tradition, the former is much older than the latter. We consider it all the more necessary to draw attention to this point, since those who commit this confusion have believed they could attribute it to us, when it is clear that we have never committed it, nor have we ever written anything that could give the slightest pretext for such an interpretation.

²⁶⁹ *Yajra* is the Sanskrit term for lightning; the Tibetan form of the word is *dorje*.

²⁷⁰ It is interesting to note that Jupiter's thunderbolts are forged by *Vulcan*, which establishes a certain relationship between "celestial fire" and "underground fire", a relationship not indicated in cases involving stone weapons; "underground fire" was in fact directly related to metallurgical symbolism, especially in the Cabirian mysteries. *Vulcan* also forges the weapons of heroes. It should also be added that there is another version according to which *Mjöltnir*, or *Thor's* hammer, was made of metal and forged by dwarves, who belong to the same order of symbolic entities as the Cabiri, the Cyclopes, the *Yaksha*, etc. Let us also note, with regard to fire, that *Thor's* chariot was drawn by two rams and that in India the ram is the vehicle of *Agni* [god of fire].

are born, so to speak, from the continuous *flashes* of Divinity from moment to moment"; in this way, in accordance with the tradition we have just recalled, he associates lightning (*fulgur*) with the idea of the production of beings. It is likely that his university commentators never noticed this, just as they did not notice, and not without reason, that the same philosopher's theories about the indestructible and "reduced to small size" animal after death were directly inspired by the Hebrew conception of *lûz* as the "core of immortality"²⁷¹.

We will highlight one last point, which refers to the Masonic symbolism of the mallet: not only is there an obvious relationship between the mallet and the hammer, which are, so to speak, two forms of the same instrument, but also the English Masonic historian R. F. Gould believes that the "Master's mallet", whose symbolism he links, on the basis of its shape, to that of *the tau*, has its origin in *Thor's* hammer. The Gauls, moreover, had a "god of the mallet", who appears on an altar discovered in Mainz; he even seems to be *Dis Pater*, whose name is so close to that of *Zeus Pater*, and whom the Druids, according to Caesar, considered the father of the Gallic race²⁷². Thus, this mallet also appears as a symbolic equivalent of the *vajra* of Eastern traditions, and, by a coincidence that is certainly not fortuitous, but which will seem at least unexpected to many, it so happens that master masons have an attribute endowed with exactly the same meaning as that of the great Tibetan lamas; but who, in Freemasonry as it stands today, could boast of actually possessing the mysterious power, one in essence but twofold in its seemingly contradictory effects, of which that attribute is the sign? We do not believe we are venturing too far in saying that, in what still remains of Western initiatory organisations, no one has even the remotest idea of what it is really about: the symbol remains, but when the 'spirit' has withdrawn from it, it is nothing but an empty form; Should we nevertheless hold on to the hope that a day will come when that form will be revived, when it will once again respond to the reality that is its original *raison d'être* and the only thing that gives it its true initiatory character?

²⁷¹Another point that we cannot help but mention in passing is that *vajra* means both 'lightning bolt' and 'diamond'; this would also lead us to consider many other aspects of the matter, which we do not intend to deal with fully here [see *below*, chapters XXVI, XXVII and LII].

⁽²⁷²⁾Certain Gallic coins also depict an enigmatic figure holding what appears to be a *lituus* or augural staff in one hand and a hammer in the other, with which he strikes a kind of anvil. Because of these attributes, this figure has been given the name 'Pontiff Blacksmith'.

XXVI

*SYMBOLIC WEAPONS*²⁷³

Speaking earlier about "symbolic flowers," we were led to refer to the spear that appears in the legend of the Grail as a complementary symbol to the cup and is one of the many figures of the "Axis of the World" ²⁷⁴. At the same time, this spear is also, as we said, a symbol of the "Celestial Ray", and, according to the considerations we have developed elsewhere ²⁷⁵, it is clear that both meanings basically coincide: but this also explains why the spear, like the sword and the arrow, which are in short its equivalents, is sometimes assimilated to the solar ray. It should be made very clear that the two symbolisms, the polar and the solar, should never be confused, and that, as we have often indicated, the former has a more fundamental and truly "primordial" character; but this does not detract from the fact that what could be called "transfers" from one to the other are a frequent occurrence, the reasons for which we may try to explain more clearly on another occasion ²⁷⁶.

For the moment, we will limit ourselves to mentioning, in particular, the attribution of the arrow to Apollo: it is well known that he kills the serpent *Python* with his arrows, just as, in the Vedic tradition, *Indra* kills *Ahi* or *Vrtra*, *Python's* counterpart, with the *vajra*, which represents lightning; and this connection leaves no doubt about the original symbolic equivalence of the two weapons. We will also recall the "golden arrow" of *Abaris* or *Zalmoxis*, which is mentioned in the story of Pythagoras; and here it is even clearer that this symbolism refers expressly to the Hyperborean Apollo, which precisely establishes the link between his solar aspect and his polar aspect²⁷⁷.

If we return to the consideration of the various weapons as representatives of the "Axis of the World", an important observation imposes itself: these weapons, not always but

²⁷³ [Published in *É. T.*, October 1936].

²⁷⁴ In this regard, the complementarity of the spear and the cup is strictly comparable to that of the mountain and the cave, to which we will return later.

²⁷⁵ See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*.

²⁷⁶ [See chap. XXVIII].

²⁷⁷ In this regard, we should also note in passing that Pythagoras' "golden thigh", which makes him appear in a certain way as a manifestation of Hyperborean Apollo himself, refers to the symbolism of the polar mountain and that of the Great Bear. On the other hand, the serpent Python is especially connected with Delphi, formerly called *Pytho*, the sanctuary of Hyperborean Apollo; hence the designation of the *Pythia*, as well as the very name of *Pythagoras*, which is actually a name of Apollo: 'he who leads to the Pythia', that is, the inspirer of her oracles.

Less often, they are double-edged or have two opposite points. The latter case, which is particularly true of *the vajra*, to which we will return, must clearly refer to the duality of the poles, considered as the two ends of the axis, with all the correspondences that this implies and which we have already indicated elsewhere²⁷⁸. As for double-edged weapons, where duality is marked in the same direction as the axis, this should be seen as a more direct allusion to the two currents otherwise represented by the two serpents coiled around the staff or caduceus; but as these two opposite currents are respectively related to the two poles and the two hemispheres, it is immediately apparent that in reality the two symbolisms coincide. Ultimately, it is always a question of a dual force, of a single essence but with apparently opposite effects in its manifestation, effects resulting from the 'polarisation' that conditions the latter, just as it conditions, at different levels, all degrees and modes of universal manifestation²⁷⁹.

The sword can generally be considered a double-edged weapon²⁸⁰; but an even more notable example is the double axe, which belongs in particular to Aegean and Cretan symbolism, that is, pre-Hellenic symbolism, but is not exclusive to it. Now, as we have explained above²⁸¹, the axe is very specifically a symbol of lightning and therefore, in this respect, a strict equivalent of *the vajra*; and a comparison of these two weapons shows, consequently, the profound identity of the two forms of symbolism mentioned, that of double-edged weapons and that of double-pointed weapons²⁸².

²⁷⁸ "La Double Spirale", March 1936 issue [article reprinted in *La Grande Triade*, chap. V].

²⁷⁹ This is equivalent to saying that all cosmic dualities are really nothing more than diverse "specifications" of the primary duality of *Purusha and Prakriti*, or, in other words, of the polarisation of Being into "essence" and "substance".

²⁸⁰In another of its meanings, the sword is a symbol of the Word, with its dual creative and destructive power (see, for example, *Revelation*, I 16 and XIX, 15). It is evident, on the other hand, that this dual power is analogous to the dual force we have just discussed, or, more precisely, that they are but two different applications of the same thing. With regard to the sword, we should note that, according to certain ancient historians, the Scythians represented the Divinity by means of a sword stuck in the ground at the top of a mound; this being a reduced image of the mountain, two symbols of the 'Axis of the World' are thus brought together.

²⁸¹ "Les pierres de foudre" [here, chap. XXV; "The 'lightning stones'"].

²⁸² *Thor's* mallet or hammer, another symbol of lightning that we have also pointed out [*ibid.*], bears a striking resemblance to the double axe due to its T-shape. We should also note that, like the mallet and the sword, although less evident than these, the axe is still found today in Masonic symbolism.

There are many variations in the representation of *the vajra*; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has pointed out²⁸³ that the most common form, with three prongs at each end, is therefore closely related to the *triçûla* or trident, another very important symbolic weapon, but whose special study would take us too far from our subject²⁸⁴; we will only note that, while the middle point is the end of the shaft itself, the two side points can also refer to the two currents, right and left, already mentioned, and that, for this very reason, such triplicity is found in other cases of "axial" symbolism, for example in certain figurations of the "World Tree". A. K. Coomaraswamy has also shown that the *vajra* is traditionally assimilated to other well-known symbols of the 'Axis of the World', such as the axis of a chariot, whose two wheels correspond to Heaven and Earth, which explains, in particular, certain representations of *the vajra* as 'supported' by a lotus, on which it is placed vertically. As for the quadruple *vajra*, formed by the union of two ordinary *vajras* arranged in a cross, if it is considered to be situated on a horizontal plane, as suggested by its designation as *Karma-vajra*, it is very close to symbols such as the *swastika* and the *chakra*²⁸⁵; we will limit ourselves here to these different indications, to which we may have the opportunity to return in other studies, as it is a subject that cannot be exhausted.

Vajra, in addition to meaning 'lightning bolt', also means 'diamond', which immediately evokes the ideas of indivisibility, unalterability, immutability; and, indeed, immutability is certainly the essential character of the axis around which the revolution of all things takes place and in which it itself does not participate. In this regard, there is also another very notable connection: Plato describes the 'Axis of the World' precisely as a luminous diamond axis; this axis is surrounded by several concentric sheaths, of various sizes and colours, corresponding to the different planetary spheres and moving around it²⁸⁶. On the other hand, the Buddhist symbolism of the 'throne of

²⁸³ *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*.

²⁸⁴ In this case, the double triplicity of the branches and roots recalls even more precisely that of the two ends of *the vajra*. [On this, see *below*, chap. LII: 'The Tree and the Vajra']. It is well known, moreover, that the *triçûla*, as an attribute of *Shiva*, often refers to the "triple time" (*trikâla*), that is, to the three modes of time, past, present and future; here too there would be links to be established with what is found in the same order of things in other traditions, for example with certain aspects of the symbolism of Janus.

²⁸⁵ It is no longer, therefore, a question of the vertical axis, as before, but of the two horizontal axes of the geometric representation that we have set out in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*.

²⁸⁶ *Republic*, Book X (myth of Er the Armenian). This set of spindles constitutes the "spindle of Necessity": the Fates *Clotho* spins it with her right hand, therefore from right to left, and this direction of rotation is not insignificant in relation to the considerations we have set out regarding the symbolism of the "double spiral" (cf. *La Grande Triade*, chap. V).

The "diamond" located at the foot of the "Tree of Wisdom" and at the very centre of the "wheel of the World", that is, at the single point that always remains motionless, is no less significant in this regard.

To return to lightning, it is considered, as we have already indicated²⁸⁷, to represent a dual power of production and destruction; one could say, if one wishes, the power of life and death, but if understood only in the literal sense, it would be nothing more than a particular application of what it really is²⁸⁸. In fact, it is the force that produces all "condensations" and "dissipations", which are referred to in Far Eastern tradition as the alternating action of the two complementary principles, *yin* and *yang*, and which also correspond to the two phases of universal "expir" and "aspir"²⁸⁹; it is what the Hermetic doctrine, for its part, calls "coagulation" and "solution" respectively⁽²⁹⁰⁾ and the double action of this force is symbolised by the two opposite ends of *the vajra* as a "flashing" weapon, while the diamond clearly represents its unique and indivisible essence.

We will point out incidentally, as a matter of curiosity — since from our point of view it could not be otherwise. — a very minor application, but one directly linked to the subject of symbolic weapons: the "power of points", well known in magic and even in profane physics, actually refers to the "solution", that is, to the second aspect of the double power we have just referred to. On the other hand, a correspondence with the first aspect, that of "coagulation", is found in the magical use of knots or "bindings"; we will also recall in this regard the symbolism of the "Gordian knot", which Alexander, incidentally, cuts with his sword, which is also quite significant: but here another aspect appears, that of the "vital knot", which, although analogous to the previous one, far exceeds the domain and scope of simple magic²⁹¹.

Finally, we must mention another 'axial' symbol, which is not a weapon per se, but which is nevertheless assimilated to a weapon because of its shape, ending in

²⁸⁷ See "Les pierres de foudre" [here chap. XXV; "The 'thunderstones'"].

²⁸⁸ In connection with the observation made above about the respective weapons of *Apollo* and *Indra*, we note that, like lightning, sunlight is also considered life-giving or destructive, depending on the circumstances. We will also recall that the spear in the legend of the Grail, like the spear of Achilles, with which we have already made a connection in this regard, had the dual power of inflicting wounds and healing them.

²⁸⁹ [See also *The Great Triad*, chap. VI].

²⁹⁰ This is also what the language of the ancient Greek philosophers referred to with the terms "generation" and "corruption" [*ibid.*].

²⁹¹ We have alluded to this question, in connection with the "sensitive point" of cathedrals, in a note entitled "Cologne or Strasbourg?" in *V. I*, January 1927. [This text will be included in the posthumous compilation *Tradition primordiale et formes particulières*].

tip: the symbol of the nail; and, among the Romans, the nail (*clavus*) and the key (*clavis*), which their language linked in a very unique way, both referred to the symbolism of Janus²⁹². With the key, which is also an 'axial' symbol, we would be led to other considerations which we do not wish to enter into at this point; we will only say that the 'power of the keys', that is, the double power of 'binding' and 'loosing'²⁹³, is not really different from what we have just explained: in essence, it is always a question of 'coagulation' and 'solution' in the hermetic sense of these terms.

²⁹² To complete this last observation, we will also recall the magical power attributed to both of these two objects, which, apart from any question of a "phenomenal" nature, appears as a kind of exoteric degeneration with respect to their traditional significance.

²⁹³ It may be observed that these very words also have an obvious connection with the symbolism of ligatures or knots: all this, then, is closely related, and the various forms that symbolism takes are always perfectly consistent with each other.

XXVII

*SAYFU-L-ISLÂM*²⁹⁴

It is customary in the Western world to consider Islam as an essentially warrior tradition and, consequently, when referring specifically to the sabre or sword (*es-sayf*), to take this word only in its literal sense, without even thinking to ask whether there might not in fact be something else to it. It is undeniable, on the other hand, that there is a warrior aspect to Islam, and also that, far from being a particular characteristic of Islam, it is also found in most other traditions, including Christianity. Even without bringing up what Christ himself said: "I did not come to bring peace, but a sword"²⁹⁵, which can be understood figuratively, the history of Christianity in the Middle Ages, that is, at the time when it was effectively implemented in social institutions, provides ample evidence; On the other hand, the Hindu tradition itself, which certainly cannot be considered particularly warlike, since it tends to be criticised for generally allowing little room for action, also contains this aspect, as can be seen by reading the *Bhagavad Gita*. Unless one is blinded by certain prejudices, it is easy to understand that this is so, for in the social sphere, war, insofar as it is directed against those who disturb the order and is intended to bring them back into line, constitutes a legitimate function, which is ultimately nothing more than one aspect of the function of 'justice' understood in its most general sense. However, this is only the most external side of things, and therefore the least essential: from the traditional point of view, what gives war thus understood its full value is that it symbolises the struggle that man must wage against the enemies he carries within himself, that is, against all the elements in him that are contrary to order and unity. In both cases, moreover, whether it be the external and social order or the internal and spiritual order, war must always tend equally to establish balance and harmony (which is why it properly belongs to 'justice') and thus to unify in a certain way the multiplicity of mutually opposing elements. This is equivalent to saying that its normal conclusion — and, ultimately, its only *raison d'être* — is peace (*es-salâm*), which can only be achieved through submission to the divine will (*el-islâm*), putting each of the elements in its place so that they all contribute to the conscious realisation of the same plan; and

²⁹⁴ [Published in *L'Islam et l'Occident*, C. d. S., 1947].

²⁹⁵ *St Matthew*, X, 34.

It is hardly necessary to point out how closely related these two terms are in Arabic: *es-salâm* and *es-islâm*²⁹⁶.

In Islamic tradition, these two meanings of war, as well as the relationship that actually exists between them, are most clearly expressed in a *hadîth** of the Prophet: "We have returned from the lesser holy war to the greater holy war" (*Radjâna min el-djihâdi-l-âsgar ila-l-djihâdi-l-âkbar*). If external war is therefore nothing more than the "lesser holy war"²⁹⁷, while the internal war is the "great holy war", it follows that the former is of only secondary importance to the latter, of which it is merely a tangible image; it goes without saying that, in such circumstances, everything that serves the external war can be taken as a symbol of what concerns the internal war²⁹⁸, as is particularly the case with the sword.

Those who are unaware of this meaning, even if they ignore the *hadîth* we have just , could at least note in this regard that, during the sermon, the *khatîb**[†], whose function is clearly not that of a warrior, holds a sword in his hand, and that in this case it can only be a symbol, apart from the fact that this sword is usually made of wood, which obviously makes it unsuitable for any use in external combat and therefore further emphasises its symbolic nature.

The wooden sword dates back, moreover, in traditional symbolism, to a very remote past, since in India it is one of the objects that figured in the Vedic sacrifice²⁹⁹; this sword (*sphya*), the sacrificial post, the chariot (or more precisely its essential element, the axle) and the arrow are considered to have been born from *Indra's vajra* or thunderbolt: "When *Indra* threw the thunderbolt at *Vrtra*, it became fourfold... The Brahmins use two of these four forms during the sacrifice, while the

²⁹⁶We have developed these considerations more extensively in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chapter VIII.

* Saying or sentence attributed to the Prophet, by tradition, based on direct testimony verified according to certain rules, and endowed with the same authority as the Qur'an to clarify or supplement points not specified in this Book. (*Translator's note*).

²⁹⁷ On the other hand, it should be understood that it is not so when it is not determined by reasons of a traditional nature; any other war is *harb* and not *jihad*.

²⁹⁸ Naturally, this would no longer be true for the instruments of modern warfare, if only because of their "mechanical" nature, incompatible with any true symbolism; for a similar reason, the exercise of mechanical trades cannot serve as a basis for spiritual development.

† *Imam* who delivers the sermon or preaching (*khutbah*). (*Translator's note*).

²⁹⁹ See A. K. Coomaraswamy, "Le Symbolisme de l'épée", in *É.T.*, January 1938 issue; we take the following quote from this article.

kshátriya use the other two in battle..."³⁰⁰ When the sacrificer wields the wooden sword, it is the lightning bolt he throws at the enemy..."³⁰¹ The relationship of this sword to the *vajra* should be noted particularly in view of what follows; and we will add in this regard that the sword is generally assimilated to lightning or considered to be derived from it³⁰², which is sensitively represented by the well-known form of the "flaming sword", apart from other meanings that it may also have, for it must be made clear that all true symbolism always encompasses a plurality of meanings, which, far from excluding or contradicting each other, harmonise and complement each other.

Returning to the sword of *the jatib*, we would say that it symbolises above all the power of the word, which should be abundantly clear, especially since this is a meaning very commonly attributed to the sword and is not foreign to Christian tradition either, as these apocalyptic texts clearly show: "And he had seven stars in his right hand, and out of his mouth came a sharp double-edged sword, and his countenance was like the sun shining in its strength"³⁰³. "And out of his mouth"³⁰⁴ cometh a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations..."⁽³⁰⁵⁾ The sword that comes out of his mouth can obviously have no other meaning than this, all the more so since the being described in both passages is none other than the Word itself or one of its manifestations; as for the double-edged sword, it represents a double power, creative and destructive, of the word, and this brings us back precisely to *the vajra*. The latter also symbolises a force which, although unique in its essence, manifests itself in two aspects that are apparently contrary but in reality complementary; and these two aspects, as they are represented by the two edges of the sword or other similar weapons³⁰⁶, are represented here by the two opposite points of *the vajra*; this symbolism, on the other hand, is valid for the whole set of cosmic forces, so that the

³⁰⁰The function of the Brahmins and that of *the Kshatriyas* can be referred to, respectively, as the inner war and the outer war, or, according to Islamic terminology, the 'great holy war' and the 'lesser holy war'.

³⁰¹ *Çátapatha-Bràhmana*, 1, 2, 4.

³⁰² In Japan, particularly, according to Shinto tradition, "the sword derives *from* an archetypal lightning bolt, of which it is the descendant or hypostasis" (A. K. Coomaraswamy, *ibid.*).

³⁰³ *Revelation*, I. 16. Note here the combination of polar symbolism (the seven stars of the Big Dipper, or *Sapta-Rksha* in the Hindu tradition) with solar symbolism, which we also find in the traditional significance of the sword.

³⁰⁴ This refers to "the one who rode the white horse", *the Kalkiavatàra* of Hindu tradition.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, XIX, 15.

³⁰⁶ We recall here in particular the Aegean and Cretan symbol of the double axe; we have already explained that the axe is especially a symbol of lightning, and therefore a strict equivalent of *the vajra* [cf. chap. XXVI.

application made to the word is only a particular case, but one which, due to the traditional conception of the Word and all that it implies, can be taken to symbolise all other possible applications as a whole³⁰⁷.

The sword is symbolically assimilated not only to lightning but also, like the arrow, to sunlight; this is clearly referred to in the fact that, in the first of the two apocalyptic passages just quoted, the one from whose mouth the sword comes out has a face shining 'like the sun'. It is easy, moreover, to draw a comparison in this regard between *Apollo*, who kills the serpent *Python* with his arrows, and *Indra*, who kills the dragon *Vrtra* with his *vajra*; and this relationship leaves no doubt as to the equivalence of both aspects of the symbolism of weapons, which are ultimately nothing more than two different modes of expression for the same thing³⁰⁸. On the other hand, it is important to note that most symbolic weapons, particularly the sword and the spear, are also very often symbols of the "Axis of the World"; it is therefore a question of 'polar' symbolism and no longer 'solar' symbolism, but although these two points of view should never be confused, there are nevertheless certain relationships between them that allow what might be called 'transfers' from one to the other, since the axis itself is sometimes identified with the 'sunbeam'³⁰⁹. In this 'axial' meaning, the two opposite points of *the vajra* refer to the duality of the poles, considered as the two extremes of the axis, while in the case of double-edged weapons, duality, being indicated in the very sense of the axis, refers more directly to the two opposite currents of cosmic force, also represented in other cases by symbols such as the two serpents of the caduceus; but, as these two currents are related respectively to the two poles and the two hemispheres³¹⁰, it can be seen that, despite their different appearance, the two figurations actually coincide in their essential meaning³¹¹.

The "axial" symbolism takes us back to the idea of harmonisation conceived as the purpose of "holy war" in its two meanings, external and internal, since the axis is the place where all oppositions are reconciled and disappear, or, in other words, the place of perfect balance, which Far Eastern tradition designates as the "Unchanging Middle"³¹². Thus, according to this relationship, which in reality corresponds to the most profound point of view, the sword does not represent only the instrumental means, as it could

³⁰⁷ On the dual power of *the vajra* and other equivalent symbols (especially the "power of the keys"), see the considerations we have formulated in *La Grande Triade*, chap. VI.

³⁰⁸ [See note 16 of chapter XXVI].

³⁰⁹ Without being able to dwell on this subject here, we should at least recall, by way of example, the link between these two points of view in the Greek symbolism of the Hyperborean Apollo.

³¹⁰ On this point too, we refer to *La Grande Triade*, chapter V.

³¹¹ See "Les Armes symboliques" [here, chap. XXVI; "The Symbolic Weapons"].

believe that one should stick to the most immediately apparent meaning, but also to the very end that is pursued, and in a certain way synthesises both in its total significance. For the rest, we have done nothing here but gather together on this subject a few observations which could give rise to many other developments; but we consider that, as they stand, they will sufficiently show how far from the truth are those who, whether in Islam or any other traditional form, claim to attribute to the sword only a 'material' meaning.

³¹² This is also represented by the sword placed vertically along the axis or beam of a balance, the whole forming the symbolic attributes of justice.

XXVIII

THE SYMBOLISM OF THE HORNS³¹³

In his study on Celticism³¹⁴, T. Basilide pointed out the importance of *Apollon Karneios* as the god of the Hyperboreans; the Celtic name *Belen* is, moreover, identical to *Ablun* or *Aplun*, which became *Apollon* (Apollo) among the Greeks. We intend to return to the question of the Hyperborean Apollo in more detail at a later date³¹⁵; for the moment, we will limit ourselves to making some observations concerning more specifically the name *Karneios*, as well as that of *Krónos* (Cronus), with which it is closely related, since both names have the same root KRN, which essentially expresses the ideas of "elevation" and "power".

In the sense of "elevation," the name *Kronos* is perfectly suited to Saturn, which indeed corresponds to the highest of the planetary spheres, the "seventh heaven" or *Satya-Loka* of the Hindu tradition³¹⁶. Moreover, Saturn should not be considered a uniquely or primarily malevolent power, as there seems to be a tendency to do at times, for it should not be forgotten that it is above all the ruler of the "golden age", that is, of *the Satya-Yuga* or first phase of *the Manvantara*, which coincides precisely with the Hyperborean period, clearly showing that it is not without reason that Cronos is identified with the god of the Hyperboreans³¹⁷. It is, on the other hand, plausible that the evil aspect in this case results from the very disappearance of that Hyperborean world; by virtue of an analogous 'reversal', every 'Land of the Gods', seat of a spiritual centre, becomes a 'Land of the Dead' when that centre has disappeared. It is also possible that this malevolent aspect was subsequently concentrated in the name *Kronos*, while, on the contrary, the beneficial aspect remained linked to the name *Karneios*, by virtue of the splitting of these names, which were originally one and the same; and it is also true that the symbolism of the sun presents both aspects.

³¹³ [Published in *É. T.*, November 1936].

³¹⁴ ['Trois études celtiques', in *É. T.*, August–September 1936].

³¹⁵ [The author did not have the opportunity to address this issue specifically].

³¹⁶For the Pythagoreans, Cronos and Rhea represented Heaven and Earth, respectively: the idea of elevation is therefore also found in this correspondence. It was only through a more or less late phonetic assimilation that the Greeks identified *Kronos* or Saturn with *Khronos*, 'time', when the roots of these two words are actually different; it seems that the symbol of the sickle was then transferred from one to the other, but this does not belong to our current topic.

³¹⁷The sea surrounding the island of Ogygia, consecrated to *Karneios* or *Krónos*, was called Cronia (Plutarch, *De facie in orbe Lunae*); Ogygia, which Romero calls "the navel of the world" (later represented by the Delphic *Omphalos*), was, moreover, nothing more than a secondary centre that had replaced *Thule* or primitive Syria at a time much closer to us than the Hyperborean period.

opposite aspects, life-giver and death-bringer, producer and destroyer, as we have recently pointed out in connection with the weapons representing the "sunbeam"³¹⁸.

Karneios is the god of *Karn*, that is, of the "high place" symbolising the sacred Mountain of the Pole, which among the Celts was represented either by the *tumulus* or by the *cairn*, or pile of stones that has retained that name. The stone, moreover, is often directly related to the cult of Apollo, as can be seen in particular in the *Omphalos* of Delphi and also in the stone cube that served as an altar in Delphi, whose volume the oracle ordered to be doubled; but, on the other hand, the stone also had a particular relationship with Cronos; there is a new relationship here that we can only mention in passing, as it is a point that deserves separate treatment³¹⁹. At the same time, *Karneios* is also, by the very meaning of the name, the "powerful god"³²⁰; and if the mountain is in one of its aspects a symbol of power and elevation, because of the idea of stability associated with it, there is another symbol even more characteristic from this point of view, and that is the horns. Now, in Delos, in addition to the cubic stone we have just mentioned, there was another altar called the *Kératon*, made entirely of ox and goat horns solidly joined together; it is clear that this refers directly to *Karneios*, whose symbolic relationship with the

Horned animals have even left their mark on our times³²¹.

The very name "horn" is clearly linked to the root KRN, as is "crown," which is another symbolic expression of the same ideas, since these two words (in Latin *cornu* and *corona*) are very close to each other³²². It is all too obvious that the crown is the insignia of power and the sign of

³¹⁸ In Greek, the form of the name *Apóllôn* is very close to *Apóllyon*, 'the destroyer' (cf. *Revelation*, IX, 11).

³¹⁹ The 'betyls', comparable to the *Omphalos*, are generally attributed a 'solar' significance; but this must have been superimposed at some point on a primitive 'polar' significance, and the same may have happened with Apollo. Let us also note that Apollo is represented as the protector of springs (the Celtic *Borvo* has been assimilated to him in this respect); and springs are also related to stone, which is one of their equivalents in 'polar' symbolism.

³²⁰ This name corresponds in Hebrew, in terms of its meaning, to the divine name *Shadday*, which must be more specifically the name of Abraham's God; now, there are very notable connections between Abraham and Cronos. [The author added: "which we may explain one day". Without claiming to be able to replace Guénon, we would like to point out in this regard that, in Islam, *Seyyidnâ Ibrâhim* (Abraham) is precisely the name of the Pole of the seventh heaven, that of Saturn (=Cronos)].

³²¹ In Brittany, *Saint Corneille* or *Cornély*, who replaces *Apóllôn Karneios*, is considered the protector of horned animals; the considerations we formulate here will allow us to understand that there is, in reality, much more to this than a simple "play on words", as many might be tempted to believe.

³²² The Greek word *Keraunós*, which means 'lightning', also seems to derive from the same root; in this regard, we should note that lightning usually strikes the highest points, places or objects.

a high hierarchy, making it necessary to emphasise this point; and we find a first connection with horns in the fact that they are also located on the head, which gives a good idea of a "summit"³²³. However, there is something else: the crown was originally a ring adorned with rays; and horns, similarly, are considered to be a representation of rays of light³²⁴, which brings us back to some of the explanations we have given about symbolic weapons. It is clear, moreover, that horns can be likened to weapons, even in the most literal sense, and thus they have also been associated with an idea of strength or power, as, in fact, they have always been everywhere³²⁵. On the other hand, rays of light are appropriate as an attribute of power, whether priestly or royal, that is, spiritual or temporal, as they designate it as an emanation or delegation from the source of light itself, as it is when it is legitimate. One could easily give many examples, from very diverse sources, of horns used as symbols of power; in particular, they are found in the Bible, and more specifically in the *Apocalypse*³²⁶; we will cite another example, taken from Arab tradition, which designates Alexander with the name *el-Iskandar dhú-l-qarnéyn*, or 'Alexander the [lord] of the two horns'³²⁷, which is usually interpreted in

elevated; and we must also bear in mind the analogy of lightning with rays of light, to which we shall return.

³²³In Hebrew tradition, *Keter*, the 'Crown', occupies the summit of the Sephirothic tree.

³²⁴A particularly notable example can be found in depictions of Moses, as it is well known that the horns on his forehead are nothing more than rays of light. Some, including Huet, Bishop of Avranches, have sought to identify Moses with Dionysus, who is also depicted with horns. There are other curious connections to consider, but they would take us too far afield from our subject.

³²⁵The same assimilation is also valid, of course, for other animal weapons, such as the tusks of elephants and wild boars, whose pointed shape is, moreover, similar to that of horns. Let us add, however, that the duality of horns—and that of tusks—prevents the 'axial' symbolism from being applicable to them: in this respect, they are more akin to the two lateral points of *the trident*; and that is why we also speak of rays of light in general and not of the 'Celestial Ray', which, from both the macrocosmic and microcosmic points of view, is equivalent to the 'Axis of the World'.

³²⁶ It should be noted that here the idea is no longer just that of a legitimate power, but extends to any power whatsoever, whether evil or beneficial: there are the horns of the Lamb, but also those of the Beast.

³²⁷ The Arabic word *qarn* is the same as "horn", since the root KRN easily changes to QRN and also to HRN, as in English *horn*. The word *qarn* also has another meaning, that of 'age' and 'cycle', and, more commonly, 'century'; this double meaning sometimes leads to curious confusion, as when some believe that the epithet *dhú-l-qarnéyn* applied to Alexander means that he lived for two centuries.

the meaning of a dual power extending to the East and West³²⁸. This interpretation is perfectly accurate, but without excluding another fact that rather completes it: Alexander, declared the son of Ammon by the oracle of this god, took as his emblem the two ram's horns that were the main attribute of this god³²⁹; and such divine origin only served to legitimise him as the successor to the ancient rulers of Egypt, to whom this emblem was also attributed. It is even said that he had himself represented in this way on his coins, which, in the eyes of the Greeks, identified him more with Dionysus, whose memory he also evoked through his conquests, especially that of India; and Dionysus was the son of Zeus, whom the Greeks assimilated to Ammon; it is possible that this idea was not foreign to Alexander himself; but Dionysus was usually depicted with bull's horns and not ram's horns, which, from the point of view of symbolism, constitutes a difference of considerable importance³³⁰.

It should be noted that horns, in their symbolic use, take two main forms: those of a ram, which are properly "solar", and those of a bull, which, on the contrary, are "lunar", as they resemble the shape of a crescent moon³³¹. It would also be possible to refer to the respective correspondences of the zodiac signs of Aries (the Ram) and Taurus (the Bull); but this would give rise, above all, to "cyclical" considerations that we cannot enter into at this time, due to the application that could be made to the predominance of one form or the other in different traditions.

To conclude these general notes, we will point out only one other link, according to certain relationships, between those animal weapons that are horns and what could be called plant weapons, that is, thorns. It should be noted in this regard that many plants that play an important symbolic role are thorny plants³³²; here too, thorns, like other points, evoke the idea of a summit or elevation, and can also, in certain cases at least, be taken as a representation of rays of light³³³. It can therefore be seen that symbolism always has

³²⁸ In this respect, the two horns are equivalent to the two heads of the heraldic eagle.

³²⁹ Ammon himself was called "Lord of the Double Horn" (*Book of the Dead*, chap. CLXV).

³³⁰ It is also possible that Alexander wore a helmet adorned with two horns; it is well known that horned helmets were worn by many ancient peoples. Among the Assyro-Babylonians, the horned tiara was a characteristic attribute of the deities.

³³¹ This distinction corresponds to the two forms given by alchemists to the sign of mercury: the lunar form refers here to "vulgar mercury", and the solar form to "the mercury of the wise".

³³² Examples include the rose, thistle, acacia, acanthus, etc.

³³³ The Christian symbolism of the crown of thorns (which, it is said, were made of acacia) thus approaches, in a way that some may find surprising but which is nonetheless real and accurate,

perfect coherence, as it must necessarily have, since it is not the result of a more or less artificial convention but, on the contrary, is essentially based on the very nature of things.

crown of luminous rays that we mentioned earlier. It should also be noted that, in various regions, menhirs are referred to as 'thorns' (hence, in Brittany and elsewhere, place names such as La Belle-Épine, Notre-Dame-de-l'Épine, etc.); now then: the symbolism of the menhir, like that of the obelisk and the column, refers to the "sunbeam" as well as the "Axis of the World".

SYMBOLISM OF THE COSMIC FORM

XXIX

*THE CAVE AND THE LABYRINTH*³³⁴

In a recent book³³⁵, W. F. Jackson Knight presents interesting research based on the passage in Book VI of the *Aeneid* describing the doors of the cave of the Cumaean Sibyl: why are the Cretan labyrinth and its history depicted on those doors? The author rightly refuses to see this as a simple and more or less useless digression, as some who do not go beyond modern 'literary' conceptions have done; on the contrary, he believes that this passage must have real symbolic value, based on a close relationship between the labyrinth and the cave, both linked to the same idea of an underground journey. This idea, according to the author's interpretation of concordant facts belonging to very different periods and regions, would have been originally related to funeral rites and then, by virtue of a certain analogy, would have been transferred to initiation rites; we will return to this point in more detail below, but first we must express some reservations about the author's conception of initiation. He seems, in fact, to view it solely as a product of 'human thought', endowed with a vitality that ensures its permanence through the ages, even if at times it survives, so to speak, only in a latent state. After all we have already said on this subject, we have no need to demonstrate once again the inadequacy of this point of view, if only because it fails to take into account the "superhuman" elements, which in reality constitute precisely the essential. We will insist only on this: the idea of a latent subsistence brings with it the hypothesis of preservation in a 'collective subconscious', taken from certain recent psychological theories; whatever one may think of these, there is in any case, in the application thus made, a complete ignorance of the necessity of the initiatory 'chain', that is, of an effective and uninterrupted transmission. It is true that there is another issue that must not be confused with this one: it may sometimes have happened that matters of a properly initiatory nature were expressed through individuals who were in no way aware of their true significance, and we have explained this previously in connection with the legend of the Grail³³⁶; but, on the one hand, this has nothing to do with the

³³⁴ [Published in *É. T.*, October and November 1937].

³³⁵ W. F. Jackson Knight, *Cumaean Gates, a reference of the Sixth "Aeneid" to Initiation Pattern*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford.

³³⁶ [See chapters III and IV].

which is the reality of initiation itself, and, on the other hand, Virgil's case could not be understood in this way, as there are, as in Dante, indications that are too precise and too manifestly conscious for it to be possible to admit that he was unfamiliar with any effective initiatory connection. What is at issue here has nothing to do with 'poetic inspiration' as it is understood today, and in this respect Jackson Knight is certainly too willing to share the 'literary' points of view to which, however, his thesis is opposed in other respects; but that does not mean we should ignore all the merit that belongs to a university author for having the courage to tackle this subject, and even simply to talk about initiation.

That said, let us return to the question of the relationship between the burial cave and the initiation cave: although this relationship is certainly real, identifying the two in terms of their symbolism represents, at best, only half the truth. Let us note, moreover, that even from a purely funerary point of view, the idea of deriving the symbolism from the ritual rather than seeing, on the contrary, the ritual itself as symbolism in action, as it actually is, already places the author in great difficulty when he finds that the underground journey is almost always followed by a journey in the open air, represented by many traditions as a voyage; this would be inconceivable, in fact, if it were nothing more than a description in images of a burial rite, but, on the other hand, it is perfectly explained when one realises that it is in fact the various stages undergone by the being in the course of a migration that is truly and genuinely 'beyond the grave', and that has nothing to do with the body that the being has left behind when abandoning earthly life. Moreover, because of the analogy between death in the ordinary sense and initiatory death, which we have discussed on another occasion, the same symbolic description can be applied equally to what happens to the being in both cases. such is, as far as the cave and the underground journey are concerned, the reason for the assimilation established above, insofar as it is justified; but, at the point where it must legitimately stop, we are still in the preliminaries of initiation and not in initiation itself.

In fact, strictly speaking, nothing more than a preparation for it can be seen in death to the profane world followed by the "descent into Hell", which, of course, is the same thing as the journey to the underworld to which the cave gives access; and, as for the initiation itself, far from being considered a death, it is, on the contrary, a "second birth" and a passage from darkness to light. But the place of this birth is also the cave, at least in cases where initiation takes place there, either literally or symbolically, for it goes without saying that one should not generalise too much and that, as in the case of the labyrinth, to which we will refer shortly, this is not necessarily common to all forms of initiation without

exception. The same appears, even exoterically, in the Christian symbolism of the Nativity, with the same clarity as in other traditions; and it is evident that the cave as a place of birth cannot have precisely the same significance as the cave as a place of death or burial. It could be noted, however, at least to link these different and even seemingly opposite aspects, that death and birth are, in short, but two phases of the same change of state, and that the passage from one state to another is always considered to take place in darkness; in this sense, the cave would be more accurately the very place of that transition: but this, even if strictly true, still refers only to one aspect of its complex symbolism.

If the author has failed to see the other aspect of this symbolism, it is most likely due to the influence exerted on him by the theories of certain 'historians of religions': following them, he admits that the cave must always be linked to "chthonic" cults, no doubt for the somewhat simplistic reason that it is located inside the earth; but this is far from the truth³³⁸. Nevertheless, our author cannot help but notice that the initiatory cave is presented above all as an image of the world³³⁹; but his hypothesis prevents him from drawing the obvious conclusion, namely: this being the case, the cave must form a complete whole and contain within itself the representation of both heaven and earth; if it happens that the sky is expressly mentioned in some text or appears in some monument as corresponding to the vault of the cave, the explanations proposed in this regard become so confusing and unsatisfactory that it is no longer possible to follow them. The truth is that, far from being a dark place, the initiatory cave is illuminated from within, so that, on the contrary, darkness reigns outside it, since the profane world is naturally assimilated to the 'outer darkness' and the 'second birth' is at once an 'illumination'³⁴⁰. Now, if

³³⁷ In this regard, one might also recall the symbolism of the grain of wheat in the Eleusinian mysteries.

³³⁸ This one-sided interpretation leads the author into a peculiar confusion: among other examples, he cites the Shinto myth of the dance performed at the entrance to a cave to bring out the "ancestral goddess" hidden there; unfortunately for his thesis, this is not the "mother earth", as he believes and expressly states, but the sun goddess, which is entirely different.

³³⁹ In Freemasonry, the same applies to the lodge, whose name some have even linked to the Sanskrit word *loka* ['world'], which is indeed accurate symbolically, if not etymologically; but it should be added that the lodge is not assimilated to the cave, and that the equivalent of the latter is found only, in this case, at the very beginning of the initiatory trials, so that it is given no other meaning than that of an underground place directly related to the ideas of death and 'descent'.

³⁴⁰ In Masonic symbolism, too, and for the same reasons, the "lights" are necessarily found inside the lodge; and the word *loka*, just mentioned, is also related

When asked why the cave is considered in this way from an initiatory point of view, we will respond that the solution lies, on the one hand, in the fact that the symbol of the cave is complementary to that of the mountain, and, on the other hand, in the close relationship between the symbolism of the cave and that of the heart. We propose to deal with these two essential points separately, but it is not difficult to understand, after what we have already had occasion to say elsewhere, that all this is directly related to the very figuration of the spiritual centres.

We will overlook other issues which, however important they may be in themselves, are only incidental here, such as the meaning of the 'golden bough'; it is highly debatable whether it can be identified, except in a very secondary respect, with the staff or wand that is very commonly found in various forms in traditional symbolism³⁴¹. Without dwelling further on this, we will now examine the labyrinth, whose meaning may seem even more enigmatic, or at least more concealed, than that of the cave, and the relationship between the two.

The labyrinth, as Jackson Knight has rightly observed, has a dual purpose, in that it allows or denies access, depending on the case, to a certain place where not everyone can enter indiscriminately; only those who are "qualified" will be able to traverse it to the end, while the others will be prevented from entering or will lose their way. It is immediately apparent that there is here the idea of 'selection', clearly related to admission to initiation itself: the journey through the labyrinth is not, in this respect, anything other than a representation of the initiation trials; and it is easy to understand that, when it effectively served as a means of access to certain sanctuaries, it could be arranged in such a way that the corresponding rites were performed along the way. On the other hand, there is also the idea of a 'journey', in the sense that this idea is assimilated to the trials themselves, as can still be seen today in certain forms of initiation, such as Freemasonry, where each of the symbolic trials is designated precisely as a 'journey'. Another equivalent symbolism is that of the "pilgrimage"; and in this regard, we recall the labyrinths that were once traced on the floor slabs of certain churches, the route of which was considered a "substitute" for the pilgrimage to the Holy Land; Moreover, if the point at which this journey ends represents a place reserved for the "chosen ones", that place is truly and genuinely a "Holy Land" in the initiatory sense of the term.

directly with a root whose primary meaning refers to light.

³⁴¹It would certainly be much more accurate to equate this 'golden branch' with the Druidic mistletoe and the Masonic acacia, not to mention the 'branches' of the Christian festival that bears precisely this name, as a symbol and pledge of resurrection and immortality.

expression: in other words, this point is nothing more than the image of a spiritual centre, as every place of initiation is equally so³⁴².

It goes without saying, moreover, that the use of the labyrinth as a means of protection or defence has various applications outside the realm of initiation; thus, the author particularly points out its "tactical" use at the entrance to certain ancient cities and other fortified places. However, it is a mistake to believe that in this case it is a purely profane use, which would even have been chronologically the first, to then suggest the idea of a ritual use; there is in this idea, strictly speaking, a reversal of normal relationships, in accordance, on the other hand, with modern conceptions but only with them, and it is therefore entirely illegitimate to attribute this to ancient civilisations. In fact, in any strictly traditional civilisation, all things necessarily begin with the principle or what is closest to it, and then descend to increasingly contingent applications; and, moreover, even the latter are never approached from a profane point of view, which is, as we have often explained, nothing more than the result of a degradation whereby the awareness of the connection between these applications and the principle has been lost. In the case in question, it could easily be perceived that there is something different from what modern 'tacticians' would see, by the simple observation that this 'labyrinthine' mode of defence was used not only against human enemies but also against hostile psychic influences, which clearly indicates that it must have had a ritual value in itself³⁴³. But there is more: the founding of cities, the choice of their location and the plan according to which they were built were subject to rules belonging essentially to the 'sacred science' and, consequently, were far from serving only 'utilitarian' purposes, at least in the exclusively material sense that is currently given to that word; However strange these things may be to the mentality of our contemporaries, they must nevertheless be taken into account, without which those who study the vestiges of ancient civilisations will never be able to understand the true meaning and *raison d'être* of what they observe, even in what simply corresponds to what has been agreed to call

³⁴²Jackson Knight mentions these labyrinths, but attributes to them only a religious significance; he seems unaware that their layout did not belong in any way to exoteric doctrine, but exclusively to the symbolism of the initiatory organisations of builders.

(³⁴³) We will not dwell on the 'labyrinthine' nature of certain processions and 'ritual dances', which, being primarily protective or 'apotropaic' rites, as the author says, are directly linked to the same order of considerations: it is essentially a matter of stopping and diverting evil influences, using a 'technique' based on knowledge of certain laws according to which they exert their action.

today the domain of "everyday life", but which at that time also had, in reality, a distinctly ritual and traditional character.

As for the origin of the name "labyrinth", it is rather obscure and has given rise to much debate; contrary to what some have believed, it does not seem to be directly related to the name of the Cretan *lábrys* or double axe, but rather both derive equally from the same very ancient word that designated the stone (root *la-*, from which *laós* in Greek, *lapis* in Latin), so that, etymologically, the labyrinth could be nothing more than a stone construction, belonging to the genre of constructions called "Cyclopean". However, this is only the most superficial meaning of the word, which, in a deeper sense, is linked to the whole symbolism of stone, to which we have referred on several occasions, either in connection with the "betyls" or with the "stones of lightning" (identified precisely with the stone axe or *labrys*), and which has many other aspects. Jackson Knight has at least glimpsed this, as he alludes to men "born of stone" (which, let us note in passing, explains the Greek word *laós* ["people, folk"]), of which the legend of Deucalion offers the best-known example: this refers to a certain period, a more precise study of which, if possible, would surely give the so-called "Stone Age" a very different meaning from that attributed to it by prehistorians. On the other hand, this brings us back to the theme of the cave, which, as it is excavated in rock, naturally or artificially, is also very close to this symbolism³⁴⁴; but we must add that this is no reason to suppose that the labyrinth itself must also necessarily have been excavated in rock: although this may have been the case in certain instances, it is merely an accidental element, one might say, and does not enter into its definition, for whatever the relationship between the labyrinth and the cave, it is important not to confuse them, especially when it comes to the initiatory cave, which we are considering here in particular.

Indeed, it is very clear that if the cave is the place where initiation itself takes place, the labyrinth, the place of preliminary trials, can only be the path that leads to it, as well as the obstacle that prevents the approach of the "unqualified" profane. We should also remember that in Cumae the labyrinth was represented on the doors, as if, in some way, this representation replaced the

³⁴⁴ Prehistoric caves were, in all likelihood, not dwellings, as is commonly believed, but rather the sanctuaries of the 'men of stone', understood in the sense we have just indicated; thus, in the traditional forms of the period in question, and in relation to a certain "concealment" of knowledge, the cave would have taken on the character of a symbol of spiritual centres and, consequently, of a place of initiation.

own labyrinth ³⁴⁵ ; and it could be said that Aeneas, as he pauses at the entrance to contemplate it, is in fact traversing the labyrinth, mentally rather than physically. On the other hand, it does not seem that this mode of access has always been exclusively reserved for shrines established in caves or symbolically assimilated to them, since, as we have already explained, it is not a feature common to all traditional forms; and the *raison d'être* of the labyrinth, as we have defined it above, may equally apply to the surroundings of any place of initiation, any sanctuary intended for 'mysteries' rather than public rites. Having made this reservation, there is nevertheless reason to suppose that, at least in its origins, the use of the labyrinth must have been more particularly linked to the initiatory cave: for both seem to have belonged at the beginning to the same traditional forms, those of the era of the 'stone men' to which we referred a moment ago; They would therefore have started out closely linked, even if they did not remain so in all subsequent forms.

If we consider the case in which the labyrinth is connected to the cave, the latter, which it surrounds with its twists and turns and into which it finally leads, occupies the innermost and central point in the whole thus constituted, which corresponds perfectly to the idea of a spiritual centre and also agrees with the equivalent symbolism of the heart, to which we intend to return. It should also be noted that when the cave itself is both the place of initiatory death and that of the 'second birth', it must then be considered as access not only to the underground or 'infernal' domains, but also to the supraterrrestrial domains; this also corresponds to the notion of the central point, which is, in the 'macrocosmic' order, as in the 'microcosmic' order, the point where communication with all higher and lower states takes place; and only in this way can the cave be, as we have said, the complete image of the world, inasmuch as all these states must be equally reflected in it; otherwise, the assimilation of its vault to the sky would be absolutely incomprehensible. But, on the other hand, if the "descent into Hell" takes place in the cave itself, between initiatory death and "second birth," it is clear that this descent cannot be considered as represented by the journey through the labyrinth, and then one may still wonder what the latter actually corresponds to: it is the "outer darkness" to which we have already alluded, and to which the state of "wandering", if it is permissible to use this term, of which such a journey is the exact expression, perfectly applies. This matter of the 'outer darkness' could give rise to further clarification, but that would take us beyond the scope of the present study; we believe, therefore, that

³⁴⁵ A similar case in this regard is that of the "labyrinthine" figures drawn on walls in ancient Greece to prevent evil influences from entering homes.

Furthermore, I have said enough to show, on the one hand, the interest presented by research such as that set out in Jackson Knight's book, but also, on the other hand, the need for a proper "technical" knowledge of the subject matter in order to refine the results and grasp their true scope. Without such knowledge, we will never achieve anything more than hypothetical and incomplete reconstructions which, even if they are not distorted by any preconceived ideas, will remain as "dead" as the vestiges themselves that were their starting point.

XXX

*THE HEART AND THE CAVE*³⁴⁶

We have previously alluded to the close relationship between the symbolism of the cave and that of the heart, which explains the role played by the cave from an initiatory point of view as a representation of a spiritual centre. Indeed, the heart is essentially a symbol of the centre, whether it be the centre of a being or, analogically, that of a world, that is to say, whether one takes the 'microcosmic' or the 'macrocosmic' point of view; it is therefore natural, by virtue of this relationship, that the same meaning should also apply to the cave; but we must now explain this symbolic connection more fully.

The "cavern of the heart" is a well-known traditional expression: the word *guhâ*, in Sanskrit, generally refers to a cavern, but it also applies to the internal cavity of the heart and, by extension, to the heart itself; this "cavern of the heart" is the vital centre in which not only the *jīvâtâmâ* resides, but also the unconditioned *Atmâ*, which is in reality identical to *Brahma* himself, as we have explained elsewhere³⁴⁷. The word *guhâ* derives from the root *ghu-*, whose meaning is 'to cover' or 'to hide', the same as that of another similar root *gup-*, from which *gupta* is derived, which applies to everything that has a secret character, to everything that is not manifested externally; it is the equivalent of the Greek *kryptós*, from which the word 'crypt' is derived, synonymous with 'cavern'. These ideas refer to the centre, as the innermost and therefore most hidden point; at the same time, they also refer to the initiatory secret, either in itself or as symbolised by the layout of the place where the initiation takes place, a hidden or 'covered' place³⁴⁸, that is, inaccessible to the uninitiated, whether access is defended by a "labyrinthine" structure or by any other means (such as the "temples without doors" of Far Eastern initiation), and always considered as an image of the centre.

On the other hand, it is important to note that this hidden or secret nature, as far as spiritual centres or their representations are concerned, implies that traditional truth itself, in its entirety, is no longer accessible to all men indiscriminately, which indicates that this is a time of at least relative 'obscurity'; this allows us to 'situate' such symbolism in the course of the cyclical process;

³⁴⁶ [Published in *É. T.*, December 1937].

³⁴⁷ *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, chap. III (see *Chândogya-Upânishad*, Prapâthaka 3, Khanda 14, çruti 3, Prapâthaka 8, Khanda 1, çruti 1).

³⁴⁸ Cf. the Masonic expression "to be under cover".

However, this is a point to which we must return in greater detail when discussing the relationship between the cave and the mountain, both of which are taken as symbols of the centre. For the moment, we will content ourselves with pointing out that the outline of the heart is a triangle with its apex pointing downwards (the 'triangle of the heart' is another traditional expression); and that the same outline also applies to the cave, while that of the mountain, like that of the pyramid which corresponds to it, is, on the contrary, a triangle with its apex pointing upwards; this shows that it is an inverse relationship, and also, in a certain sense, a complementary one. We will add, regarding this representation of the heart and the cave by the inverted triangle, that this is one of the cases in which it is clearly not linked to any idea of "black magic", contrary to what is often claimed by those who have only a completely insufficient knowledge of symbolism.

That said, let us return to what, according to Hindu tradition, is hidden in the "cavern of the heart": it is the very principle of being, a principle which, in that state of "envelopment" or "withdrawal" and with respect to manifestation, is compared to the smallest thing (the word *dāhara*, which designates the cavity where it resides, also refers to this idea of smallness), when in reality it is the greatest thing there is, just as the point is spatially tiny and even non-existent, even though it is the principle by which all space is produced, or in the same way that the unit appears to be the smallest of numbers, even though it principally contains them all and produces its entire indefinite series by itself. Here too, then, we find the expression of an inverse relationship, in that the principle is viewed from two different points of view; of these two points of view, that of extreme smallness concerns its hidden and, in a certain sense, 'invisible' state, which is not yet a 'virtuality' for the being, but from which the spiritual development of that being will take place; there, then, is properly the "beginning" (*initium*) of that development, which is directly related to initiation, understood in the etymological sense of the term; and precisely from this point of view, the cave can be considered the place of "second birth". In this regard, we find texts such as the following: "Know that this *Agni*, which is the foundation of the eternal (principal) world, and through which it can be attained, is hidden in the cave (of the heart)"³⁴⁹, which refers, in the "microcosmic" order, to the "second birth" and also, by transposition to the "macrocosmic" order, to its analogue, which is the birth of *the Avatāra*.

We have said that what resides in the heart is both the *jīvātmā* from the point of view of individual manifestation and the unconditioned *Ātmā* or *Paramātmā* from the point of view of principle; the two are distinguished only in an illusory way, that is to say,

³⁴⁹*Katha-Upānishad*, Vallī 1st cṛuti 14.

relative to the manifestation itself, and are one in absolute reality. They are "the two who have entered the cave," and at the same time, it is said that they "remain at the highest summit," so that the two symbols, that of the mountain and that of the cave, are brought together here³⁵⁰. The text adds that "those who know *Brahma* call them shadow and light"; this refers more particularly to the symbolism of *Nara-nârâyana*, which we have discussed in connection with the *Ātmā-Gītā*³⁵¹, citing precisely this same text; *Nara*, the human or mortal, who is *jīvātmā*, is assimilated to *Ārjuna*, and *Nârâyana*, the divine or immortal, who is *Paramātmā*, is assimilated to *Kr̥ṣṇa*; but, according to its proper meaning, the name *Kr̥ṣṇa* designates the dark colour, and that of *Ārjuna* the light colour, that is, respectively, night and day, insofar as they are considered as respective representations of the unmanifest and the manifested³⁵². A symbolism exactly similar in this respect is found, moreover, with the Dioscuri, who are also related to the two hemispheres, one dark and the other light, as we have indicated when studying the symbolism of the "double spiral"³⁵³. On the other hand, those called "the two", that is, the *jīvātmā* and the *Paramātmā*, are also the "two birds" or the "two birds" referred to in other texts as "residing in the same tree" (just as *Ārjuna* and *Kr̥ṣṇa* ride in the same chariot), and who are "inseparably united" because, as we said before, they are in reality but one and are only illusorily distinguished³⁵⁴. It is important to note here that the symbolism of the tree is essentially "axial", like that of the mountain; and the cave, insofar as it is considered to be located in the mountain, or inside it, is also on the axis, since, in all cases and however one looks at things, the centre is necessarily there, which is the place where the individual and the Universal unite.

Before leaving this subject, we will make a linguistic observation that may not be of great importance, but is at least curious: the Egyptian word *hor*, the name of *Horus*, seems to mean 'heart'; *Horus* would then be the 'Heart of the World', according to a designation found in most traditions and which, moreover, fits perfectly with the symbolism

³⁵⁰ *Katha-Upānishad*, Vallī 3rd, ṛuti 1 (cf. *Brahma-Sūtra*, Adhyāya 1st, Pāda 2nd, sūtra 11-12).

³⁵¹ [V. I. March 1930].

³⁵² Cf. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Darker Side of the Dawn and Angel and Titan, an essay in Vedic Ontology*.

³⁵³ [É. T., March 1936; article reprinted in *La Grande Triade*, chap. V. At this point in the text, the author added: "...perhaps we will return to this at some point"; but this opportunity did not arise, apart from its reuse in *La Grande Triade* (published in 1946), where the original text of the article on the "double spiral" can be found, without further development].

³⁵⁴ *Mūndaka-Upānishad*, Mūndaka 3rd, Khanda 1st, ṛuti 1; *Ḥvetāvatara-Upānishad*, Adhyāya 4th, ṛuti 6.

of that god, insofar as it is possible to comprehend him. At first glance, one might be tempted to relate the word *hor* to the Latin *cor*, which has the same meaning, especially since, in different languages, similar roots designating

the heart are found with both a guttural and an aspirated initial letter*: thus, for On the one hand, *hr* or *hrdaya* in Sanskrit, *heart* in English, *herz* in German, and on the other, *kêr* or *kárdion* in Greek, and *cor* (genitive *cordis*) in Latin; but the common root of all these words, including the last one, is actually HRD or KRD, and this does not seem to be the case with the Egyptian *hor*, so that we are dealing here not with a real root identity, but only with a kind of phonetic convergence, which is no less remarkable. But here is something perhaps even more remarkable and, in any case, directly related to our topic: in Hebrew, the word *hôr* or *hûr*, written with *hêt*, means 'cave'; we do not mean to say that there is an etymological link between the two words, Hebrew and Egyptian, although strictly speaking they may have a more or less remote common origin; but ultimately it matters little, for when we know that nothing can be purely fortuitous, the relationship is no less worthy of interest. That is not all: in Hebrew, *hôr* or *har*, this time written with *hê*, means 'mountain'; if we note that *hêt* is, in the order of aspirated letters, a reinforcement or hardening of *hê*, which in a way indicates a kind of 'compression', and that this letter also expresses, ideographically, a limit or enclosure, we see that, by the very relationship between the two words, the cave is indicated as the enclosed place inside the mountain, which is accurate both literally and symbolically; and we are thus led once again to the relationship between the mountain and the cave, which we shall examine in more detail below.

*We respect the author's terminology; it would be more accurate to say: "they are found both with a velar and with an aspirated initial consonant"; also, towards the end of the article, it should be noted that the Hebrew *hêt* is a pharyngeal "constrictive" rather than an "aspirated" sound. (*Translator's note*).

XXXI

THE MOUNTAIN AND THE CAVE ³⁵⁵

There is, therefore, a close relationship between the mountain and the cave, in that both are taken as symbols of spiritual centres, as are, for obvious reasons, all 'axial' or 'polar' symbols, one of the main ones being precisely the mountain. We should remember that, in this regard, the cave must be considered as located under the mountain or inside it, so that it is also on the axis, which further reinforces the link between the two symbols, which are in a way complementary to each other. It should also be noted, however, in order to "situate" them exactly in relation to each other, that the mountain has a more "primordial" character than the cave: this results from the fact that it is visible from the outside, that it is even, one might say, the most visible of all places, whereas, on the contrary, the cave is, as we have said, an essentially hidden and closed place. It can easily be deduced that the representation of the primordial centre by the mountain corresponds precisely to the original period of terrestrial humanity, during which truth was fully accessible to all (hence the name *Satya-Yuga* ['period of truth'], and the summit of the mountain is then the *Satya-Loka* or 'place of truth'); but when, as a result of the downward march of the cycle, that truth was no longer accessible to more than a more or less restricted minority (which coincides with the beginnings of initiation understood in its strictest sense) and became hidden from the majority of men, the cave was a more appropriate symbol for the spiritual centre and, consequently, for the initiatory sanctuaries that are its image. Because of this change, the centre, one might say, did not abandon the mountain, but only withdrew from the summit to the interior; on the other hand, that same change is in a way an 'inversion' whereby, as we have explained elsewhere, the 'celestial world' (to which the elevation of the mountain above the earth's surface refers) became in a sense the 'underground world' (although in reality it is not the former that changed, but the conditions of the outside world, and therefore its relationship with it); and that 'inversion' is figured by the respective schemes of the mountain and the cave, which express at the same time their mutual complementarity. conditions of the outside world, and therefore its relationship with it); and that "inversion" is represented by the respective schemes of the mountain and the cave, which express their mutual complementarity.

As we have pointed out above, the outline of the mountain, like that of the pyramid or the mound, its equivalents, is a triangle with the apex pointing upwards; that of the cave, on the contrary, is a triangle with the apex pointing downwards, and therefore inverted with respect to the former. This inverted triangle is also the outline

³⁵⁵ [Published in *É. T.*, January 1938].

of the heart ³⁵⁶, and that of the cup, which is generally assimilated to it in symbolism, as we have shown particularly with regard to the Holy Grail ³⁵⁷. Let us add that these latter symbols and their counterparts, from a more general point of view, refer to the passive or feminine principle of universal manifestation, or to some aspect thereof ³⁵⁸, while the symbols represented by the upward-pointing triangle refer to the active or masculine principle; they are, therefore, truly complementary. On the other hand, if both triangles are placed one below the other, corresponding to the situation of the cave under the mountain, we see that the second can be considered as the reflection of the first (fig. 12); and this idea of reflection fits very well with the relationship of a derived symbol to the main symbol, according to what we have just said about the relationship between the mountain and the

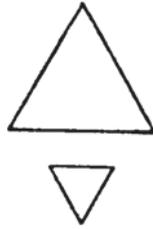


Fig. 12

cave as successive representations of the spiritual centre in the different phases of cyclical development.

It may seem surprising that we show the inverted triangle here as smaller than the upright triangle, since, since the latter is a reflection of the former, it would seem that it should be equal to it; but such a difference in proportions is not unusual in symbolism: thus, in Hebrew Kabbalah, the *Macroprosopus* or "Great Face" is reflected in the *Microprosopus* or "Small Face". Moreover, in the present case, there is a reason for this.

³⁵⁶ This figuration may be referred to by the fact that the Arabic name for the heart (*qalb*) properly means that it is in an "inverted" position (*maqlûb*) (cf. T. Burckhardt, "Du Barzakh," in *É. T.*, December 1937).

³⁵⁷ In ancient Egypt, the vessel was the hieroglyph for the heart. The "cup" in the Tarot also corresponds to the "heart" in ordinary playing cards [French; in the Spanish deck, the figure of the cup has been retained (*Translator's note*)].

³⁵⁸ In India, the inverted triangle is one of the main symbols of *Shakti*; it is also that of the primordial waters.

More specifically: we have recalled, in relation to the cave and the heart, the text from the *Upanishads* which states that the Principle, residing in "the centre of being", is "smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a grain of mustard, smaller than a grain of millet, smaller than the germ in a grain of millet", but also, at the same time, "greater than the sky, greater than all these worlds put together" ³⁵⁹; now, in the inverse relationship between the two symbols we are considering, the mountain corresponds to the idea of "greatness" and the cave (or the cavity of the heart) to that of "smallness". The aspect of "greatness" refers, on the other hand, to absolute reality, and that of "smallness" to appearances relative to manifestation; it is therefore perfectly normal that the former should be represented here by the symbol corresponding to a "primordial" condition ³⁶⁰, and the latter by that corresponding to a subsequent condition of "darkening" and spiritual "envelopment" or "withdrawal".

If one wishes to represent the cave as located inside (or at the heart, one might say) of the mountain, it suffices to transport the inverted triangle inside the right triangle, so that their centres coincide (fig. 13); the former must therefore necessarily be smaller in order to be contained entirely within the latter; but, apart

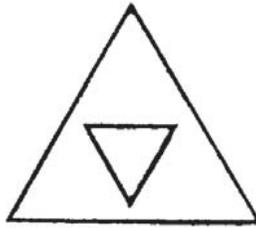


Fig. 13

this difference, the figure thus obtained is clearly identical to the symbol of the "Seal of Solomon", where the two opposing triangles also represent two complementary principles, in the various applications to which they are susceptible. On the other hand, if the sides of the inverted triangle are made equal to half those of the right-angled triangle (we have made them slightly smaller so that the two triangles appear entirely separate, but in fact it is clear that the entrance to the cave

³⁵⁹ *Chhândogya-Upânishad*, Prapâthaka 3rd, Khanda 14th, çruti 3.

³⁶⁰ It is well known that Dante places the earthly Paradise at the summit of a mountain; this location is, therefore, exactly that of the spiritual centre in the "primordial state" of humanity.

must be found on the surface of the mountain itself, and therefore the triangle representing it should actually touch the perimeter of the other)³⁶¹, the smaller triangle will divide the surface of the larger one into four equal parts, one of which will be the inverted triangle itself, while the other three will be right-angled triangles; this last consideration, like that of certain numerical relationships linked to it, has, in truth, no direct relation to our present subject, but we will undoubtedly have occasion to return to it in the course of other studies³⁶².

³⁶¹ It can be observed, according to the same scheme, that if the mountain is replaced by the pyramid, the inner chamber of the latter is the exact equivalent of the cave.

³⁶² [Our beloved teacher did not have such an opportunity in his books or articles. Only in his correspondence with us was he led on several occasions to provide some unpublished details in relation to certain topics in our letters. His other readers therefore have no other means of knowing what he meant in this regard than to learn, through a posthumous note, certain passages from his letters, accompanied by circumstantial explanations and our comments. See Annex I at the end of the volume for more on this subject].

XXXII

THE HEART AND 'THE EGG OF THE WORLD' ³⁶³

After all the above considerations on the various aspects of the symbolism of the cave, we still have to deal with another important point: the relationship of this symbol to the "Egg of the World"; but in order for this to be well understood and more directly linked to what we have said so far, we must first discuss the symbolic relationship between the "Egg of the World" and the heart. At first glance, one might be surprised by this and discern only a certain similarity in shape between the heart and the egg; but this similarity itself cannot have any real significance unless there are deeper relationships. Now then: the fact that the *Ômphalos* and the betyl, indisputably symbols of the centre, often have an ovoid shape, as was the case, in particular, with the Delphic *Ômphalos*³⁶⁴, clearly shows that this must be so, and this is what we must now explain.

In this regard, it is important to note first and foremost that the "Egg of the World" is not the figure of the "cosmos" in its state of full manifestation, but rather that from which its development will take place; and if this development is represented as an extension that unfolds in all directions from the starting point, it is clear that this point will necessarily coincide with the centre itself; thus, the "Egg of the World" is truly "central" in relation to the "cosmos"³⁶⁵. The biblical image of the earthly Paradise, which is also the "Centre of the World", is that of a circular enclosure, which can be considered the horizontal section of an ovoid as well as a spherical shape; let us add that, in fact, the difference between these two forms consists essentially in the fact that the sphere, extending equally in all directions from its centre, is truly the primordial form, while the egg corresponds to an already differentiated state, derived from the former by a kind of 'polarisation' or splitting of the centre³⁶⁶;

³⁶³ [Published in *É. T.*, February 1938].

³⁶⁴ We have examined these symbols more closely in *Le Roi du Monde*, where we also pointed out that, in other cases, they take on a conical shape, in direct relation to the symbol of the mountain, so that here too we find the two complementary figures we mentioned earlier.

³⁶⁵ The symbol of the fruit also has, in this respect, the same meaning as that of the egg; we will undoubtedly return to this in the course of our studies [cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLIII]; and we will of course note that this symbol also has an obvious link with that of the 'garden', and therefore with that of the earthly Paradise.

³⁶⁶ Thus, in plane geometry, the single centre of the circle, when unfolded, gives rise to the two foci of an ellipse; the same unfolding is also clearly represented in the Far Eastern symbol of *Yin-Yang*, which is also related to that of the "Egg of the World".

Such "polarisation" can be considered, moreover, as taking place from the moment the sphere completes a rotation around a given axis, since from that moment on, not all directions in space play the same role uniformly; and this precisely marks the transition from one to the other of these two successive phases of the cosmogonic process, symbolised respectively by the sphere and the egg³⁶⁷.

That said, all that remains is to show that what is contained in the "Egg of the World" is really identical to what, as we said earlier, is also symbolically contained in the heart, and in the cave, insofar as it is the equivalent of the heart. This refers to that spiritual "germ" which, in the "macrocosmic" order, is designated by Hindu tradition as *Hiranyagarbha*, that is, literally, the "golden embryo"³⁶⁸; this "seed" is truly and really the primordial *Avatâra*³⁶⁹, and we have seen that the birthplace of the *Avatâra*, as well as that which corresponds to it from the "microcosmic" point of view, is precisely represented by the heart or the cave. It could perhaps be objected that, in the text quoted by us elsewhere³⁷⁰, as well as in many other cases, the *Avatâra* is expressly designated as *Agni*, whereas it is said that it is *Brahmâ* who envelops himself in the "Egg of the World", called for this reason *Brahmânda*, in order to be born within it as *Hiranyagarbha*; but, apart from the fact that the different names do not really designate anything other than various divine attributes, always necessarily interconnected, and not separate entities, it should be noted more particularly here that, since gold is considered the "mineral light" and "sun of metals", the very designation of *Hiranyagarbha* effectively characterises it as a principle of fiery nature; and this reason is added to its central position, to make it symbolically assimilated to the Sun, which, moreover, is equally in all traditions one of the figures of the "Heart of the World".

³⁶⁷ Let us also point out, regarding the spherical form, that in Islamic tradition the sphere of pure primordial light is the *Rûh mohammediyah* ['spirit of Muhammad'], which is in turn the 'Heart of the World'; and the entire "cosmos" is enlivened by the "pulsations" of that sphere, which is properly the *barzakh* ['interval, isthmus' (between the Principle and Manifestation)] par excellence; see on this subject the article by T. Burckhardt in *É. T.*, December 1937.

³⁶⁸ See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, chap. XIII.

³⁶⁹ This is also referred to in the designation of Christ as the "seed" in various texts of the Scriptures, to which we may return on another occasion (see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVIII; and, in the present compilation, chap. LXXIII: "The Mustard Seed").

³⁷⁰ *Katha-Upânishad*, Vallî 1st, çruti 14.

To move from here to the microcosmic application, it suffices to recall the analogy between the *pinda*, the subtle embryo of the individual being, and the *Brahmānda* or "World Egg"³⁷¹; and that *pinda*, as the permanent and indestructible "germ" of being, is identified on the other hand with the "core of immortality", which is called *lūz* in the Hebrew tradition³⁷². It is true that, in general, the *lūz* is not indicated as being located in the heart, or at least this is only one of the different locations of which it is capable, in its correspondence with the corporeal organism, and not even the most common one; but it can still be found, among others, precisely where it should be found according to what we have said, that is, where the *lūz* is in immediate relation to the "second birth". In fact, these locations, which are also related to the Hindu doctrine of the *chakras* [subtle 'organic' centres], refer to other conditions of the human being or phases of their spiritual development: at the base of the spine, the *lūz* is found in ordinary people in a state of 'sleep'³⁷³; in the heart, the initial phase of its 'germination' occurs, which is properly the 'second birth'; at the frontal eye, it corresponds to the perfection of the human state, that is, to reintegration into the 'primordial state'; finally, at the crown of the head, it corresponds to the passage to supra-individual states; and we will also find the exact correspondence of these various stages when we return to the symbolism of the initiatory cave³⁷⁴.

³⁷¹*Yatha pinda tatha Brahmānda* (see *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chapters XIII and XIX).

³⁷² For further discussion on this point, we refer once again to *Le Roi du Monde*; it may also be noted that the assimilation of the "second birth" to a "germination" of the *lūz* clearly recalls the Taoist description of the initiatory process as "endogeny of the immortal".

⁽³⁷³⁾The serpent coiled around the "Egg of the World", and sometimes depicted around the *Omphalos* and the *betyl*, is, in this respect, the *Kundalini* coiled around the "core of immortality", which is also related to the symbolism of the "black stone"; This "lower" position of *the lūz* is directly alluded to in the Hermetic formula: "*Visita inferiora terrae, rectificando invenies occultum lapidem*" ["Visit the lower parts of the earth, and by rectifying you will find the hidden stone"]; "rectification" here is the "straightening" [*redressement*] that marks, after the "descent", the beginning of the upward movement, corresponding to the awakening of the *Kundalini*; and the complement of the same formula also designates this "hidden stone" as "*veram medicinam*" ["true medicine"], which also identifies it with the *āmrtā*, food or potion of immortality.

³⁷⁴ Let us also note that the designation "golden embryo" suggests a certain relationship with alchemical symbolism, confirmed by certain links such as those we have indicated in the preceding note; and we shall also see, in this regard, that the initiatory cave corresponds remarkably well to *the hermetic athanor*; these similarities should come as no surprise, since the process of the "Great Work", understood in its true meaning, is essentially nothing other than the process of initiation itself.

XXXIII

*THE CAVE AND "THE EGG OF THE WORLD"*³⁷⁵

The initiatory cave, as we have said before, is considered an image of the world; but, on the other hand, because of its symbolic assimilation to the heart, it particularly represents the central cosmic place. It may seem that there are two different points of view here, but in reality, they do not contradict each other in any way, and what we have explained regarding the 'World Egg' is sufficient to reconcile them, and even to identify them with each other in a certain sense: in fact, the 'World Egg' is central with respect to the 'cosmos' and, at the same time, contains in embryo everything that the latter will contain in its state of full manifestation; all things are therefore found in the "World Egg", but in a state of "folding" or "envelopment", which is also represented, as we have explained, by the very situation of the cave, by its character as a hidden and closed place. The two halves into which the "Egg of the World" is divided, according to one of the most common aspects of its symbolism, become, respectively, the sky and the earth; in the cave, likewise, the floor corresponds to the earth and the vault to the sky; there is, therefore, nothing in all this that is not perfectly coherent and normal.

Now, another particularly important question from the initiatory point of view needs to be considered: we have spoken of the cave as the place of the 'second birth'; but an essential distinction must be made between this 'second birth' and the 'third birth', a distinction that corresponds, in short, to that between initiation into the 'lesser mysteries' and the 'greater mysteries'; if the 'third birth' is also represented as taking place in the cave, how will the symbolism of the cave be adapted to it? The "second birth," which is properly what can be called "psychic regeneration," operates in the realm of the subtle possibilities of human individuality; the "third birth," on the contrary, taking place directly in the spiritual order, and no longer in the psychic order, is the access to the realm of supra-individual possibilities. The former is, therefore, properly a "birth in the cosmos" (a process which, as we have said, corresponds in the "macrocosmic" order to the birth of *the Avatâra*) and it is therefore logical to imagine it as occurring entirely within the cave; but the other is a "birth outside the cosmos" and this "exit from the cosmos", according to the expression of Hermes³⁷⁶, must correspond, in order for the

³⁷⁵ [Published in *É. T.*, March 1938].

³⁷⁶Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "La Vierge allaitant saint Bernard," in *É. T.*, December 1937, p. 418.

symbolism to be complete, a final exit from the cave, which contains only the possibilities included in the "cosmos", which the initiate must precisely overcome in this new phase of the development of his being, of which the "second birth" was in reality only the starting point.

Here, naturally, certain relationships will be modified: the cave becomes a "tomb" once again, not this time exclusively because of its "underground" location, but because the entire "cosmos" is in a certain sense the "tomb" from which the being must now emerge; the "third birth" is necessarily preceded by the "second death"; which is no longer death to the profane world, but truly "death to the cosmos" (and also "in the cosmos"), and that is why "extra-cosmic" birth is always assimilated to a "resurrection"³⁷⁷. In order for such a "resurrection" to occur, which is at the same time the exit from the cave, it is necessary for the stone that closes the opening of the "tomb" (that is, of the cave itself) to be removed; we will see shortly how this can be translated in certain cases into ritual symbolism.

On the other hand, when what lay outside the cave represented only the profane world or the "outer darkness," the cave appeared as the only illuminated place, and, moreover, necessarily illuminated from within; no light, in fact, could then come to it from outside. Now, since we must take into account "extra-cosmic" possibilities, the cave, despite such illumination, becomes relatively dark, not in relation to what is simply outside it, but more precisely to what is above it, beyond its vault, for this is what represents the "extra-cosmic" domain. According to this new point of view, the interior illumination could then be considered as the mere reflection of a light that penetrates through the 'roof of the world', through the 'solar door', which is the 'eye' of the cosmic vault or the upper opening of the cave. In the microcosmic order, this opening corresponds to *the Brahma-randhra* [the seventh *chakra*], that is, the point of contact of the individual with the "seventh ray" of the spiritual sun³⁷⁸, a point whose "location" according to organic correspondences is at the crown of the head³⁷⁹, and which is also represented by the upper opening of *the hermetic athanor*³⁸⁰. Let us add in this regard that the "philosophical egg", which manifestly plays the role of the "Egg of the World", is enclosed within the *athanor*, but that the latter can be assimilated to the "cosmos", and this in the double application, "macrocosmic" and "microcosmic"; the cavern,

³⁷⁷ The analogue of all this is also found in the symbolism of the chrysalis and its transformation into a butterfly.

³⁷⁸ Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *loc. cit.*

³⁷⁹ See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. XXI.

³⁸⁰ The "third birth" could be considered, using alchemical terminology, as a "sublimation".

It can also be symbolically identified with both the "philosopher's stone" and the *athanor*, depending on whether the reference is, so to speak, to different degrees of development in the initiatory process, but in any case without altering its fundamental meaning in any way.

It should also be noted that, with this reflected illumination, we have the image of Plato's cave, in which only shadows are seen, thanks to a light that comes from outside, and this light is certainly "extra-cosmic", since its source is the "intelligible Sun". The liberation of the prisoners and their exit from the cave is a 'coming out into the light', whereby they can directly contemplate the reality that until then they had perceived only as a mere reflection; that reality is the eternal 'archetypes', the possibilities contained in the 'permanent actuality' of the immutable essence.

Finally, it is important to note that the two "births" we have discussed, being two successive phases of complete initiation, are also, therefore, two stages along the same path, and that this path is essentially "axial", as is, in its symbolism, the "sunbeam" to which we referred earlier, which indicates the spiritual "direction" that the being must follow, rising constantly, to finally reach its true centre³⁸². Within the limits of the microcosm, this 'axial' direction is that of the *sushumnâ* [a subtle 'artery'], which extends to the crown of the head, from which it extends 'extra-individually', so to speak, into the 'solar ray' itself, travelling back towards its source; along the *sushumnâ* are the *chakras*, subtle centres of individuality, some of which correspond to the different positions of the *lûz* or "core of immortality" to which we have referred above, so that these positions themselves, or the successive "awakening" of the corresponding *chakras*, are always equally assimilable to stages located on the same "axial" path. On the other hand, as the "Axis of the World" is naturally identified with the vertical direction, which corresponds very well to the idea of an ascending path, the upper opening, which corresponds "microcosmically", as we have said, to the crown of the head, should normally be located, in this respect, at the zenith of the cave, that is, at the top of the vault. However, the question does in fact present some complications, because two different types of symbolism may be involved, one 'polar' and the other 'solar'; therefore, as far as the exit from the cave is concerned, further details need to be provided, which will also give an example of the relationships that may exist between them.

³⁸¹This obscure vision is the *quasi per speculum in aenigmate* vision referred to by Saint Paul (I *Corinthians*, XIII. 12); what appears to be manifested in the "cosmos" is not, strictly speaking, but a shadow or a "vestige" of transcendent reality, but, moreover, that is what constitutes its value as a symbol of that reality.

³⁸² Cf. "*es-sirâtu-l-mustaqîm*" ["the straight path"] in Islamic tradition.

between these two modalities, whose respective predominance originally refers to different cyclical periods, but which have subsequently been associated and combined in many ways.

XXXIV

*THE EXIT FROM THE CAVE*³⁸³

The final exit from the initiatory cave, considered to represent the "exit from the cosmos", seems to normally take place, according to what we have said before, through an opening located in the vault, at its zenith; we recall that this upper door, sometimes traditionally referred to as the "hub of the solar wheel" and also as "the cosmic eye", corresponds in human beings to *the Brahma-randhra* and the crown of the head. However, despite the references to solar symbolism found in such cases, it could be said that this 'axial' and 'zenithal' position refers more directly, and undoubtedly more primitively, to polar symbolism: this point is where, according to certain 'operative' rituals, the 'plumb line of the Great Architect' is suspended, indicating the direction of the 'Axis of the World' and thus identified with the North Star itself³⁸⁴. It should also be noted that, in order for the exit to take place in this way, it is necessary to remove a stone from the vault at that very spot; and this stone, by virtue of occupying the summit, has a special and even unique character in the architectural structure, as it is naturally the "keystone"; this observation is not without importance, although this is not the place to dwell on it³⁸⁵.

In fact, it seems quite rare that what we have just said is literally observed in initiation rituals, although some examples can be found³⁸⁶; this rarity, moreover, can be explained, at least in part, by certain

³⁸³ [Published in *É.T.*, April 1938].

³⁸⁴ We recall in this regard that, according to Far Eastern tradition, the North Star represents the seat of the "Great Unity" (*T'ai-yi*); at the same time, although the axis should normally be considered vertical, as we have just said, it also corresponds to the 'Great Summit' (*T'ai-ki*), that is, the summit of the celestial peak or the 'roof of the world'. [On the representation of the 'Axis of the World' by the 'plumb line of the Great Architect of the Universe', see *La Grande Triade*, chap. XXV].

³⁸⁵ This refers more specifically to the symbolism of *Royal Arch* Masonry; for further information on this subject, please refer to the note at the end of our article on "Le Tombeau d'Hermès" in *É. T.*, December 1936, p. 473. [Text to be included in the posthumous compilation *Tradition primordiale et formes particulières*].

³⁸⁶ In the higher degrees of Scottish Freemasonry, this is the case with the 13th degree, called the "Royal Arch," but which should not be confused, despite certain partial similarities, with what in English Freemasonry constitutes *Arch Masonry* as distinct from *Square Masonry*. the "operative" origins of this Scottish degree are, moreover, much less clear; the 14th degree, or "Grand Scottish of the Sacred Vault", is also conferred "in an underground, vaulted place". It should be noted in this regard that there are many elements of diverse origin in all these high degrees, which are not always preserved in their entirety or without confusion, so that in their current state their true nature is often difficult to determine exactly.

practical difficulties and also because of the need to avoid confusion that could arise in such a case³⁸⁷. Indeed, if the cave has no other exit than the one at the top, this will have to serve as both an entrance and an exit, which is not in keeping with its symbolism; logically, the entrance should rather be located at a point opposite to it along the axis, that is, on the ground, in the very centre of the cave, which would be reached by an underground passage. However, on the other hand, such an entrance would not be suitable for the "great mysteries", as it corresponds only to the initial stage, which by then has long since been passed; it would therefore be necessary to assume that the recipient, having entered by this underground passage to receive initiation into the 'lesser mysteries', then remains in the cave until the moment of his 'third birth', when he finally leaves it through the upper opening; this is theoretically admissible, but it is clearly not possible to put it into practice effectively³⁸⁸.

There is, in fact, another solution, which involves considerations in which solar symbolism takes precedence this time, although traces of polar symbolism remain clearly visible. In short, it is a kind of combination and almost a fusion of both modalities, as we indicated at the end of the previous study. What is essential to note in this regard is the following: the vertical axis, insofar as it unites both poles, is clearly a north-south axis; in the transition from polar to solar symbolism, this axis must be projected in a certain way onto the zodiacal plane, but in such a way as to preserve a certain correspondence, and even, one might say, the most exact equivalence possible, with the primitive polar axis³⁸⁹. Now, in the annual cycle, the winter and summer solstices are the two points that correspond respectively to north and south in the spatial order, just as the spring and autumn equinoxes correspond to east and west; the axis that fulfils the required condition will therefore be the one that joins the two solstice points; and it can be said

³⁸⁷ This confusion does indeed exist in the Scottish degrees we have just mentioned: as the "underground vault" has "no doors or windows", it is impossible to enter or leave except through the single opening at the top of the vault.

³⁸⁸ In a certain sense, it can be said that the "lesser mysteries" correspond to the earth (the human state), and the "greater mysteries" to heaven (supra-individual states); hence also, in certain cases, a symbolic correspondence established with the geometric forms of the square and the circle (or derivatives thereof), which in particular the Far Eastern tradition refers to the earth and the sky, respectively; this distinction is found in the West in that of *Square Masonry* and *Arch Masonry*, which we have just mentioned. [On the issues referred to in this note, see *La Grande Triade*, chap. XV].

³⁸⁹ This same transition from one symbolism to another refers to the "transfer" of certain constellations from the polar region to the zodiacal region, to which we have alluded elsewhere (see *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. X).

This solstice axis will then play the role of a relatively vertical axis, as it indeed is in relation to the equinoctial axis ³⁹⁰. The solstices are truly what can be called the poles of the year; and these poles of the temporal world, if one may so express it, then replace, by virtue of a real and by no means arbitrary correspondence, the poles of the spatial world; moreover, they are naturally in direct relation to the course of the sun, from which the poles, in the proper and ordinary sense of the term, are, on the contrary, completely independent; and thus the two symbolic modalities to which we have referred are linked in the clearest possible way.

This being the case, the 'cosmic' cave may have two 'zodiacal' doors, opposite each other along the axis we have just considered, and therefore corresponding, respectively, to the two solstice points, one of which will serve as an entrance and the other as an exit; indeed, the notion of these two "solstice doors" is explicit in most traditions, and is even generally attributed considerable symbolic importance. The entrance door is sometimes referred to as the "door of men", who can then be initiated into the "lesser mysteries" as mere profane beings, since they have not yet transcended the human state; and the exit gate is then designated, by contrast, as the "gate of the gods", that is, the one through which only beings who have access to supra-individual states pass. All that remains is to determine which of the two solstices corresponds to each of the two gates; but this question, in order to receive the development it requires, also deserves separate treatment.

³⁹⁰We shall not concern ourselves here with the fact that among the different traditional forms there are some that give the year a solstice starting point and others an equinoctial one; we shall only say that the predominance thus attributed to the solstices and equinoxes also finds its *raison d'être* in the consideration of the different cyclical periods to which these traditional forms must be more particularly linked.

XXXV

*THE SOLSTICIAL GATES*³⁹¹

We have said that the two zodiacal gates, which are respectively the entrance and exit of the "cosmic cave" and which certain traditions designate as "the gate of men" and "the gate of the gods", must correspond to the two solstices. We must now specify that the first corresponds to the summer solstice, that is, to the sign of Cancer, and the second to the winter solstice, that is, to the sign of Capricorn. To understand the reason for this, it is necessary to refer to the division of the annual cycle into two halves, one "ascending" and the other "descending": the first is the period of the sun's course towards the north (*uttarâyana*), which runs from the winter solstice to the summer solstice; the second is the course of the sun towards the south (*dakshinâyana*), which runs from the summer solstice to the winter solstice³⁹². In Hindu tradition, the "ascending" phase is related to the *deva-yâna* ["way of the gods"], and the descending phase to the *pitr-yâna* ["way of the fathers (or ancestors)"]³⁹³, which coincides exactly with the designations of the two gates we have just mentioned: the 'gate of men' is the one that gives access to *the pitr-yâna*, and the 'gate of the gods' is the one that gives access to *the deva-yâna*; they must therefore be located respectively at the beginning of the two corresponding phases, that is, the first at the summer solstice and the second at the winter solstice. However, in this case, it is not strictly speaking an entrance and an exit, but two different exits: this is because the point of view is different from that which refers specifically to the initiatory role of the cave, although it is in perfect harmony with it. In fact, the 'cosmic cave' is considered here as the place of manifestation of being: after having manifested itself in it in a certain state, for example in the human state, that being, according to the spiritual degree it has reached, will exit through one or other of the two doors; in one case, that of *the pitr-yâna*, it must return to another state of manifestation, which will naturally be represented by a new entry into the "cosmic cave" thus considered; on the contrary, in the other case, that of *the deva-yâna*, there is no return to the manifested world. Thus, one of the two doors is both an entrance

³⁹¹ [Published in *Ê. T.*, May 1938].

³⁹² It should be noted that the zodiac, which frequently appears on the portals of medieval churches, is arranged in such a way as to clearly indicate this division of the annual cycle.

³⁹³ See especially *Bhagavad-Gîta*, VIII, 23-26; cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Vêdânta*, chap. XXI. A similar correspondence is found in the monthly cycle, for the period of the waxing moon is also related to the *deva-yâna*, and that of the waning moon to the *pitr-yâna*; it can be said that the four lunar phases correspond, in a more restricted cycle, to the four solar phases, which are the four seasons of the year.

and a departure, while the other is a definitive departure; but, as far as initiation is concerned, this definitive departure is precisely the final goal, so that the being who has entered through the "gate of men" must, if he has effectively reached that goal, depart through the "gate of the gods"³⁹⁴.

We have previously explained that the solstice axis of the Zodiac, which is relatively vertical with respect to the axis of the equinoxes, should be considered as the projection, in the annual solar cycle, of the north-south polar axis; according to the correspondence between temporal symbolism and the spatial symbolism of the cardinal points, the winter solstice is in a sense the north pole of the year and the summer solstice its south pole, while the two equinoxes, spring and autumn, correspond respectively, and analogously, to east and west³⁹⁵. However, in Vedic symbolism, the gate of *the deva-loka* ['world of the gods'] is located in the northeast, and that of *the pitr-loka* in the southwest; but this should be considered only as a more explicit indication of the direction in which the annual cycle proceeds. In fact, according to the correspondence just mentioned, the 'ascending' period develops from north to east and then from east to south; similarly, the 'descending' period develops from south to west and then from west to north³⁹⁶; it could therefore be said, even more precisely, that the 'gate of the gods'

³⁹⁴The "gate of the gods" can only be an entrance in the case of voluntary descent into the manifested world, either by a being who is already "liberated" or by a being who represents the direct expression of a "supracosmic" principle. [On this point, see *Initiation et réalisation spirituelle*, chap. XXXII: "Réalisation ascendante et descendante"]. But it is clear that these exceptional cases do not fall within the "normal" processes we are considering here. We will only note that it is thus easy to understand why the birth of *the Avatāra* is considered to have occurred at the time of the winter solstice, which is the time of the Christmas festival in the Christian tradition.

³⁹⁵During the day, the ascending half is from midnight to midday, and the descending half is from midday to midnight: midnight corresponds to winter and the north, midday to summer and the south; morning corresponds to spring and the east (the side where the sun rises), and afternoon to autumn and the west (the side where the sun sets). Thus, the phases of the day, like those of the month, but on an even smaller scale, analogously represent those of the year; the same is true, more generally, for any sky, which, whatever its extent, is always naturally divided according to the same quaternary law. According to Christian symbolism, the birth of *the Avatāra* occurs not only at the winter solstice, but also at midnight; it is thus in double correspondence with the "gate of the gods". On the other hand, according to Masonic symbolism, the initiatory work is accomplished "from noon to midnight", which is no less accurate if one considers the work as a march from the "gate of men" to the "gate of the gods"; the objection that one might be tempted to make, given the "descending" nature of this period, is resolved by applying the "reverse meaning" of the analogy, as will be seen below.

³⁹⁶ This is directly related to the question of the meaning of ritual "circumambulations" in different traditional forms: according to the "solar" mode of symbolism, that meaning is the one we indicate here, and the "circumambulation" is performed by constantly keeping the centre around which one turns on the right; according to the "polar" modality, it is performed in the opposite direction to the previous one, that is

it is located in the north and faces east, which is always considered the side of light and life, and the "gate of men" is located in the south and faces west, which, similarly, is considered the side of shadow and death; and thus the two permanent paths of the manifested world are precisely determined, one clear, the other dark; on one, there is no return (from the unmanifest to the manifested); on the other, one returns (to manifestation)³⁹⁷.

However, there is still an apparent contradiction to be resolved, namely: the north is designated as the highest point (*uttara*), and, moreover, the sun's ascending course is directed towards this point, while its descending course is directed towards the south, which thus appears as the lowest point; but, on the other hand, the winter solstice, which corresponds to the north in the year and marks the beginning of the ascending movement, is in a sense the lowest point, and the summer solstice, which corresponds to the south, where that ascending movement ends, is, in the same respect, the highest point, from which the descending movement will immediately begin, ending at the winter solstice. The solution to this difficulty lies in the distinction that can be made between the 'celestial' order, to which the course of the sun belongs, and the 'terrestrial' order, to which, on the contrary, the succession of seasons belongs; according to the general law of analogy, both orders must, in their very correlation, be mutually inverse, so that the highest for one order is the lowest for the other, and vice versa; thus, according to the hermetic expression of the *Emerald Tablet*, 'that which is above (in the celestial order) is like that which is below (in the terrestrial order)', or also, according to the words of the Gospel, 'the first (in the principal order) shall be last (in the manifested order)³⁹⁸. This does not make it any less true, however, that as far as

with the centre always on the left. The first case is that of *pradākshinā*, as used in the Hindu and Tibetan traditions; the second is found particularly in the Islamic tradition. It may be interesting to note that the direction of these "circumambulations", from left to right and from right to left respectively, also corresponds to the direction of writing in the sacred languages of these traditional forms. In Freemasonry, in its current form, the direction of the "circumambulations" is solar; but it seems, on the contrary, to have been "polar" in the ancient "operative" ritual, according to which the "throne of Solomon" was also located in the west and not in the east.

⁽³⁹⁷⁾*Bhagavad-Gita*, VIII, 26. It can be observed that the "clarity" and "darkness" that characterise these two paths correspond exactly to the two complementary principles, *yang* and *yin*, of Far Eastern tradition.

³⁹⁸ This dual perspective corresponds, among other applications, to the fact that in geographical or other representations, the point at the top may be north or south; in China it is south, and in the Western world the same was true among the Romans and during part of the Middle Ages; this usage, in fact, according to what we have just said, is the most correct one as far as the representation of terrestrial things is concerned, whereas, on the contrary, when it comes to celestial things, north should normally be located at the top; but it goes without saying that the predominance of one or other of these two points of view,

The "influences" linked to these points always remain "beneficial" in the north, whether it is considered as the point towards which the sun's ascending course in the sky is directed or, in relation to the terrestrial world, as the entrance to *the deva-loka*. and similarly, the south always remains "malefic," whether it is considered as the point toward which the descending course of the sun in the sky is directed, or, in relation to the terrestrial world, as the entrance to *pitri-loka*³⁹⁹. It should be added that the terrestrial world can be considered here, by transposition, as a representation of the "cosmos" as a whole, and that then the sky, according to the same transposition, will represent the "extra-cosmic" domain; from this point of view, the consideration of the "reverse direction" should be applied to the "spiritual" order, understood in its highest sense, with respect not only to the sensible order but to the totality of the cosmic order.

depending on traditional forms or periods, it may determine the adoption of a single provision for all cases without distinction; and, in this regard, the fact of placing north or south at the top is generally linked above all to the distinction between the two modalities, 'polar' and 'solar', with the point at the top being the one that is oriented according to one or the other, as we will explain in the following note.

³⁹⁹ Incidentally, let us point out another case in which the same point also retains a constant meaning through certain changes that constitute apparent inversions: orientation can be taken according to one or other of the two modalities of symbolism, 'polar' and 'solar'; in the first, looking towards the North Star, that is, turning towards the north, one has the east on the right; in the second, looking at the sun on the meridian, that is, turning south, one has the east on the left; the two modalities have been in use, particularly in China at different times; thus, the side to which pre-eminence was given was sometimes the right and sometimes the left, but in fact it was always the east, that is, the "side of light". We should add that there are also other modes of orientation, for example, turning towards the rising sun; this is referred to in the Sanskrit designation of the south as *dākshina* or 'right side'; and it is also the one that was used in the West by medieval builders for the orientation of churches. [For all questions of orientation discussed in this chapter, refer to *The Great Triad*, chapter VII].

⁽⁴⁰⁰⁾ To give an example of this application, which is closely related to what we are discussing here, if the 'culmination' of the visible sun occurs at midday, that of the 'spiritual sun' can be symbolically considered to occur at midnight; which is why it is said of those initiated into the "great mysteries" of Antiquity that they "contemplated the sun at midnight"; from this point of view, night no longer represents the absence or deprivation of light, but its primary state of non-manifestation, which strictly corresponds to the higher significance of darkness or the colour black as a symbol of the unmanifested; and it is also in this sense that certain teachings of Islamic esotericism should be understood, according to which "night is better than day". It can also be noted that, if "solar" symbolism has an obvious connection with the day, "polar" symbolism, on the other hand, has a certain connection with the night; and it is also very significant in this regard that the "midnight sun" has, literally, in the order of sensible phenomena, its representation in the Hyperborean regions, that is, precisely where the origin of the primordial tradition is located.

XXXVI

*THE SYMBOLISM OF THE ZODIAC AMONG THE PYTHAGOREANS*⁴⁰¹

In discussing the question of the solstice gates, we have referred directly above all to the Hindu tradition, because it is in this tradition that the data on this question are presented most clearly; but this is something that is, in reality, common to all traditions, and can also be established in Western antiquity. In Pythagoreanism in particular, this zodiacal symbolism seems to have been of no less considerable importance; the expressions "gate of men" and "gate of the gods," which we have used, belong, moreover, to the Greek tradition; only that the information that has come down to us is so fragmentary and incomplete that its interpretation can give rise to a multitude of confusions, which, as we shall see, have been committed by those who have considered it in isolation and without clarifying it by comparison with other traditions.

First of all, to avoid certain misunderstandings about the respective positions of these two gates, we must remember what we have said about the application of the "reverse direction" depending on whether they are approached in relation to the terrestrial order or the celestial order: the winter solstice gate, or the sign of Capricorn, corresponds to the north in the year, but to the south in terms of the course of the sun in the sky; Similarly, the summer solstice gate, or the sign of Cancer, corresponds to the south in the year, and to the north in terms of the sun's course. Therefore, while the "ascending" movement of the sun goes from south to north and its "descending" movement from north to south, the "ascending" period of the year must be considered, on the contrary, as going from north to south, and its "descending" period as going from south to north, as we have already said above. Precisely in relation to this last point of view, in Vedic symbolism the gate of *the deva-loka* is located to the north and that of *the pitr-loka* to the south, without there being, despite appearances, any contradiction with what we will find in the following regarding other places.

We will quote, accompanied by the necessary explanations and corrections, Jérôme Carcopino's summary of Pythagorean conceptions⁴⁰²: "The Pythagoreans —he says— had constructed a whole theory about the relationship between the zodiac and the migration of souls. When did this originate? It is impossible to know. In any case,

⁴⁰¹ [Published in *É. T.*, June 1938].

⁴⁰² *La Basilique pythagoricienne de la Porte Majeure*. As we do not have the volume, we quote from the article previously published under the same title in the *Revue des Deux Mondes* issue of 15 November 1926.

During the second century AD, this theory was developed in the writings of the Pythagorean Numenius, which are accessible to us through a dry and belated summary by Proclus in his commentary on Plato's *Republic* and through a broader and older analysis by Porphyry in chapters XXI and XXII of *De Antro Nyinpharum*. Let us point out that this is an excellent example of 'historicism': the truth is that it is by no means a theory 'constructed' more or less artificially on such and such a date, by the Pythagoreans or by others, in the manner of a simple philosophical or individual conception; it is traditional knowledge referring to a reality of an initiatory order, which, because of its very traditional nature, has no chronologically assignable origin and could not have had one. Of course, these are considerations that may escape a scholar; but at least even a 'scholar' can understand this: if the theory in question had been 'constructed by the Pythagoreans', how can we explain that it is found everywhere, outside of any Greek influence, and especially in the Vedic texts, which undoubtedly predate Pythagoreanism? Even this, unfortunately, may be ignored by Mr Carcopino as a 'specialist' in Greco-Roman antiquity; but, according to what he himself later reports, this conception is already found in Homer; therefore, even among the Greeks, it was already known, not only before Numenius, which is too obvious, but even before Pythagoras; it is a traditional teaching that has been transmitted continuously through the centuries, and it matters little that certain authors, who invented nothing and had no pretensions to invention, may have formulated it in writing in a more or less precise manner at a perhaps "late" date.

That said, let us return to Proclus and Porphyry: "Both authors agree in attributing to Numenius the determination of the extreme points of the sky: the winter tropic, under the sign of Capricorn, and the summer tropic, under the sign of Cancer, and in defining, evidently following Numenius and according to the 'theologians' he cites and who have served as his guides, Cancer and Capricorn as the two gates of heaven. Whether descending to generation or ascending to God, souls must therefore necessarily pass through one of them." By 'extreme points of heaven', an expression somewhat too elliptical to be perfectly clear in itself, we must understand here, naturally, the extreme points reached by the sun in its annual course, at which it stops in a certain way, hence the name 'solstices'; and these solstice points correspond to the two "gates of heaven", which exactly represents the traditional doctrine we already knew. As we have indicated elsewhere⁴⁰³, these two points were sometimes symbolised, for example under the Delphic tripod and at the feet of

⁴⁰³ "Quelques aspects du symbolisme du poisson" [here, chap. XXII: "Some aspects of the symbolism of the fish"].

the horses of the sun chariot, by the octopus and the dolphin, which represent Cancer and Capricorn respectively. It goes without saying, moreover, that the authors in question could not attribute to Numenius the determination of the solstice points themselves, which were known at all times; they simply referred to him as one of those who had spoken before them on these points, just as Numenius himself had referred in turn to other 'theologians'.

It is then a matter of specifying the role of each of the two gates, and this is where the confusion arises: "According to Proclus, Numenius would have strictly specialised them: through the gate of Cancer, the fall of souls to earth; through that of Capricorn, the ascent of souls to the ether. Porphyry, on the contrary, only says that Cancer is in the north and is favourable for descent, and Capricorn is at midday and is favourable for ascent: so that, instead of being strictly subject to a 'one-way system', souls would have retained a certain freedom of movement both on the way there and on the way back." The end of this quotation expresses, in truth, only an interpretation for which Mr Carcopino should take full responsibility; we do not see at all how what Porphyry says would be 'contrary' to what Proclus says; it is perhaps formulated in a somewhat vaguer way, but it seems in fact to mean essentially the same thing: what is "favourable" to descent or ascent must undoubtedly be understood as what makes it possible, for it is not at all plausible that Porphyry would have wanted to leave some kind of indeterminacy, which, being incompatible with the rigorous nature of traditional science, would in any case constitute nothing more than proof of his pure and simple personal ignorance on this point. Be that as it may, it is clear that Numenius has done nothing more than repeat, on paper, the traditional teaching on the role of both gates; on the other hand, if, as Porphyry indicates, he places Cancer in the north and Capricorn at noon, this is because he is referring to the position of these points in the sky; moreover, this is clearly indicated by the fact that, in the previous context, he speaks of the "tropics", which can have no other meaning than that, and not of the "solstices", which, on the contrary, would refer more directly to the annual cycle; Therefore, the situation described here is the opposite of that given by Vedic symbolism, without establishing any real difference, since they are two equally legitimate points of view that are in perfect agreement once their mutual relationship has been understood.

We must now consider something even more extraordinary: Mr Carcopino continues, saying that 'it is difficult, in the absence of the original, to extract from these divergent allusions' — but we must add that they are not divergent except in the mind of this author — 'the true doctrine of Numenius', which, as we have seen, is not his own doctrine at all, but only the repeated teaching

by him, and this is, moreover, more important and worthy of interest; "but from Porphyry's context it follows that, even when presented in its most elastic form" —as if there could be "elasticity" in a matter pertaining to exact knowledge— "it would be in contradiction with those of some of his predecessors, and especially with the system that the older Pythagoreans had based on their interpretation of the verses of the *Odyssey* where Homer describes the cave of Ithaca," that is, that "cave of the Nymphs," which is nothing more than one of the figurations of the "cosmic cave" to which we have referred previously. "Homer," Porphyry points out, "has not limited himself to saying that this cave had two doors. He has specified that one faced north and the other, more divine, faced south, and that one descended through the north door. But he has not indicated whether one could descend through the south door. He only says: it is the entrance of the gods. Man never takes the path of the immortals." We assume that this must be Porphyry's own text, and we do not see in it the contradiction that has been pointed out; but here is Mr Carcopino's commentary: "In terms of this exegesis, in that compendium of the universe that is the cave of the Nymphs, we perceive the two doors that rise towards the heavens and through which souls pass, and, contrary to the language that Proclus attributes to Numenius, the northern gate, Capricorn, was originally reserved for the departure of souls, and the southern gate, Cancer, was therefore assigned to the return of souls to God."

Now that we have finished the quote, we can easily see that the alleged contradiction, in this case too, exists only in Mr Carcopino's mind; in fact, in the last sentence there is a clear error, and even a double error, which seems truly inexplicable. Firstly, the mention of Capricorn and Cancer is introduced on Mr Carcopino's own initiative; Homer, according to Porphyry, only designates the two gates by their respective locations to the north and south, without indicating the corresponding zodiac signs; but since he specifies that the 'divine' gate is the one at midday, it must be concluded that for him this corresponds to Capricorn, as it does for Numenius, that is to say, he also locates these gates according to their position in the sky, which seems to have been, then, the generally dominant point of view throughout the Greek tradition, even before Pythagoreanism. Furthermore, the "departure from the cosmos" and the "return to God" of souls are not really but one and the same thing, so that Mr Carcopino attributes, apparently without realising it, the same role to both gates; on the contrary, Homer says that the "descent", that is, the entrance into the "cosmic cave", or, in other words, into the world of generation or individual manifestation, takes place through the northern gate. As for the southern gate, it is the "exit from the cosmos," and therefore it is through it that the "ascent" of beings on the path to liberation takes place; Homer does not say

It is expressly stated that one may also descend through this gate, but this is not necessary, since, by designating it as the entrance of the gods, it sufficiently indicates which exceptional "descents" are made through it, in accordance with what we have explained in our previous study. Finally, whether we consider the position of the two gates in relation to the course of the sun in the sky, as in the Greek tradition, or in relation to the seasons in the annual cycle of the earth, as in the Hindu tradition, Cancer is always the "gate of men" and Capricorn the "gate of the gods"; there can be no variation on this point, and indeed there is none; it is only the misunderstanding of modern 'scholars' that believes it has discovered non-existent divergences and contradictions in the various interpreters of traditional doctrines.

XXXVII

*THE SOLSTICE SYMBOLISM OF JANUS*⁴⁰⁴

We have just seen that the symbolism of the two solstice gates in the West existed among the Greeks and more particularly among the Pythagoreans; it is also found among the Latins, where it is essentially linked to the symbolism of Janus. As we have already referred to this and its various aspects on many occasions, we will only consider here the points most directly related to what we have discussed in our recent studies, although, on the other hand, it is difficult to isolate them completely from the highly complex whole of which they form part.

Janus, in the aspect we are now discussing, is properly the *ianitor* ['doorkeeper'] who opens and closes the doors (*ianuae*) of the annual cycle, with keys that are one of his main attributes; and we will recall in this regard that the key is an 'axial' symbol. This refers, of course, to the 'temporal' aspect of Janus' symbolism: his two faces, according to the most common interpretation, are considered to represent the past and the future respectively; however, such a consideration of the past and the future is also evident in any cycle, for example the annual cycle, when viewed from either end. From this point of view, moreover, it is important to add, in order to complete the notion of "triple time", that between the past that is no longer and the future that is not yet, the true face of Janus, the one that looks at the present, is said to be neither of the two visible ones. This third face is invisible because the present, in its temporal manifestation, is nothing more than an elusive instant; but when the being rises above the conditions of this transitory and contingent manifestation, the present, on the contrary, contains all reality. The third face of Janus corresponds, in another symbolism, that of the Hindu tradition, to the frontal eye of *Shiva*, also invisible, since it is not represented by any bodily organ, an eye that represents the "sense of eternity"; a glance from this third eye reduces everything to ashes, that is, it destroys all manifestation; but when succession is transmuted into simultaneity, the temporal into the timeless, all things come together again and dwell in the "eternal present", so that apparent destruction is in truth nothing but "transformation".

Let us return to what concerns the annual cycle more specifically: its gates, which Janus is responsible for opening and closing, are none other than the solstice gates that we have already

⁴⁰⁴ [Published in *É. T.*, July 1938].

⁴⁰⁵ For this very reason, certain languages, such as Hebrew and Arabic, have no verbal form corresponding to the present tense.

We have referred to this. There is no doubt about it: Janus [*Ianus*] gave his name to the month of January (*ianuarius*), which is the first month, the one that opens the year when it normally begins, at the winter solstice. Furthermore, even more clearly, the festival of Janus in Rome was celebrated at the two solstices by the *Collegia Fabrorum*; we will have an immediate opportunity to emphasise this point. As the solstice gates give access, as we have said above, to the two halves, ascending and descending, of the zodiacal cycle, which have their respective starting points in them, Janus, whom we have already seen appear as the 'Lord of the triple time' (a designation that also applies to *Shiva* in the Hindu tradition), is also, for the reasons given above, the "Lord of the two paths", those two paths, right and left, which the Pythagoreans represented with the letter Y⁴⁰⁶, and which are, in essence, identical to the *deva-yāna* and the *pitr-yāna* respectively⁴⁰⁷. It is easy to understand, then, that Janus' keys are in fact the same ones that, according to Christian tradition, open and close the "Kingdom of Heaven" (corresponding in this sense to *the deva-yāna*, the path by which it is reached)⁴⁰⁸, and this is all the more so given that, in another respect, these two keys, one of gold and the other of silver, were also, respectively, those of the "great mysteries" and the "lesser mysteries".

Indeed, Janus was the god of initiation⁴⁰⁹, and this attribution is one of the most important, not only in itself but also from the point of view we are now taking, because there is a clear connection with what we were saying about the initiatory function of the cave and other equivalent "images of the world", a function that has led us precisely to consider the question of solstice doors. In this capacity, Janus presided over the *Collegia Fabrorum*, the custodians of initiations which, as in all traditional civilisations, were linked to the practice of crafts; and it is very noteworthy that this, far from disappearing with the ancient Roman civilisation, has continued uninterrupted in

⁴⁰⁶This is also depicted, in an exoteric and "moralised" form, in the myth of Hercules between Virtue and Vice, whose symbolism has been preserved in the sixth arcane of the Tarot. Ancient Pythagorean symbolism, moreover, has had other curious "survivals"; thus, it is found in the Renaissance period in the imprint of the printer Nicolas du Chemin, designed by Jean Cousin.

⁴⁰⁷ The Sanskrit word *yāna* has the same root as the Latin *ire*, and, according to Cicero, the name Janus [*Ianus*] itself derives from this root, whose form is, moreover, singularly close to that of *yāna*.

⁴⁰⁸ Regarding this symbolism of the two paths, it should be added that there is a third, the 'middle path', which leads directly to 'liberation'. This path corresponds to the upper, unmarked extension of the vertical part of the letter Y, and this must also be related to what has been said above about the third (invisible) face of Janus.

⁴⁰⁹ Let us note that the word *initiatio* comes from *in-ire*, and that therefore it also contains the verb *ire*, which is linked to the name of Janus.

Christianity itself, and that, strange as it may seem to those who are unaware of certain "transmissions", traces of this can still be found in our own day.

In Christianity, the solstice festivals of Janus have become those of the two Saint Johns, and these are always celebrated at the same times, that is, around the winter and summer solstices⁴¹⁰; and it is also very significant that the esoteric aspect of the Christian tradition has always been considered "Johannine", which gives this fact a meaning that clearly goes beyond, whatever the outward appearances may be, the merely religious and exoteric domain. The succession of the ancient *Collegia Fabrorum*, moreover, was regularly transmitted to the guilds which, throughout the Middle Ages, maintained the same initiatory character, especially that of the builders; the latter naturally had the two Saint Johns as its patrons, hence the well-known expression "Lodge of Saint John" which has been preserved in Freemasonry, as the latter is nothing more than the continuation, by direct affiliation, of the organisations to which we have just referred⁴¹¹. Even in its modern "speculative" form, Freemasonry has preserved

⁴¹⁰ The winter Saint John's Day is thus very close to Christmas, which, from another point of view, corresponds no less exactly to the winter solstice, as we have explained above. A 13th-century stained-glass window in the church of Saint-Rémi in Reims presents a particularly curious and undoubtedly exceptional representation in relation to the subject at hand: there has been much debate as to which of the two Saint Johns is depicted there. The truth is that, without the slightest confusion, both have been represented, synthesised in the figure of a single character, as shown by the two sunflowers placed in opposite directions above his head, which in this case correspond to the two solstices and the two faces of Janus. Let us also point out, in passing and as a matter of curiosity, that the popular French expression "*Jean qui pleure et Jean qui rit*" ["John who laughs and John who cries"] is in fact a reminiscence of the two opposing faces of Janus. [Cf. note 5 in the following chapter].

⁴¹¹We recall that the "Lodge of St. John", although not symbolically assimilated to the cave, is nonetheless, like the cave, a figure of the "cosmos"; the description of its "dimensions" is particularly clear in this regard: its length is "from east to west"; its width, "from south to north"; its height, "from earth to heaven"; and its depth, "from the surface to the centre of the earth". It is noteworthy, as a remarkable relationship concerning the height of the Lodge, that according to Islamic tradition, the site where a mosque is built is considered sacred not only on the surface of the earth, but from there to the "seventh heaven". On the other hand, it is said that "in the Lodge of St. John, temples are built to virtue and dungeons are dug for vice"; these two ideas of "raising" and "digging" refer to the two vertical "dimensions", height and depth, which are counted according to the halves of the same axis that goes "from the zenith to the nadir", taken in a mutually inverse sense; these two opposite directions correspond, respectively, to *sattva* and *tamas* (while the expansion of the two horizontal "dimensions" corresponds to *rajas*), that is, to the two tendencies of being, towards Heaven (the temple) and towards Hell (the dungeon), tendencies that are here rather "allegorised" than symbolised in the strict sense, by the notions of "virtue" and "vice", exactly as in the myth of Hercules that we recalled earlier. [The three Sanskrit terms mentioned are explained as follows in *L'Homme et son*

always also, as one of the most explicit testimonies of its origin, the solstice festivals, consecrated to the two Saint Johns after having been consecrated to the two faces of Janus⁴¹² ; and thus the traditional doctrine of the two solstice gates, with their initiatory connections, has remained alive even today, however much it is generally misunderstood, even in the modern Western world.

Becoming according to the Vedanta, Chapter IV: "The gunas... are... conditions of universal existence to which all manifested beings are subject... The three gunas are: *satva*, conformity to the pure essence of Being (Sat), which is identified with intelligible Light or Knowledge and is represented as an upward tendency; *rajas*, the expansive impulse, according to which the being develops in a certain state and, in a certain way, at a certain level of existence; *tamas*, darkness, assimilated to ignorance, and represented as a downward tendency." (Translator's note)

⁴¹²In Masonic symbolism, two tangents parallel to a circle are considered, among other diverse meanings, as representing the two Saint Johns; if the circle is seen as a figure of the annual cycle, the points of contact of the two tangents, diametrically opposed to each other, then correspond to the two solstice points.

XXXVIII

ABOUT THE TWO SAINTS JOHN⁴¹³

Although summer is generally considered a joyful season and winter a sad one, because the former represents in a way the triumph of light and the latter that of darkness, the two corresponding solstices are in reality exactly the opposite of what is indicated; This may seem like a rather strange paradox, but it is very easy to understand once one has some knowledge of the traditional data on the course of the annual cycle. Indeed, what has reached its peak can only decline, and what has reached its lowest point can only begin to rise again ⁴¹⁴; that is why the summer solstice marks the beginning of the descending half of the year, and the winter solstice, conversely, the beginning of the ascending half; and this also explains, from the point of view of its cosmic significance, these words of St John the Baptist, whose birth coincides with the summer solstice: "He (Christ, born at the winter solstice) must increase, but I must decrease"⁴¹⁵. It is well known that, in Hindu tradition, the ascending phase is related to the *deva-yāna*, and the descending phase to the *pitr-yāna*; therefore, in the Zodiac, the sign of Cancer, corresponding to the summer solstice, is the "gate of men", which gives access to *the pitr-yāna*, and the sign of Capricorn, corresponding to the winter solstice, is the "gate of the gods", which gives access to *the deva-yāna*. In reality, the "joyful" period, that is, the beneficial and favourable period, is the ascending half of the annual cycle, and its "sad" period, that is, the malefic or unfavourable period, is its descending half; and the same character naturally belongs to the solstice gate that opens each of the two periods into which the year is divided by the very meaning of the solar course.

It is well known, moreover, that in Christianity the feasts of the two Saint Johns are directly related to the two solstices⁴¹⁶, and, remarkably, although we have never seen it indicated anywhere, what we have just recalled is expressed

⁴¹³ [Published in *É. T.*, June 1949].

⁴¹⁴ This idea is expressed several times and in various forms in the *Tao-te King*; in Far Eastern tradition, it refers more specifically to the vicissitudes of *yin* and *yang*.

⁴¹⁵ *St John*, III, 30.

⁴¹⁶ These festivals actually take place shortly after the exact date of the solstices, which makes their character even clearer, since the descent and ascent have a l r e a d y begun; in Vedic symbolism, this corresponds to the fact that the gates of *Pitr-loka* and *Deva-loka* are considered to be located not exactly to the south and north, but to the southwest and northeast.

in a certain way by the double meaning of the name "John" itself⁴¹⁷. Indeed, the Hebrew word *hanán* has both the meaning of 'benevolence' and 'mercy' and that of 'praise' (it is at least curious to note that, in our own language, words such as "grace(s)" have exactly this double meaning); therefore, the name *Yahanán* [or, rather, *Yehohanán*] can mean 'mercy of God' and also 'praise to God'. It is easy to see that the first of these two meanings seems to apply particularly well to Saint John the Baptist, and the second to Saint John the Evangelist; moreover, it can be said that mercy is clearly 'descending' and praise 'ascending', which brings us back to their respective relationship with the two halves of the annual cycle⁴¹⁸.

In relation to the two Saint Johns and their solstice symbolism, it is also interesting to consider a symbol⁴¹⁹ that seems peculiar to Anglo-Saxon Freemasonry, or at least one that has been preserved only in it: it is a circle with a point in the centre, enclosed between two parallel tangents; and these tangents are said to represent the two Saint Johns. In effect, the circle here is the figure of the annual cycle, and its solar significance is made even more evident by the presence of the dot in the centre, since the figure itself is also the astrological sign of the sun; and the two parallel lines are the tangents to that circle at the two solstice points, thus indicating their character as "limit points", since these points are, in effect, like the limits that the sun can never exceed in the course of its journey; and because these lines thus correspond to the two solstices, it can also be said that they represent the two Saint Johns for that very reason. There is, however, at least an apparent anomaly in this figuration: the solstice diameter of the annual cycle must be considered, as we have explained on other occasions, as relatively vertical with respect to the equinoctial diameter, and only in this way, moreover, can the two halves of the cycle, which go from one solstice to the other, appear real and respectively as ascending and descending, since the solstice points then constitute the highest point and the

⁴¹⁷ We would like to refer here to the etymological meaning of that name in Hebrew; as for the link between *John* and *Janus*, although it should be understood that this is a phonetic assimilation with no relation, obviously, to etymology, it is no less important from a symbolic point of view, since, in effect, the feasts of the two Saint Johns have actually replaced those of Janus, at the respective summer and winter solstices.

⁴¹⁸ We will also recall, linking it more specifically to the ideas of 'sadness' and 'joy' that we mentioned in the text, the well-known but undoubtedly not very well understood French 'folkloric' figure of 'John who weeps and John who laughs', which is essentially a representation equivalent to that of the two faces of Janus. "John who weeps" is the one who implores God's mercy, that is, Saint John the Baptist; and "John who laughs" is the one who praises him, that is, Saint John the Evangelist.

⁴¹⁹ [Already noted in the last note of the previous chapter.]

lowest point of the circle; under such conditions, the tangents to the ends of the solstice diameter, being perpendicular to it, will necessarily be horizontal. However, in the symbol we are now considering, the two tangents are, on the contrary, depicted as vertical; there is, therefore, in this special case, a certain modification to the general symbolism of the annual cycle, which can be explained quite simply, since it is evident that it could only have come about through an assimilation established between these two parallels and the two [Masonic] columns; the latter, which naturally cannot be anything but vertical, have, moreover, by virtue of their respective locations in the north and south, and at least from a certain point of view, an effective relationship with solstice symbolism.

This aspect of the two columns is clearly seen above all in the case of the symbol of the "Pillars of Hercules"⁴²⁰; the "solar hero" character of Hercules and the zodiacal correspondence of his twelve labours are too well known to need further explanation; and it is clear that it is precisely this solar character that justifies the solstice significance of the two columns with which his name is associated. That being the case, the motto "*non plus ultra*", referring to these columns, appears to have a double meaning: not only does it express, according to the usual interpretation, typical of the terrestrial point of view and, moreover, valid in its own right, that they mark the limits of the "known" world, that is to say, in reality, that they are the limits which, for reasons that might be interesting to investigate, travellers were not allowed to cross; but at the same time—and this should undoubtedly be said first and foremost—it indicates that, from a celestial point of view, they are the limits that the sun cannot cross and between which, as between the two tangents we discussed a few lines earlier, its annual course is completed internally⁴²¹. These latter considerations may seem quite far removed from our starting point, but in truth this is not the case, for they contribute to the explanation of a symbol expressly referring to the two Saint Johns; and, on the other hand,

⁴²⁰In the geographical representation that places these columns on either side of the present-day Strait of Gibraltar, it is clear that the one located in Europe is the northern column and the one located in Africa is the southern column.

⁴²¹ Ancient Spanish coins feature a depiction of the Pillars of Hercules joined by a sort of banner inscribed with the motto '*non plus ultra*'; now then—something that seems to be relatively unknown and that we will point out here as a curiosity—the usual symbol for the US dollar derives from this image; but all the importance was given to the banner, which was originally nothing more than an accessory and was changed to the letter S, which it roughly resembled, while the two columns, which were the essential element, were reduced to two parallel lines, vertical like the two tangents of the circle in the Masonic symbolism we have just explained; and the thing is not without a certain irony, since it was precisely the 'discovery' of America that effectively nullified the ancient geographical application of *non plus ultra*.

It can be said that, in the Christian tradition, everything related to solstice symbolism is also, for that very reason, related to both saints.

CONSTRUCTIVE SYMBOLISM

XXXIX

*THE SYMBOLISM OF THE DOME*⁴²²

In an article in *The Indian Historical Quarterly* (March 1938), Ananda K. Coomaraswamy examined the question of the symbolism of the dome, which is too important and too closely linked to some of the considerations we have developed above for us not to examine its main aspects in particular. The first essential point to be noted in this regard, in connection with the symbolic and initiatory value of the architectural arch, is that every building constructed according to strictly traditional criteria has, in the structure and arrangement of its different parts, a 'cosmic' significance, which, moreover, is susceptible to double application, in accordance with the analogical relationship between "macrocosm" and "microcosm", that is, it refers both to the world and to man. This is valid, of course, and in the first place, for temples or other buildings with a "sacred" purpose in the most limited sense of the term; but, in addition, the same is true of simple human dwellings, for it should not be forgotten that, in reality, there is nothing "profane" in entirely traditional civilisations, so that it is only as a result of profound degradation that houses have been built with no other purpose than to meet the purely material needs of their inhabitants, who, for their part, have been content with dwellings designed according to such narrow and base utilitarian concerns.

It goes without saying that the "cosmic" significance we have just discussed can be realised in many different ways, corresponding to many different points of view, which will thus give rise to different architectural "types", some of which will be particularly linked to this or that traditional form; but for the moment we need only consider one of these "types", which, moreover, appears to be one of the most fundamental and, for that very reason, one of the most widespread. It is a structure consisting essentially of a square base (it matters little here whether this lower part is cubic or more or less elongated), crowned by a dome or a cupola of more or less strictly hemispherical shape. Among the most characteristic examples, we can cite, with Coomaraswamy, the Buddhist *stupa*, and also, we would add, the Islamic *qubbah*, whose

⁴²² [Published in *É. T.*, October 1938].

The shape is exactly the same ⁴²³; other cases in which this structure is not so clearly distinguishable at first glance include Christian churches in which a dome is built over the central part ⁴²⁴. It should also be noted that an arch, with its two straight pillars and the lintel resting on them, is in fact nothing more than the vertical section of this structure; and, in this arch, the "keystone" at the top clearly corresponds to the highest point of the dome, the significance of which we will return to later ⁴²⁵.

It is easy to see, first of all, that the two parts of the structure just described represent the earth and the sky, which correspond respectively to the square and circular (or spherical, in a three-dimensional construction) shapes; and although this correspondence is more strongly indicated in Far Eastern tradition, it is far from being unique to it ⁴²⁶. Since we have just referred to Far Eastern tradition, it is interesting to note in this regard that in China the clothing of the ancient emperors had to be round at the top and square at the bottom; that garment, in fact, had a symbolic meaning (as did all the actions of their lives, always regulated according to rites), and that meaning was precisely the same as that of

⁴²³ The purpose of these two buildings is, moreover, equally similar, since the *stupa*, at least originally, was made to contain relics and the *qubbah* rises above the tomb of a *wali* [roughly, 'saint'].

⁴²⁴ If the church as a whole has the shape of a Latin cross, as is most commonly the case, it should be noted that this cross can be obtained by developing a cube whose faces are rebated on the plane of the base (this point is expressly indicated in the Masonic symbolism of *the Royal Arch*); the face of the base, which naturally remains in its original position, then corresponds to the central part above which the dome rises.

⁽⁴²⁵⁾ In certain figurations belonging to *Royal Arch* Masonry, the "celestial" significance of the vaulted arch is formally indicated by the representation of part of the zodiac on it, with one of the solstice gates being located at the "keystone"; this "door" should normally be different depending on whether the point in question is considered an "entrance" or an "exit", as explained above.

⁴²⁶ In Masonic initiation, the passage *from square to arch* represents a passage "from Earth to Heaven" (hence the term *exaltation* to designate admission to the degree of *Royal Arch*), that is, from the realm of the "lesser mysteries" to that of the "greater mysteries," with the latter having a dual priestly and royal aspect, as the full title is *Holy (and) Royal Arch*, although, for historical reasons that we will not examine here, the 'priestly art' has been eclipsed by the 'royal art'. The circular and square forms are also alluded to by the compass and square, which are used to draw them respectively and are associated as symbols of two complementary principles, as indeed are Heaven and Earth [cf. *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XX, and *La Grande Triade*, chap. III].

architectural realisation we are dealing with here⁴²⁷. Let us add immediately that, if in this case the entire construction is considered a "hypogeum", as it sometimes is in fact, literally in certain cases and symbolically in others, we find ourselves led back to the symbolism of the cave as an image of the "cosmos" as a whole.

To this general meaning is added another even more precise one: the building as a whole, viewed from top to bottom, represents the passage from Unity principal (corresponding to the central point or summit of the dome, of which the entire vault is in a sense nothing but an expansion) to the quaternary of elemental manifestation⁴²⁸ ; conversely, if viewed from the bottom up, it is the return of that manifestation to Unity. In this regard, Coomaraswamy recalls, as having the same meaning, the Vedic symbolism of the three *Rbhus*, who made four cups (and it goes without saying that the shape of the cup is hemispherical, like that of the dome) from the single cup (*pātra*) of *Tvashtr*; the ternary number, which intervenes here as an intermediary between the quaternary and Unity, means particularly, in this case, that only through the three dimensions of space can the original "one" become "four", which is exactly represented by the symbol of the three-dimensional cross. The reverse process is also represented by the legend of the Buddha, who, having received four bowls of alms from the *Mahārājas* of the four cardinal points, made them into one, indicating that, in order to be "unified", the "Grail" (to use the traditional Western term, which obviously designates the equivalent of that *pātra*) is once again unique, as it was in the beginning, that is, at the starting point of cosmic manifestation⁴²⁹.

⁴²⁷The Emperor himself, thus dressed, represented the 'True Man', mediator between Heaven and Earth, whose respective powers he unites in his own nature; and in exactly this same sense a master mason (who should also be a 'True Man' if he has effectively completed his initiation) 'is always found between the square and the compass'. Let us also point out, in this regard, one of the aspects of the symbolism of the tortoise: the lower part of the shell, which is flat, corresponds to Earth, and the upper part, which is arched in the shape of a dome, corresponds to Heaven; the animal itself, between the two parts, represents Man between Heaven and Earth, thus completing the "Great Triad", which plays a particularly important role in the symbolism of Taoist initiatory organisations [cf. *La Grande Triade*, chap. XVI].

⁴²⁸ The crucial floor plan of a church is also a quaternary form; the numerical symbolism therefore remains the same in this case as in that of the square base.

⁽⁴²⁹⁾ With regard to *Tvashtri* and the three *Rbhu* [respectively the Vedic divine Builder, literally 'Carpenter', and the three divine Craftsmen, literally 'the Skilful Ones'], considered as a triad of 'artists', we note that, in the rules established by Hindu tradition for the construction of a building, we find in a certain way the counterparts of these characters in the architect (*sthāpati*) and his three companions or assistants, the surveyor (*sūtragrāhi*), the builder (*vārdhaki*) and the carpenter (*tākshaka*); The equivalents of this triad could also be found in Freemasonry, where, in addition, in an 'inverse' aspect, it becomes that of the 'bad companions' who

Before going any further, we should point out that the structure in question can also be constructed horizontally: a semicircular section will be added to one end of a rectangular building, the end facing the side associated with the meaning of a 'celestial' correspondence, by means of a kind of projection onto the horizontal base plane; that side, at least in the best-known cases, will be the one from which the light comes, that is, the east; and the most immediate example offered here is that of a church ending in a semicircular apse. Another example is given by the complete shape of a Masonic temple: it is well known that the Lodge itself is a "long square", that is, in reality, a double square, whose length (from east to west) is twice its width (from north to south)⁴³⁰; but to this double square, which is the *Hikal* [Hèjal], is added, to the east, the *Debîr*, in the form of a semicircle⁴³¹; and this plan is also exactly that of the Roman "basilica"⁴³².

That said, let us return to the vertical structure: as Coomaraswamy points out, this must be considered entirely in relation to a central axis; the same is obviously true in the case of a hut, whose dome-shaped roof is supported by a pole connecting the top of the roof to the ground, and also in the case of certain *stupas* whose axis is represented inside, and sometimes even extends upwards beyond the dome. However, it is not necessary for this axis to always be represented in this way materially, just as the "Axis of the World", of which it is an image, is not actually represented anywhere. What matters is that the centre of the floor occupied by the building, i.e. the point directly below the top of the dome, is always virtually identified with the "Centre of the World"; this is not a "place" in the topographical and literal sense of the term, but in a transcendent and principal sense, and can therefore be realised in any regularly established and consecrated "centre", hence the need for rites that make the construction of a building a true imitation of the formation of the world itself⁴³³. The point in question is, therefore, a true *omphalos* (*nâbhih prthivyâ*)

Hiram is killed.

⁴³⁰ According to Plato's *Critias*, the great temple of Posidonis, capital of Atlantis, was also based on a double square; if the side of that figure is taken as a unit, the diagonal of the double square is equal to $\sqrt{5}$.

⁴³¹ In Solomon's Temple, the *Hikal* [Hèjal] was the "Sanctum" and the *Debîr* was the "Holy of Holies".

⁴³² In a mosque, the *mihrab*, which is a semicircular niche, corresponds to the apse of a church and also indicates the *qiblah*, that is, the ritual orientation; but this orientation, directed towards a centre that is not a defined point on the earth's surface, naturally varies according to location.

⁴³³ Sometimes, the dome itself may not exist in the building without altering its symbolic meaning; we are referring to the traditional type of house arranged in a square around an interior courtyard; the central part is then open to the sky, but, precisely, the sky itself

[Sanskrit: 'navel of the earth']), in many cases, the altar or hearth is located there, depending on whether it is a temple or a house; the altar, moreover, is also in reality a hearth, and conversely, in a traditional civilisation, the hearth must be considered a true domestic altar; symbolically, it is there that *Agni* manifests himself, and we will recall in this regard what we have said about the birth of *the Avatâra* in the centre of the initiatory cave, for it is evident that the meaning here is also the same, only the application being different. When an opening is made at the top of the dome, the smoke rising from the hearth escapes through it; but this too, far from having only a purely utilitarian reason, as modern people might imagine, has, on the contrary, a very profound symbolic meaning, which we will examine below, establishing even more precisely the exact meaning of that top of the dome in the two orders, "macrocosmic" and "microcosmic".

plays the role of a natural dome in this case. We will mention in passing, in this regard, that there is a certain relationship, in a given traditional form, between the layout of the house and the constitution of the family; thus, in the Islamic tradition, the quadrilateral layout of the house (which should normally be entirely closed to the outside, with windows opening onto the interior courtyard) is related to the limitation of the number of wives to a maximum of four, each of whom then has one of the sides of the quadrilateral as her own domain.

XL

THE DOME AND THE WHEEL ⁴³⁴

It is well known that the wheel, in general, is a symbol of the world: the circumference represents manifestation, produced by the radiation from the centre; this symbolism is, on the other hand, and naturally, susceptible to more or less specific meanings, since, instead of applying to universal manifestation as a whole, it can also apply only to a particular domain of manifestation. A particularly important example of the latter case is that in which two wheels are associated as corresponding to different parts of the cosmic whole; this refers to the symbolism of the chariot, as it is particularly often found in the Hindu tradition; Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has expounded this symbolism on several occasions, and also, on the subject of *the chhatra* and the *ushnisha*, in an article in *The Poona Orientalist* (April 1938 issue), from which we take some of the following considerations.

Because of this symbolism, the construction of a chariot is, like the architectural construction we mentioned earlier, the "artisanal" realisation of a cosmic model; we need only recall that, by virtue of considerations of this order, crafts possess a spiritual value and a truly "sacred" character in a traditional civilisation, and that is why they can normally serve as a "support" for an initiation. On the other hand, there is an exact parallel between the two constructions in question, as can be seen above all by observing that the fundamental element of the chariot is the axle (*aksha*, a word identical to *axis*), which here represents the "Axis of the World" and thus corresponds to the central pillar (*skambha*) of a building, to which the whole structure must refer. It matters little, moreover, as we have said, whether this pillar is materially represented or not; similarly, certain texts say that the axis of the cosmic chariot is only a "separating breath" (*vyāna*) which, occupying the intermediate space (*antaryaksha*), keeps Heaven and Earth in their respective "places"⁴³⁵, and that, on the other hand, while separating them, it also unites them like a bridge (*setu*) and allows passage from one to the other⁴³⁶. The two wheels, located at the two ends of the axle, therefore represent Heaven and Earth; and the axle is

⁴³⁴ [Published in *É. T.*, November 1938].

⁴³⁵ This corresponds exactly, in Far Eastern tradition, to the comparison of heaven and earth with the two plates of a bellows. The *antariksha* also corresponds, in Hebrew tradition, to the "firmament in the midst of the waters" that separates the lower waters from the upper waters (*Genesis*, I, 6); the idea expressed in Latin by the word *firmamentum* corresponds, moreover, to the "adamantine" character frequently attributed to the "Axis of the World".

extends from one to the other, just as the central pillar extends from the ground to the top of the vault. Between the two wheels, and supported by the axle, is the "box" (*koça*) of the chariot, in which, from another point of view, the floor also corresponds to the Earth, the side frame to the intermediate space, and the roof to the Sky; as the floor of the cosmic chariot is square or rectangular and the roof is dome-shaped, the architectural structure studied above is also found here.

If the two wheels are considered representations of Heaven and Earth, it could perhaps be objected that, since both are equally circular, the difference in the geometric shapes that most commonly correspond to them does not appear in this case; but there is nothing to prevent us from admitting that there is a certain change of perspective here, and in any case, the circular shape is justified as a symbol of the cyclical revolutions to which all manifestations, both 'earthly' and 'heavenly', are subject. However, the difference in question can also be found, in a way, by assuming that, while the 'earthly' wheel is flat, the 'celestial' wheel has, like the dome, the shape of a segment of a sphere⁴³⁷; this consideration may seem strange at first glance, but there is in fact a symbolic object that combines the structure of the wheel and that of the dome. This object, whose 'celestial' significance is in no way doubtful, is the parasol (*chhatra*); its spokes are clearly similar to the spokes of the wheel, and, just as the latter meet at the hub, the former also meet at a central piece (*kárnikā*) that supports them and is described as a 'perforated globe': the axle, that is, the handle of the parasol, passes through this central piece, just as the axle of the chariot penetrates the hub of the wheel; and the extension of that axle beyond the meeting point of the rods or spokes also corresponds to that of the axis of a *stūpa*, in the case where the axis of the latter rises like a mast above the top of the dome; on the other hand, it is clear that the parasol itself, given its intended function, is nothing more than the "portable" equivalent, so to speak, of a vaulted ceiling.

Due to its "celestial" symbolism, the parasol is one of the insignia of royalty; it is, strictly speaking, an emblem of *the Chakravarti* or universal monarch⁴³⁸ and, if it is also attributed to ordinary sovereigns, it is only insofar as they represent him in a certain way, each within his own domain.

⁴³⁶ Here we find very clearly the two complementary meanings of *barzakh* in Islamic tradition [the 'interval' or 'isthmus' that unites and separates; cf. note 5 of chapter XXXII (*Translator's note*)].

⁴³⁷ This difference in shape is the one that exists between the two parts, upper and lower, of the turtle's shell, whose equivalent symbolism we have already explained [note 6 in the previous chapter].

⁴³⁸ We recall, in this regard, that the very designation of *Chakravarti* refers to the symbolism of the wheel.

thus participating in its nature and identifying with its cosmic function⁴³⁹. Now, it is important to note that, by strictly applying the inverse meaning of the analogy, the parasol, in its ordinary use in the "world below", is a protection against light, while, insofar as it represents the sky, its rods are, on the contrary, the rays of light themselves; and, of course, it must be understood in this higher sense when it is an attribute of royalty. A similar observation also applies to the *ushnīsha*, understood in its primitive sense as a headdress: its common function is to protect against heat, but when symbolically attributed to the sun, it represents, conversely, that which radiates heat (and this double meaning is contained in the very etymology of the word *ushnīsha*); let us add that precisely according to its "solar" meaning, the *ushnīsha*, which is properly a turban and can also be a crown, which is basically the same thing⁴⁴⁰, also constitutes, like the parasol, an insignia of royalty; both are thus associated with the character of "glory" inherent in royalty, rather than responding to a simple practical need, as in ordinary men.

On the other hand, while the *ushnīsha* envelops the head, the parasol is identified with the head itself; in its "microcosmic" correspondence, it represents the skull and the hair; it should be noted in this regard that, in the symbolism of various traditions, hair most often represents rays of light. In ancient Buddhist iconography, the combination of footprints, altar or throne⁴⁴¹ and parasol, corresponding respectively to the Earth, the intermediate space and Heaven, fully represents the cosmic body of *Mahāpūruṣa* u

⁴³⁹We have previously referred to the cosmic function attributed to the Emperor by Far Eastern tradition; it goes without saying that the same applies here; and, in connection with what we have just said about the significance of the parasol, we would point out that in China the performance of the rites comprising the "cult of Heaven" was reserved exclusively for the Emperor [cf. *The Great Triad*, chap. XVII].

⁴⁴⁰In Islamic tradition, the turban, considered more particularly as a distinctive mark of the *sheikh* (whether in the exoteric or esoteric order), is commonly referred to as *tādj el-Islām*; it is, therefore, a crown (*tādj*), which in this case constitutes a sign, not of temporal power, as that of kings, but of spiritual authority. Let us also recall, in view of the relationship between the crown and the sun's rays, the close link between its symbolism and that of the horns, which we have already discussed [chap. XXVIII].

⁴⁴¹ The throne, as a seat, is in a sense equivalent to an altar, which is the seat of *Agni*; the cosmic chariot is also driven by *Agni*, or by the Sun, which then has the "box" of the chariot as its seat; and, as for the relationship between the "Axis of the World" and the *antariksha*, it can also be observed that when the altar or hearth is located immediately below the central opening of the vault of a building, the "column of smoke" of *Agni* that rises and exits through that opening represents the "Axis of the World".

"Universal Man" ⁴⁴². Likewise, the dome, in cases such as that of *the stūpa*, is also, in certain respects, a representation of the human skull ⁴⁴³; and this observation is particularly important because the opening through which the axis passes, whether it be the dome or the parasol, corresponds in the human being to *the Brahma-randhra*; we shall return to this point in greater detail.

⁴⁴² In this regard, it is also worth referring to *Vaiçvânara's* description of the "macrocosmic" body, in which the set of luminous celestial spheres is likened to the upper part of the head, that is, the cranial vault (see *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, chap. XII).

⁴⁴³ Ananda K. Coomaraswamy points out that the same observation applies to prehistoric "burial mounds," whose shape often seems to have been intentionally modelled on that of a skull; since, on the other hand, the "burial mound" or mound is an artificial image of the mountain, the same significance must also be attributed to the symbolism of the latter. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the name *Golgotha* means precisely 'skull', as does the word *Calvarium*, which is its Latin translation; According to a legend that was popular in the Middle Ages, but whose origin can be traced back much further, this designation refers to the skull of Adam, who was buried in that place (which, in an esoteric sense, would be identified with the mountain itself), and this brings us back to the consideration of the 'Universal Man'. this skull is often depicted at the foot of the cross; and it is well known that this constitutes another representation of the 'Axis of the World'.

XLI

THE NARROW GATE ⁴⁴⁴

In the course of her study on the symbolism of the dome, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has pointed out a particularly noteworthy aspect concerning the traditional representation of the sun's rays and their relationship to the "Axis of the World": in the Vedic tradition, the sun is always at the centre of the Universe and not at its highest point, although, from any given point, it nevertheless appears to be located at the "top of the tree" ⁴⁴⁵, and this is easy to understand if one considers the Universe as symbolised by the wheel, for then the sun is at the centre of it and every state of being is on its circumference ⁴⁴⁶. From any point on the latter, the 'Axis of the World' is both a radius of the circle and a ray of sunlight, and geometrically passes through the sun to extend beyond the centre and complete the diameter; but that is not all, for the 'Axis of the World' is also a 'sunbeam' whose extension cannot be represented geometrically. This is the formula according to which the sun is described as having seven rays; of these, six, opposed two by two, form the *trivid vajra* ['triple vajra'], that is, the three-dimensional cross; those corresponding to the zenith and nadir coincide with our "Axis of the World" (*skambha*), while those corresponding to the north and south, east and west, determine the extent of a "world" (*loka*) represented by a horizontal plane. As for the "seventh ray", which passes through the sun, but in a different direction than the one indicated above, to lead to the suprasolar worlds (considered the domain of "immortality"), it corresponds precisely to the centre and, therefore, can only be represented by the intersection of the arms of the three-dimensional cross⁴⁴⁷; its extension beyond the sun cannot be represented in any way, and this corresponds precisely to the "incommunicable" and "inexpressible" nature of that which is involved. From our point of view, and from that of every being situated on the "circumference" of the Universe, that ray ends in the sun itself and is identified in a certain way with it as the centre,

⁴⁴⁴ [Published in *É. T.*, December 1938].

⁴⁴⁵ We have previously referred to the representation of the sun in different traditions as the fruit of the "Tree of Life".

⁴⁴⁶ This central and, therefore, unchanging position of the sun gives it the character of a true "pole" here, while also placing it constantly at the zenith with respect to any point in the Universe.

⁴⁴⁷ It should be noted that in symbolic representations of the seven-rayed sun, especially on ancient Indian coins, although these rays are not necessarily arranged in a circle around the central disc, the "seventh ray" is distinguished from the others by a distinctly different shape.

For no one can see through the solar disc by any physical or psychic means, and that passage "beyond the sun" (which is the "last death" and the passage to true "immortality") is possible only in the purely spiritual order.

Now, what is important to note, in order to link these considerations with those we have outlined above, is this: through that "seventh ray," the "heart" of every individual being is directly linked to the sun; it is, therefore, the "solar ray" par excellence, the *sushumna* through which that connection is established in a constant and unchanging manner; and it is also the *sūtrātmā* ["thread of the *Ātmā*"] that unites all states of being with each other and with their total centre. For those who have returned to the centre of their own being, this "seventh ray" necessarily coincides with the "Axis of the World", and it is said that for them "the Sun always rises at the zenith and sets at the nadir"⁴⁵⁰. Thus, although the "Axis of the World" is not currently that "seventh ray" for any being located at this or that particular point on the circumference, it is always, nevertheless, virtually, in the sense that it has the possibility of identifying with it by means of that return to the centre, whatever, on the other hand, the state of existence in which that return takes place. It could also be said that this "seventh ray" is the only truly immutable "Axis", the only one that, from a universal point of view, can truly be designated by that name, and that any particular "axis", relative to a contingent situation, is not really an "axis" except by virtue of that possibility of identification with it; and this is, in short, what gives full meaning to any symbolically located representation of the "Axis of the World", for example, the one we considered earlier in the structure of buildings constructed according to traditional rules, and especially those crowned by a dome-shaped roof, for it is precisely to this theme of the dome or cupola that we must now return.

The axis, whether physically represented in the form of a tree or a central pillar, or represented by the rising flame and the "column of smoke" of *Agni* in cases where the centre of the building is occupied by the altar or the hearth⁴⁵¹, always ends exactly at the top of the dome, and sometimes, as we have already pointed out, even passes through it and extends beyond it in the form of a mast, or as the handle of a parasol, in

⁴⁴⁸ See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. XX.

⁴⁴⁹ In Islamic tradition, this refers to one of the meanings of the word *es-sirr*, literally 'the secret', used to designate what is most central to every being, and at the same time its direct relationship with the 'Supreme Centre', due to the 'incommunicability' we have just mentioned.

⁴⁵⁰ *Chândogya-Upânishad*, Prapâthaka 3rd Khanda 8th çruti 10.

⁴⁵¹ In the case, already mentioned above, of a room arranged around an open-air interior courtyard (and receiving no light other than from that inner side), the centre of the courtyard is sometimes occupied by a fountain; this then represents the "Fountain of Life", which flows from the foot of the "Middle Tree" (although, naturally, the tree may not have a material representation there).

Another example of equivalent symbolism. It is clear here that the top of the dome is identified with the hub of the celestial wheel of the 'cosmic chariot'; and, as we have seen that the centre of this wheel is occupied by the sun, it follows that the passage of the axis through that point represents the passage 'beyond the Sun' and through it, which we discussed above. The same also occurs when, in the absence of a material representation of the axis, the dome is perforated at its summit by a circular opening (through which, in the case just mentioned, the smoke from the hearth located immediately below escapes); that opening is a representation of the solar disc itself as the "Eye of the World", and through it the exit from the "cosmos" takes place, as we have explained in the studies devoted to the symbolism of the cave⁴⁵². In any case, it is through this central opening, and through it alone, that the being can pass into *Brahma-loka* ['world of Brahma (Supreme Principle)'], which is an essentially 'extracosmic' domain⁴⁵³; and it is also the "narrow gate" which, in evangelical symbolism, analogously gives access to the "Kingdom of God"⁴⁵⁴.

The 'microcosmic' correspondence of this 'solar door' is easy to discover, especially if we remember the similarity between the dome and the human skull, which we mentioned earlier⁴⁵⁵: the top of the dome is the "crown" of the head, that is, the point where the subtle "coronal artery" or *sushumnâ* ends, which is in the direct extension of the solar ray analogously called *sushumna*, and which, in reality, is not even, at least virtually, but its axial portion, "intra-human" if one may express it that way. This point is the orifice called *Brahma-randhra*, through which the spirit of the being in the process of liberation escapes when the bonds that united it to the human corporeal and psychic composite (as *jīvâtma*) have been broken⁴⁵⁶; and it goes without saying

⁴⁵²Among the Indians of North America, who seem to have preserved more perfectly recognisable traditional elements than is generally believed, the different 'worlds' are often represented as a series of superimposed caves, and beings pass from one to another by climbing up a central tree; naturally, our world is one of these caves, with the sky as its vault.

⁴⁵³ In this regard, reference should be made to the descriptions of the *devâ-yâna*, of which *Brahma-Loka* is the point of arrival "beyond the sun" (see *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, chap. XXI).

⁴⁵⁴In the symbolism of archery, the centre of the target also has this meaning; without dwelling on this subject here, we will simply recall that the arrow is also an 'axial' symbol and one of the most common representations of the 'sunbeam'. In certain cases, a thread is tied to the arrow, which will pierce the target; this is particularly reminiscent of the evangelical figure of the 'eye of the needle', and the symbol of the thread (*sûtra*) is also found in the term *sûtrâtma* [the *Âtmâ* considered as a thread that pierces the Universe; see chap. LXI]. [On the symbolism of archery, see Coomaraswamy's article in *É. T.*, October-November and December 1945].

⁴⁵⁵ [See Chapter XL: "The Dome and the Wheel"].

⁴⁵⁶ This is clearly referred to in the rite of posthumous trepanation, the existence of which has been verified in many prehistoric graves, and which has even been preserved until much later times

that this path is exclusively reserved for the "cognisant" being (*vid-vân*), for whom the "axis" has been effectively identified with the "seventh ray", and who is now ready to leave the "cosmos" definitively, passing "beyond the Sun".

recent among certain peoples; on the other hand, in the Christian tradition, the tonsure of priests, whose shape is also that of the solar disc and the "eye" of the dome, clearly refers to the same ritual symbolism.

XLII

*THE OCTAGON*⁴⁵⁷

We return to the question of symbolism, common to most traditions, of buildings consisting of a square base crowned by a dome, or by a more or less strictly hemispherical cupola. Square or cubic shapes refer to the earth, and circular or spherical shapes to the sky; the significance of these two parts immediately follows from this, and we would add that the earth and the sky do not only designate the two poles between which all manifestation occurs, as is particularly the case in the Far Eastern Great Triad, but also comprise, as in the Hindu *Tribhūvana*, the aspects of that manifestation itself which are closest, respectively, to those poles, and which, for this reason, are called the terrestrial world and the celestial world. There is a point that we have had occasion to emphasise previously, but which deserves to be taken into consideration: insofar as the building represents the realisation of a "cosmic model", its overall structure, if reduced exclusively to these two parts, would be incomplete in the sense that, in the superimposition of the "three worlds", an element corresponding to the "intermediate world" would be missing. In fact, this element also exists, since the dome or circular vault cannot rest directly on the square base, and to allow the transition from one to the other, a transitional form is needed that is, in a sense, intermediate between the square and the circle, a form that is generally that of the octagon.

This octagonal shape is, from a geometric point of view, closer to a circle than to a square, since a regular polygon approaches a circle more closely the greater its number of sides. It is well known that a circle can be considered as the limit towards which a regular polygon tends when its number of sides increases indefinitely; and here we can clearly see the nature of the limit, understood in the mathematical sense: it is not the last term in the series that tends towards it, but rather it is outside that series, for no matter how large the number of sides of a polygon may be, it will never be confused with the circle, whose definition is essentially different from that of polygons⁴⁵⁸. On the other hand, it should be noted that, in the series of polygons obtained starting from the square and doubling the number of sides each time, the octagon is the first term⁴⁵⁹; it is, therefore, the simplest of all these.

⁴⁵⁷ [Published in *É. T.*, July-August 1949].

⁴⁵⁸ Cf. *Les Principes du calcul infinitésimal*, chaps. XII and XIII.

polygons, and at the same time can be considered representative of that entire series of intermediaries.

From the point of view of cosmic symbolism, particularly in its spatial aspect, the quaternary form, that is, the square in the case of polygons, is naturally related to the four cardinal points and their various traditional correspondences. To obtain the octagonal shape, we must also consider, between the four cardinal points, the four intermediate points ⁴⁶⁰, which together with the cardinal points form a set of eight directions, those that various traditions designate as "the eight winds" ⁴⁶¹. This consideration of the "winds" presents something particularly noteworthy here: in the Vedic triad of "deities" who preside over the three worlds, *Agni*, *Vāyu* and *Aditya*, it is *Vāyu* ["Wind"] who corresponds to the intermediate world. In this regard, concerning the two parts of the building, lower and upper, which represent the earthly and heavenly worlds, as we have explained, it should be noted that the hearth or altar, normally located in the centre of the base, clearly corresponds to *Agni* ['Fire'], and that the 'eye' at the top of the dome represents the 'solar gate' and thus corresponds, no less rigorously, to *Aditya* ['Sun']. Let us add that *Vāyu*, insofar as it is identified with the 'vital breath', is manifestly in immediate relation to the psychic domain or subtle manifestation, which justifies this correspondence even more fully, whether it is considered in the 'macrocosmic' or 'microcosmic' order.

In construction, the octagonal shape can naturally be achieved in different ways, particularly by means of eight pillars supporting the vault; we find an example of this in China in the case of the *Ming-tang*⁴⁶², whose "round ceiling is supported by eight columns resting on a square base, like the earth, because in order to achieve this squaring of the circle, which goes from the celestial unity of the vault to the square of the terrestrial elements, it is necessary to pass through the octagon, which is related to the intermediate world of the eight directions, the eight gates and the

⁴⁵⁹Or the second, if the square itself is counted as the first term; but if we are talking about the series of intermediates between the square and the circle, as we are doing here, the octagon is actually the first term.

⁴⁶⁰ When the cardinal points are put in correspondence with the corporeal elements, the intermediate points correspond to the sensible qualities: hot and cold, dry and wet.

⁴⁶¹In Athens, the "Tower of the Winds" was octagonal. Let us note, in passing, the singular nature of the expression "compass rose," which is commonly used without much thought: in Rosicrucian symbolism, *Rosa Mundi* and *Rota Mundi* were equivalent expressions, and the *Rosa Mundi* was depicted with precisely eight rays, corresponding to the elements and the sensible qualities.

⁴⁶² Cf. *La Grande Triade*, chap. XVI.

the eight winds"⁴⁶³). The symbolism of the "eight gates", which is also mentioned in this passage, is explained by the fact that the gate is essentially a place of passage, and as such represents the transition from one state to another, especially from an "outer" state to an "inner" one, at least relatively, since this relationship between the "outside" and the "inside" is always comparable, at any level, to that between the earthly world and the heavenly world.

In Christianity, the octagonal shape was that of the ancient baptisteries, and despite the neglect or disregard of symbolism since the Renaissance, it is still commonly found today in the bowls of baptismal fonts⁴⁶⁴. Here too, it is clearly a place of passage or transition; moreover, in the early centuries, the baptistery was located outside the church, and only those who had been baptised were admitted inside; it goes without saying that the fact that the fonts were later moved into the church itself, but always near the entrance, in no way changes their significance. In a certain sense, according to what we have just said, the church is, with respect to the outside, in a correspondence that is like an image of that of the celestial world with respect to the terrestrial world, and the baptistery, through which one must pass to go from one to the other, corresponds for that very reason to the intermediate world; but, in addition, the baptistery is even more directly related to the latter because of the nature of the rite performed in it, which is properly the means of a regeneration that takes place in the psychic realm, that is, in the elements of being that naturally belong to that intermediate world⁴⁶⁵.

With regard to the eight directions, we have noted a concordance between different traditional forms which, although referring to a different set of considerations than those we had particularly in mind, seems to us too noteworthy to refrain from mentioning: Luc Benoist points out⁴⁶⁶ that "in St. Hildegard's *Scivias*, the divine throne that surrounds the worlds is represented by a circle supported by eight angels". Now, this "throne surrounding the world" is the most accurate possible translation of the Arabic expression "*el-'Arsh el-Muhîr*" ["the Throne that envelops or encompasses", or "the Throne of the One who envelops or encompasses"], and an identical representation is also found in Islamic tradition, according to which this throne is likewise supported by

⁴⁶³ Luc Benoist, *Art du monde*, p. 90.

⁴⁶⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, p. 65.

⁴⁶⁵ When consecrating water, the priest traces a sign on the surface with his breath in the shape of the Greek letter *psi*, the initial letter of the word *psychê*; this is very significant in this regard, since the influence that consecrated water serves as a vehicle for must operate on the psychic level; and it is also easy to see the relationship between this rite and the "breath of life" we mentioned earlier.

⁴⁶⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 79.

eight angels, which, as we have explained elsewhere⁴⁶⁷, correspond both to the eight directions of space and to groups of letters of the Arabic alphabet; it must be acknowledged that such a "coincidence" is rather astonishing. Here, it is no longer a question of the intermediate world, unless it can be said that the function of these angels establishes a connection between that world and the celestial world; be that as it may, this symbolism can nevertheless be linked, at least in a certain respect, to the preceding one, recalling the biblical text according to which God "makes the winds his messengers"⁴⁶⁸, and bearing in mind that angels are literally divine "messengers".

⁴⁶⁷ "Note sur l'angéologie de l'alphabet arabe", in *É. T.*, August-September 1938. [Text to be included in the posthumous compilation *Tradition primordiale et formes particulières*].

⁴⁶⁸ *Psalm* XIV, 4. [Cf. also Qur'an: God "sends the winds as good tidings of His mercy", VII, 57; XXV, 48; XXVII, 63].

XLIII

THE "CORNERSTONE" ⁴⁶⁹

The symbolism of the "cornerstone" in Christian tradition is based on this text: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone," or, more precisely, "the head of the corner" (*caput anguli*)⁴⁷⁰. The strange thing is that this symbolism is almost always misunderstood, as a result of a common confusion between this "cornerstone" and the "foundation stone", to which this other, even better-known text refers: "You are Peter, and on this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it"⁴⁷¹. Such confusion is strange, we say, because from a specifically Christian point of view it is in fact equivalent to confusing St. Peter with Christ himself, since the latter is expressly designated as the "cornerstone", as shown in this passage from St. Paul, which also clearly distinguishes it from the "foundations" of the building: "(you are) built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone (*summo angulare lapide*), in whom the whole building, harmoniously joined together, is raised up to be a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built together (*coaedificamini*) to be a dwelling place for God in the Spirit"⁴⁷². If the confusion we refer to were specifically modern, it would certainly not be too surprising, but it seems to be found already in times when it cannot be attributed purely and simply to ignorance of symbolism. We are therefore led to wonder whether in reality it might not be, at its origin, an intentional "substitution", explainable by the role of St. Peter as 'substitute' or 'vicar' of Christ (*vicarius*, corresponding in this sense to the Arabic *jalfifāh*); if so, this way of 'veiling' the symbolism of the 'cornerstone' would seem to indicate that it was considered to contain something particularly mysterious, and it will soon become clear that such an assumption is far from unjustified⁴⁷³. Be that as it may, there is in that

⁴⁶⁹ [Published in *É. T.*, April-May 1940].

⁴⁷⁰ Psalm CVIII, 22; *St Matthew*, XXI, 42; *St Mark*, XII, 10; *St Luke*, XX, 17.

⁴⁷¹ *St. Matthew*, XVI, 18.

⁴⁷² *Ephesians*, 11, 20-22.

⁴⁷³ The 'substitution' may also have been favoured by the phonetic similarity between the Hebrew [Aramaic] name *Kēfūh*, 'stone', and the Greek word *kephalē*, 'head'; but there is no other relationship between the two words, and the foundation of a building cannot obviously be identified with its 'head', that is, with its summit, which would be equivalent to inverting the entire building; on the other hand, one might also wonder whether this 'inversion' has some symbolic correspondence with the crucifixion of Saint Peter, upside down.

Identification of the two stones, even from the point of view of simple logic, is clearly impossible when the texts we have quoted are examined with a little attention: the "cornerstone" is the one that is laid first, at the very beginning of the construction of a building (which is why it is also called the "first stone")⁴⁷⁴ ; how, then, could it be rejected during the construction itself? For this to be the case, it is necessary, on the contrary, that the "cornerstone" be such that it cannot yet find its place; in fact, as we shall see, it cannot find its place until the entire building is completed, and thus it truly becomes the "cornerstone".

In an article we have already mentioned⁴⁷⁵, Ananda Coomaraswamy points out that St Paul's intention in the text is clearly to represent Christ as the sole principle on which the whole edifice of the Church depends, adding that 'the principle of a thing is neither one of its parts among the others nor the totality of its parts, but that in which all the parts are reduced to a unity without composition'. The "*foundation stone*" can appropriately be called, in a certain sense, a "*cornerstone*," as it is commonly done, since it is located at an angle or corner of the edifice⁴⁷⁶; but it is not unique as such, since the building necessarily has four corners; and even if one wishes to speak more particularly of the "first stone", it does not differ in any way from the foundation stones of the other corners, except for its location⁴⁷⁷, and it is not distinguished either by its function or by its shape, since it is, in short, only one of four supports that are equal to each other; it could be said that any of the four *cornerstones* "reflects" in a certain way the

⁴⁷⁴This stone should be placed in the northeast corner of the building; we should note in this regard that several aspects or functions can be distinguished in the symbolism of Saint Peter, corresponding to different 'situations', since, on the other hand, as *ianitor* ['doorkeeper'], his place is in the west, where the entrance to any normally oriented church is located; Furthermore, Saint Peter and Saint Paul are also represented as the two "pillars" of the Church, and so they are usually depicted, one with the keys and the other with the sword, in the manner of two *dvārapāla* [*vaksha* or 'genies' who guard the threshold of certain sacred doors in Hinduism].

⁴⁷⁵ "*Eckstein*," in *Speculum* magazine, January 1939 issue (review by R. Guénon in *É. T.*, May 1939).

⁴⁷⁶ In this study, we will often be forced to refer to English "technical" terms because, originally belonging to the language of ancient operative masonry, they have been preserved for the most part in the rituals of *Royal Arch Masonry* and the accessory degrees associated with it, rituals for which there is no equivalent in our language; and it will be seen that some of these terms are very difficult to translate.

⁴⁷⁷According to the operative ritual, this "first stone" is, as we have said, that of the northeast corner; the stones of the other corners are placed later and successively according to the apparent course of the sun, that is, in the southeast, southwest, and northwest.

dominant principle of the building, but it could in no way be considered this principle itself⁴⁷⁸. On the other hand, if this were really the case, it would not even be logical to speak of "the cornerstone", since there would in fact be four; it must therefore be something essentially different from the *cornerstone* understood in the usual sense of "foundation stone", and the only thing they have in common is that they belong to the same "constructive" symbolism.

We have just referred to the shape of the "cornerstone", and this is indeed a particularly important point: precisely because this stone has a special and unique shape, which distinguishes it from all the others, not only can it not find its place in the course of construction, but even the builders cannot understand what its purpose is; if they understood it, they would obviously not reject it and would be content to set it aside until the end; but they wonder "what they will do with the stone", and, finding no satisfactory answer, they decide, believing it unusable, to "throw it among the rubbish" (*to heave it over among the rubbish*)⁴⁷⁹. The destiny of that stone can only be understood by another category of builders, who are not yet involved at this stage: they are those who have passed 'from the square to the compass', and by this distinction we must naturally understand the geometric shapes that these instruments are used to draw, namely the square and the circle, which, as is well known, generally symbolise the earth and the sky; here, the square shape corresponds to the lower part of the building, and the circular shape to its upper part, which, in this case, must therefore consist of a dome or a vault⁴⁸⁰. In fact, the "cornerstone" is truly and genuinely a "keystone"; A. Coomaraswamy says that, to give the true meaning of the expression "it has *become the head of the corner*", it could be translated as "*it has become the keystone of the arch*", which is perfectly accurate; and thus that stone, both in its shape and position, is indeed unique in the entire building, as it must be in order to symbolise the principle on which everything depends. It may be surprising that this representation of the principle is not located at the top of the building, but it can be said that the construction in

⁴⁷⁸ This "reflection" is clearly directly related to the substitution mentioned above.

⁴⁷⁹ The expression "*to heave over*" is quite unusual, and apparently uncommon in modern English in this sense; it could mean "to lift" or "to raise", but, according to the rest of the quoted sentence, it is clear that it actually refers here to the act of "throwing" the rejected stone.

⁴⁸⁰ This distinction is, in other words, that of *Square Masonry* and *Arch Masonry*, which, because of their respective relationships to "earth" and "heaven," or to the parts of the building that represent them, are here placed in correspondence with the "lesser mysteries" and the "greater mysteries" respectively. [See chap. XXXIX, notes 4 and 5 (*Translator's note*)].

The whole is ordered in relation to it (which St Paul expresses by saying that 'in it the whole building is raised up to be a holy temple in the Lord'), and in it it finally finds its unity; there is also an application here of the analogy, already explained by us on other occasions, between the "first" and the "last" or the "beginning" and the "end": the construction represents the manifestation, in which the Beginning appears only as the ultimate fulfilment; and precisely by virtue of the same analogy, the "first stone" or "foundation stone" can be considered a "reflection" of the "last stone," which is the true "cornerstone."

The ambiguity involved in an expression such as *cornerstone* ultimately lies in the different possible meanings of the term 'angle'; Coomaraswamy points out that, in various languages, words meaning 'angle' are often related to others meaning 'head' and 'end': in Greek, *kephalè*, 'head' or, in architecture, 'capital' (*capitulum*, diminutive of *caput*), can only be applied to a summit; but *ákros* (Sanskrit *agra*) can indicate an extremity in any dimension, that is, in the case of a building, both the summit to which it refers, admittedly more commonly, and any of the four angles or corners (the corresponding word in French, *coin*, is etymologically related to the Greek *gónia*, 'angle' [while 'corner' comes from the Arabic *rukni*, 'angle']). But even more important, from the point of view of the texts concerning the 'cornerstone' in the Judeo-Christian tradition, is the consideration of the Hebrew word meaning 'angle': that word is *pinnáh*, and it is found in the expressions *eben pinnáh*, 'cornerstone', and *ro'sh pinnáh*, 'head of the angle'; and it is particularly noteworthy that, in a figurative sense, the same word is used to mean 'chief': an expression designating the 'chiefs of the people' (*pinnôt ha-'am*) is literally translated in the Vulgate as *anguli populorum*⁴⁸¹. A 'chief' or 'leader' is etymologically the 'head' (*caput*), and *pinnáh* is related, by its root, to *penè*, which means 'face'; the close relationship between the ideas of 'head' and 'face' is evident, and, moreover, the term 'face' belongs to a very widespread symbolism, which deserves to be examined separately⁴⁸². Another related idea is that of 'point' (found in the Sanskrit *agra*, the Greek *ákros*, the Latin *acer* and *acies*); we have already discussed the symbolism of points in relation to weapons and horns⁴⁸³, and we have seen that it refers to the idea of extremity, but more particularly to the upper extremity, that is, the highest point.

⁴⁸¹ I *Samuel*, XIV, 38; the Greek version of the *Septuagint* also uses the word *gónia* here.

⁴⁸² Cf. A. M. Hocart, *Les Castes*, pp. 151-54, on the expression "faces of the earth" used in the Fiji Islands to designate chiefs. In the early centuries of Christianity, the Greek word *Kárai* was used to designate the five "faces" or "heads" of the Church, that is, the five main patriarchates, whose initials together formed precisely that word: Constantinople, Alexandria, Rome, Antioch, Jerusalem [= *Ierusalêm*].

elevated or summit; all these connections therefore confirm what we have said about the position of the "cornerstone" at the summit of the building: even if there are other "cornerstones" in the more general sense of the expression⁴⁸⁴, only that one is in reality "the cornerstone" par excellence.

We find other interesting indications in the meanings of the Arabic word *rukn*, 'angle', 'corner'; that word, as it designates the extremities of a thing, that is, its most remote and, consequently, most hidden parts (*recondita et abscondita*, one might say in Latin), sometimes takes on the meaning of 'secret' or 'mystery'; and, in this respect, its plural *arkàn* is linked to the Latin *arcantum*, which has the same meaning and with which it bears a remarkable similarity; moreover, in the language of Hermeticists at least, the use of the term 'arcane' has certainly been directly influenced by this Arabic word⁴⁸⁵. In addition, *rukn* also means 'base' or 'foundation', which brings us back to the *cornerstone* understood as the 'foundation stone'; in alchemical terminology, *el-arkàn*, when this designation is used without further clarification, refers to the four elements, that is, the substantial 'bases' of our world, thus assimilated to the cornerstones of the four corners of a building, since in a certain sense the entire corporeal world (also represented by the square shape) is built upon them⁴⁸⁶; and this brings us directly to the symbolism that concerns us here. In fact, there are not only these four *arkàn* or "basic" elements, but also a fifth *rukn*, the fifth element or "quintessence" (i.e. ether, *el-athîr*); this is not on the same "plane" as the others, for it is not simply a foundation, like them, but the very principle of this world⁴⁸⁷; it will therefore be represented by the fifth "angle" of the building, which is its

⁴⁸³It should be noted that the English word *corner* is clearly derived from *corne* [French, 'horn'].

⁴⁸⁴ In this sense, the four cornerstones do not exist only at the base, but also at any level of the construction; and these stones are all of the same common shape, rectilinear and rectangular (that is, carved *on the square*, since the word *square* has the double meaning of 'square' and 'square'), contrary to what occurs in the unique case of the *keystone*.

⁴⁸⁵It might be interesting to investigate whether there could be a real etymological relationship between the Arabic and Latin words, even in the ancient use of the latter (for example, in the *disciplina arcani* of early Christians), or whether it is only a "convergence" that occurred later, among medieval Hermeticists.

⁴⁸⁶ This assimilation of the elements to the four corners of a square is also related, of course, to the correspondence that exists between those elements and the cardinal points.

⁴⁸⁷It would be on the same plane (at its central point) if this plane were taken as a representation of a state of complete existence; but this is not always the case here, since the entire building is an image of the world. Let us note, in this regard, that the horizontal projection of the pyramid referred to above is constituted by the square of the base with its diagonals, and the lateral edges are

summit; and this "fifth", which is in fact the "first", is appropriately designated as the supreme angle, the angle par excellence or "angle of angles" (*rukn el-arkân*), since in it the multiplicity of the other angles is reduced to unity⁴⁸⁸. It can also be observed that the geometric figure obtained by joining these five angles is that of a pyramid with a quadrangular base: the lateral edges of the pyramid emanate from its vertex like so many rays, just as the four ordinary elements, which are represented by the lower ends of these edges, proceed from the fifth and are produced by it; and also in the sense of the edges, which we have intentionally assimilated to rays for this reason (and also by virtue of the "solar" character of the point from which they emanate, according to what we have said about the "eye" of the dome), the "cornerstone" at the top is "reflected" in each of the "foundation stones" of the four angles of the base. Finally, in what we have just said there is a clear indication of a correlation between alchemical symbolism and architectural symbolism, which is explained by their common 'cosmological' character. This is also an important point, to which we shall return in connection with other relationships of the same order.

The "cornerstone", taken in its true sense of "summit stone", is referred to in English as both *keystone* and *capstone* (sometimes also spelled *capestone*), as well as *copestone* (or *copingstone*); The first of these terms is easily understandable, as it is the exact equivalent of our "keystone" (or "arch keystone", as the word can actually be applied to the stone that forms the top of an arch as well as that of a vault); but the other two require further explanation. In *capstone*, the word *cap* is obviously the Latin *caput*, 'head', which brings us back to the designation of that stone as the 'head of the angle'; it is, properly speaking, the stone that 'finishes' or 'crowns' a building; and it is also a capital, which is likewise the 'crown' of a column⁴⁸⁹. We have just

They project according to the diagonals and the vertex at the meeting point of these elements, that is, at the very

centre of the square.

⁴⁸⁸ In the sense of 'mystery', as we have indicated, *rukn el-arkân* is equivalent to *sirr el-asrâr* ['mystery of mysteries', 'supreme mystery'], represented, as we have explained on another occasion, by the upper end of the letter *alif*; as the *alif* itself represents the "Axis of the World", this, as will be seen immediately, corresponds exactly to the position of the *keystone*.

⁴⁸⁹The term "crowning" must be related here to the designation of the cranial "crown," due to the symbolic assimilation, which we have pointed out above, between the "eye" of the dome and the *Brahmarandhra* [seventh and last *chakra*, or "subtle organ or centre", whose "awakening" corresponds to the culmination of *Kundalini-Yoga*]; it is well known, moreover, that the crown, like horns, essentially expresses the idea of elevation. It should also be noted in this regard that the oath of the *Royal Arch* degree contains an allusion to the "*crown of the skull*," which suggests a relationship between the opening of the skull (as in the rites of posthumous trepanation) and the act of removing

To speak of "finishing", and related to this, the words "cap" and "head" or "headboard" are, in fact, etymologically identical⁴⁹⁰; the *capstone* is therefore the "head" or "headboard" of the "work", and, because of its special shape, which requires particular knowledge or skills to carve, it is also at the same time a "capital work" or "masterpiece" (*chef-d'oeuvre*), in the sense that this expression has in the *Compagnonnage*⁴⁹¹; it is the capstone that completes the building, or, in other words, brings it to "perfection"⁴⁹².

As for the term *copestone*, the word *cope* expresses the idea of 'covering'; this is explained not only because the upper part of the building is properly its "covering", but also, and we would say above all, because that stone is placed so as to cover the opening at the top, that is, the "eye" of the dome or vault, which we have discussed above⁴⁹³. It is, therefore, in short, in this respect, the equivalent of a *roof plate*, as Coomaraswamy points out, adding that this stone can be considered as the upper termination or capital of the 'axial pillar' (in Sanskrit *skambha*, in Greek *staurós*)⁴⁹⁴; this pillar, as we have already explained, may not be physically represented in the structure of the building, but it is nonetheless an essential part of it.

(*removing*) the *keystone*; otherwise, in general, the so-called "penalties" formulated in the oaths of the different Masonic degrees, as well as the signs that correspond to them, actually refer to the various subtle centres of the human being.

⁴⁹⁰ In the meaning of the word 'to finish', or in the equivalent expression 'to carry out', the idea of 'head' [*caput*] is associated with that of 'end', which perfectly corresponds to the situation of the 'cornerstone', known both as the 'top stone' and the 'last stone' of the building. We will mention yet another term derived from *caput*: in French, it is called *chevet* ('head')—and in Spanish "cabecera" or "testero"—of a church at the eastern end where the apse is located, whose semicircular shape corresponds, on the horizontal plane, to the dome in vertical elevation, as we have explained on another occasion.

⁴⁹¹ The word 'work' is used in both architecture and alchemy, and it will be seen that we relate the two things for good reason: in architecture, the conclusion of the work is the 'cornerstone', and in alchemy, the 'philosopher's stone'.

⁴⁹² It should be noted that, in certain Masonic rites, the degrees that correspond more or less exactly to the upper part of the construction in question here (we say more or less exactly, as there is sometimes some confusion in this regard) are designated precisely by the name 'degrees of perfection'. On the other hand, the term "exaltation", which designates access to the degree of *Royal Arch*, can be understood as an allusion to the elevated position of the *keystone*.

⁴⁹³ For the placement of this stone, we find the expression "*to bring forth the copestone*", whose meaning is also quite obscure at first glance: *to bring forth* literally means 'to produce' (in the etymological sense of the Latin *producere*) or 'to bring to light'; since the stone has already been removed during construction, it cannot be a question of its "production" in the sense of "manufacturing" on the day the work is completed; However, as it has been thrown 'among the rubble', it is a question of bringing it back to light, to place it in a visible position at the top of the building, so that it becomes the 'cornerstone'; thus, '*to bring forth*' is opposed here to '*to heave over*'.

around which the entire structure is organised. The crowning nature of the "axial pillar", present only in an "ideal" form, is particularly evident in cases where the "keystone" descends in the form of a "corbel" towards the interior of the building, without being visibly supported by anything at its base⁴⁹⁵; the entire construction has its origin in this pillar, and all its various parts ultimately come together at its "summit", which is the top of this same pillar and the "keystone" or "cornerstone"⁴⁹⁶.

The actual interpretation of the "cornerstone" as the "summit stone" seems to have been fairly common knowledge in the Middle Ages, as is clearly shown in an illustration from the *Speculum Humanae Salvationis* reproduced here (fig. 14)⁴⁹⁷; this book was widely circulated, as several hundred manuscripts still exist; the illustration shows two masons holding a trowel in one hand and the stone they are about to place on top of a building (apparently a church tower, whose summit is to be completed by that stone) in the other, leaving no doubt as to its meaning. It should be noted, with regard to this figure, that the stone in question, as a "keystone" or in any other similar function, depending on the structure of the building it is intended to "crown", cannot, due to its very shape, be placed anywhere but at the top (without which, moreover, it could obviously fall inside the building); thus, it represents in a certain way the "stone that fell from heaven", an expression perfectly applicable to Christ⁴⁹⁸, which recalls

⁴⁹⁴*Staurós* also means 'cross', and it is well known that, in Christian symbolism, the cross is assimilated to the 'Axis of the World'; Coomaraswamy links this term with the Sanskrit *sthāvara*, 'firm' or 'stable', which, in effect, is appropriate for a pillar and, moreover, corresponds exactly to the meaning of 'stability' given to the combination of the names of the two columns of Solomon's Temple.

⁴⁹⁵ It is the summit of the 'axial pillar', which corresponds, as we have said, to the upper tip of the *alif* in literal Arabic symbolism; let us also remember, with regard to the terms *keystone* and 'key of the vault', that the symbol itself of the 'key' also has an 'axial' meaning.

⁴⁹⁶Coomaraswamy recalls the symbolic identity between the roof (particularly a vaulted roof) and the parasol; we would also add, in this regard, that the Chinese symbol for the "Great Ultimate" (*T'ai-ki*) literally designates a "highest point" or a "summit": it is, properly speaking, the summit of the "roof of the world".

⁴⁹⁷*Munich manuscript*, column 146, fol. 35 (Lutz and Perdrizet, II, plate 64): the photograph was provided to us by A. K. Coomaraswamy; it has been reproduced in the *Art Bulletin*, XVII, p. 450 and fig. 20, by Erwin Panofski, who considers this illustration to be the closest to the prototype and, in this regard, refers to *the lapis in caput anguli* ['the stone at the head of the angle'] as a *keystone*; it could also be said, in accordance with our previous explanations, that this figure represents *the bringing forth of the copestone*.

⁴⁹⁸In this regard, a link could be established between the 'stone descended from heaven' and the 'bread descended from heaven', as there are important symbolic relationships between stone and bread; but this goes beyond the scope of our current topic; in all cases, the "descent from heaven" naturally represents the *avatāra* ['descent' or appearance of the Avatāra].

also the stone of the *Grail* (Wolfram von Eschenbach's *lapis ex illis*, which can be interpreted as *lapis ex caelis*)⁴⁹⁹. Furthermore, there is another important point to note: Erwin Panofsky has pointed out that this same illustration shows the stone as a diamond-shaped object (which also links it to the Stone of *the Grail*, as this is also described as faceted); this issue deserves more detailed examination, because, although such a representation is far from being the most common case, it is linked to aspects of the complex symbolism of the "cornerstone" that are different from those we have studied so far, and no less interesting in highlighting its links with traditional symbolism as a whole.

However, before we get to that, we need to clarify a secondary issue: we have just said that the 'keystone' may not be a 'keystone' in all cases, and indeed it is not, except in a building whose upper part is dome-shaped; in any other case, for example that of a building crowned by a pointed or tent-shaped roof, there is still a "top stone" which, placed at the summit, plays the same role in this respect as the "keystone" and, consequently,

⁴⁹⁹ Cf. also the symbolic stone of the *Etoile Internelle* ['inner star'] mentioned by L. Charbonneau-Lassay, which, like the emerald of *the Grail*, is a faceted stone; this stone, in the cup where it is placed, corresponds exactly to the 'jewel in the lotus' (*mani padme*) of *Mahayana* Buddhism.



Fig. 14

It also corresponds to this from a symbolic point of view, although it is not possible to designate it by that name; the same can be said of the special case of *the pyramidion*, to which we have already referred on another occasion. It should be made clear that, in the symbolism of medieval builders, which is based on Judeo-Christian tradition and linked to the construction of Solomon's Temple as its prototype⁵⁰⁰, the 'cornerstone' is a 'keystone'; and, while the exact shape of Solomon's Temple may have given rise to debate from a historical point of view, it is certain, in any case, that its shape was not that of a pyramid; these are facts that must necessarily be taken into account in the interpretation of biblical texts referring to the 'cornerstone'⁵⁰¹. *The pyramidion*, that is, the stone that forms

⁵⁰⁰ The 'legends' of *the Compagnonnage* [a medieval craft guild, related to Freemasonry], in all its branches, attest to this, as do the 'survivals' of ancient operative masonry, which we have considered here.

⁵⁰¹ Thus, it could in no way be, as some claim, an allusion to an incident that occurred during the construction of the "Great Pyramid" and as a result of which it would have remained unfinished, which, moreover, is a highly dubious hypothesis in itself and a probably insoluble historical question; moreover, this "incompleteness" would be in direct contradiction with the symbolism according to which the stone that had been rejected finally takes its eminent place as the "cornerstone".

The top of the pyramid is by no means a "keystone"; nevertheless, it is still the "crown" of the building, and it should be noted that it reproduces its entire shape in a reduced form, as if the entire structure were synthesised in that single stone. The expression 'cornerstone', in the literal sense, suits it perfectly, as does the figurative sense of the Hebrew name for 'angle' to designate the 'head' or 'leader', all the more so as the pyramid, starting from the multiplicity of the base and gradually culminating in the unity of the apex, is often taken as the symbol of a hierarchy. On the other hand, according to what we have explained above about the apex and the four angles of the base in connection with the meaning of the Arabic word *rūkn*, it could be said that the shape of the pyramid is implicitly contained in every architectural structure; the "solar" symbolism of this shape, which we have indicated on that occasion, is even more particularly expressed in the *pyramidion*, as shown by various archaeological descriptions cited by Coomaraswamy: the central point or apex corresponds to the sun itself, and the four faces (each between two extreme "rays" that delimit the domain represented by it) correspond to as many secondary aspects of the sun itself, in relation to the four cardinal points, towards which the four faces are respectively oriented. Despite all this, it is no less true that the *pyramidal capstone* is only a particular case of a "cornerstone" and does not represent it except in a special traditional form, that of the ancient Egyptians; in order to respond to the Judeo-Christian symbolism of this stone, which undoubtedly belongs to another traditional form very different from that, it lacks an essential characteristic, which is that of being a "keystone".

That said, we can return to the diamond-shaped representation of the 'cornerstone': A. Coomaraswamy, in the article we have referred to, starts from an observation made regarding the German term *Eckstein*, which means both 'cornerstone' and 'diamond'⁵⁰²; and in this regard, he recalls the symbolic meanings of *the vajra*, which we have already considered on several occasions: in general, the stone or metal considered to be the hardest and most brilliant has been taken, in different traditions, as a 'symbol of indestructibility, invulnerability, stability, light and immortality'; and, in particular, these qualities are very often attributed to the diamond. The idea of 'indestructibility' or

⁵⁰²Stoudt, "*Consider the lilies, how they grow*", regarding the significance of a diamond-shaped ornamental motif, explained by writings that refer to Christ as the *Eckstein*. The double meaning of the word can be plausibly explained, from an etymological point of view, by the fact that it can be understood both as "cornerstone" and as "stone with corners", i.e. faceted; but, of course, this explanation in no way detracts from the symbolic value indicated by the combination of both meanings in the same word.

"Indivisibility" (the two being closely linked and expressed in Sanskrit by the same word, *ākshara*) clearly applies to the stone that represents the single principle of the building (since true unity is essentially indivisible); "stability", which, in architectural terms, applies properly to a pillar, is equally appropriate to that same stone considered as the capital of the "axial pillar", which in turn symbolises the "Axis of the World"; and this, which Plato in particular describes as a "diamond axis", is also, on the other hand, a "pillar of light" (as a symbol of *Agni* and as a "sunbeam"); with even greater reason, this latter quality applies ("eminently", one might say) to its "crown", which represents the very source from which it emanates as a ray of light⁵⁰³. In Hindu and Buddhist symbolism, everything that has a "central" or "axial" significance is generally assimilated to the diamond (for example, in expressions such as *vajrāsana*, 'diamond throne'); and it is easy to see that all these associations are part of a tradition that can truly be called universal.

There is more: the diamond is considered the "precious stone" par excellence; and this "precious stone" is also, as such, a symbol of Christ, who is identified here with his other symbol, the "cornerstone"; or, if you prefer, both symbols are thus united in one. It could then be said that this stone, insofar as it represents a "completion" or "fulfilment"⁵⁰⁴, is, in the language of Hindu tradition, a *chintāmani*, which is equivalent to the Western alchemical expression "philosopher's stone"⁵⁰⁵; and it is very significant in this regard that Christian Hermeticists often speak of Christ as the true "philosopher's stone," no less than as the "cornerstone"⁵⁰⁶. We are thus led back to what we said earlier, on the occasion of the two meanings in which the Arabic expression *rukn el-arkān* can be understood, on the

⁵⁰³ The uncut diamond naturally has eight angles, and the sacrificial post (*yūpa*) must be carved "in eight angles" (*ashtācṛi*) to represent the *vajra* (which is understood here in its other meaning of 'lightning'); the Pali word *attansa*, literally 'eight-angled', means both 'diamond' and 'pillar'.

⁵⁰⁴ From a 'constructive' point of view, it is the 'perfection' of the architect's plan; from an alchemical point of view, it is the 'perfection' or ultimate goal of the 'Great Work'; there is an exact correspondence between the two.

⁵⁰⁵ Diamonds among stones and gold among metals are the most precious, and they also have a 'luminous' and 'solar' character; but diamonds, like the 'philosopher's stone', to which they are assimilated here, are considered even more precious than gold.

⁵⁰⁶ The symbolism of the "cornerstone" is expressly mentioned, for example, in various passages from the hermetic works of Robert Fludd, quoted by A. E. Waite, *The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, pp. 27-28; on the other hand, it should be noted that these passages contain the confusion with the "foundation stone" that we mentioned at the beginning, and what the author who quotes them says on his own account about the "cornerstone" in various places in the same book is not very helpful in clarifying the point, and can only contribute to maintaining the confusion indicated.

correspondence between architectural and alchemical symbolism; and, to conclude this lengthy but undoubtedly incomplete study with a very general observation, as the subject is one of those that are almost inexhaustible, we can add that this correspondence is, in essence, nothing more than a particular case of what exists analogously, although perhaps not always so obviously, between all the sciences and all the traditional arts, since in reality they are all different expressions and applications of the same truths of a fundamental and universal nature.

XLIV

"LAPSIT EXILLIS" ⁵⁰⁷

Speaking of the symbolism of the "cornerstone", we have had occasion to mention Wolfram von Eschenbach's *"lapsit exillis"* in passing; it may be of interest to return to this subject in more detail, given the many connections it gives rise to. In its strange form ⁵⁰⁸, this enigmatic expression may have more than one meaning: it is certainly, first and foremost, a kind of phonetic contraction of *lapis lapsus ex caelis*, 'the stone fallen from the heavens'; moreover, this stone, by virtue of its very origin, is as if 'in exile' in its earthly dwelling place, from where, according to various traditions concerning this stone or its equivalents, it must ultimately return to the heavens. With regard to the symbolism of the Grail, it is important to note that, although it is most commonly described as a cup, and this is its best-known form, it is also sometimes described as a stone, as is particularly the case in Wolfram von Eschenbach; on the other hand, it can be both at the same time, for it is said that the cup was carved from a precious stone which, having fallen from Lucifer's forehead when he fell, is also "fallen from the heavens"⁵¹¹.

Furthermore, what seems to increase the complexity of the symbolism, but in reality may provide the "key" to certain connections, is the following: as we have already explained elsewhere, if the Grail is a cup (*grasale*), it is also a book (*gradale* or *graduale*); and in certain versions of the legend, it is not exactly a book as such, but rather an inscription traced on the cup by an angel or by Christ himself. Now, inscriptions of equally "non-

⁵⁰⁷ [Published in *É. T.*, August 1946].

⁵⁰⁸ A. E. Waite, in his work *The Holy Grail*, gives the variants *lapis exilis* and *lapis exilix*, as it seems that the spelling differs depending on the manuscript; He also points out that, according to the *Rosarium Philosophorum*, which quotes Arnaldo de Vilanova on this subject, *lapis exilis* was one of the names given by alchemists to the 'philosopher's stone', which naturally relates to the considerations set out at the end of the previous study.

⁵⁰⁹ *Lapis exilii* or *lapis exsulis*, according to the interpretations suggested by Waite as possible in this regard.

⁵¹⁰ We do not believe that the Latin word *exilis* should be taken literally in the sense of 'thin' or 'tenuous', unless, perhaps, one wishes to link it to some idea referring to 'subtle'.

⁵¹¹ Regarding the symbolism of the Grail, see *Le Roi du Monde*, chapter V. We should also recall in this regard the symbol of the *Estoile Internelle*, in which the cup and the gem are united, even though in this case they are distinct from one another.

"human" also appear in certain circumstances in the *lapsit exillis*⁵¹²; this was, therefore, a "talking stone", that is to say, if you like, an 'oracular stone', for if a stone can 'speak' by producing sounds, it can also do so (like the turtle shell in Far Eastern tradition) by means of characters or figures displayed on its surface. Now, it is also very noteworthy from this point of view that biblical tradition mentions an 'oracular cup', that of Joseph⁵¹³, which could, at least in this respect, be considered one of the forms of the Grail itself; and, curiously, it is said that another Joseph, Joseph of Arimathea, became the owner or guardian of the Grail and brought it from the East to Britain; it is surprising that no attention seems to have ever been paid to these "coincidences", which are nevertheless highly significant⁵¹⁴.

To return to *the lapsit exillis*, we should point out that some have linked it to the *Lia Fail* or 'stone of destiny'; in fact, this was also a 'talking stone' and, moreover, could be in a sense a 'stone from the heavens', since, according to Irish legend, the *Tuatha de Danann* brought it with them from their first dwelling place, which is said to have been 'heavenly' or at least 'paradisical'. It is well known that *Lia Fail* was the stone of consecration for the ancient kings of Ireland, and later for those of England, having been taken by Edward I, according to the most commonly accepted opinion, to Westminster Abbey; but what may seem at least singular is that, on the other hand, this same stone has been identified with the one Jacob consecrated in Beyt-el⁵¹⁵. That is not all: according to Hebrew tradition, Jacob's stone also seems to have been the one that followed the Israelites through the

⁵¹²As in the "black stone" of Urga, which must have been, like all "black stones" in all traditions, a meteorite, that is, also a "stone fallen from the sky" (see *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. I).

⁵¹³ *Genesis*, XLIV, 5.

⁵¹⁴ The "oracular cup" is, in a way, the prototype of "magic mirrors," and in this regard we must make an important observation: the purely "magical" interpretation, which reduces symbols to a purely "divinatory" or "talismanic" character, depending on the case, marks a certain stage in the process of degradation of these symbols, or rather in the way they are understood, a stage which is, moreover, less advanced — since, despite everything, it still refers to a traditional science — than the entirely profane deviation that attributes to them only a purely "aesthetic" value; it should be added, moreover, that it is only under the cover of this 'magical' interpretation that certain symbols can be preserved and transmitted, in a state of 'folkloric' survival. Regarding the "divining cup," let us also point out that the vision of all things as present, if understood in its true sense (the only one to which the "infallibility" expressly mentioned in Joseph's case can be attributed), is clearly related to the symbolism of the "third eye," and therefore also with that of the stone that fell from Lucifer's forehead, where it occupied the place of the third eye. Moreover, it was also because of his fall that man himself lost the "third eye", that is, the "sense of eternity", which the Grail restores to those who manage to conquer it.

⁵¹⁵Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. IX.

desert and from which flowed the water they drank⁵¹⁶, a stone which, according to St Paul's interpretation, was none other than Christ himself⁵¹⁷; it would later become the *setiyáh* or 'foundation' stone placed in the Temple of Jerusalem beneath the site of the Ark of the Covenant⁵¹⁸, thus symbolically marking the 'centre of the world', as did, in another traditional form, the Delphic *Omphalos*⁵¹⁹; and, since these identifications are clearly symbolic, it can be said with certainty that all of this refers, in fact, to one and the same stone.

It should be noted, however, with regard to "constructive" symbolism, that the foundation stone just mentioned should not be confused in any way with the "cornerstone", since the latter is the crowning element of the building, while the former is located at the centre of its base⁵²⁰; and, thus placed in the centre, it also differs from the 'foundation stone' in the ordinary sense of the term, which occupies one of the corners of the same base. We have said that in the base stones of the four corners there was a kind of reflection and participation of the true 'cornerstone' or 'keystone'; here, too, one can speak of a reflection, but it is a more direct relationship than in the previous case, since the "summit stone" and the "foundation stone" in question are located on the same vertical line, so that the second is like the horizontal projection of the first onto the plane of the base⁵²¹; it could be said that this 'foundation stone', while remaining on the same plane as the stones of the four corners, synthesises the partial aspects represented by them (this partial character being expressed by the obliquity of the lines that join them to the summit

⁵¹⁶ *Exodus*, XVII, 5. The drink given by this stone should be related to the food provided by the Grail considered as a "cup of abundance".

⁵¹⁷ I *Corinthians*, X, 4. Note the relationship between Jacob's anointing of the stone, that of kings at the moment of their consecration, and the character of Christ or the Messiah, who is, properly speaking, the 'Anointed One' par excellence. [*Khristós* is the Greek translation of the Hebrew *Mashiah*, 'anointed one'].

⁵¹⁸ In the symbolism of the *Sefirot*, this "foundation stone" corresponds to *Yesod* ["foundation"]; the "cornerstone", to which we shall return shortly, corresponds to *Keter* ["crown"].

⁵¹⁹ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. IX. The *Omphalos* is, moreover, a "betyl", a designation identical to *Beyt-el* or 'house of God'.

⁵²⁰ As this 'foundation stone' is not a cornerstone, its location, at least in this respect, cannot give rise to confusion, and therefore we have not needed to discuss it in relation to the 'cornerstone'.

⁵²¹ This corresponds to what we have already indicated about the horizontal projection of the pyramid, whose apex is projected at the point of intersection of the diagonals of the base square, that is, at the very centre of this square. In operative masonry, the location of a building was determined, before construction began, by the so-called "five-point method", which consisted of first fixing the four angles where the first four stones were to be placed, and then the centre, that is, since the base was normally square or rectangular, the point of intersection of its diagonals; The stakes marking these five points were called *landmarks*, and this is undoubtedly the first and original meaning of this Masonic term.

of the building). In fact, the 'foundation stone' in the centre and the 'cornerstone' are respectively the base and the top of the axial pillar, whether this is visibly represented or only exists 'ideally'; in the latter case, the 'foundation stone' may be a hearth stone or an altar stone (which, moreover, is in principle the same thing), and in any case corresponds in a certain way to the very 'heart' of the building.

We have said, regarding the "cornerstone", that it represents the "stone that fell from heaven", and we have now seen that the *lapsit exillis* is more properly the "stone that fell from heaven", which, moreover, can also be related to the "stone rejected by the builders", if we consider, from a cosmic point of view, those builders as Angels or *Devas*⁵²²; but, since not every "descent" is necessarily a "fall"⁵²³, a certain difference must be established between the two expressions. In any case, the idea of "fall" could not be applied in any way when the "cornerstone" occupies its definitive position at the summit⁵²⁴; one can still speak of a "descent" if the building refers to a larger complex (this in correspondence with the fact, which we have already pointed out, that the stone can only be placed from above); but if we consider only the building itself and the symbolism of its various parts, that position can be called "celestial", since the base and the roof correspond respectively, in terms of their "cosmic model", to the earth and the sky. Now we must add, and with this observation we will conclude, that everything located on the axis, at different levels, can be considered in a certain way as a representation of the different situations of one and the same thing, situations that are in turn related to different conditions of a being or a world, depending on whether the 'microcosmic' or 'macrocosmic' point of view is adopted; and, in this regard, we will only indicate, as it applies to human beings, that the relationships between the "foundation stone" at the centre and the "cornerstone" at the summit do not

⁵²²These should be considered as working under the direction of *Viçvakarma*, who is, as we have explained on other occasions, the same as the "Great Architect of the Universe" (cf. especially *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. III).

⁵²³ It goes without saying that this observation applies above all to the "descent" of *the Avatara*, although his presence in the earthly world may also be like an "exile", albeit only in outward appearance.

⁵²⁴ It could only apply when, before being put in place, that same stone was considered in its state of "rejection".

⁵²⁵See "Le Symbolisme du Dôme" [here chap. XXXIX: "The Symbolism of the Dome"], and also *La Grande Triade*, chap. XIV.

They bear some connection to what we have said elsewhere about the different "locations" of *the lûz* or "core of immortality" ⁽⁵²⁶⁾.

⁵²⁶ See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVIII. This relationship with the *lûz* is, moreover, clearly suggested by the connections mentioned above with *Beyt-el* and with the "third eye" (see on this point *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. VII).

XLV

*El-ARKAN*⁵²⁷

To the considerations we have set forth on the "cornerstone," we believe it would be useful to add some additional details on a particular point: the indications we have given on the Arabic term *rukṅ*, "angle" and

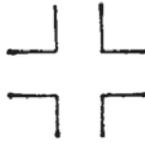


Fig. 15

about their different meanings. In this regard, we propose above all to point out a very notable concordance found in ancient Christian symbolism which, moreover, is clarified, as always, by the connections that can be established with certain data from other traditions. We refer to *the gammadion*, or rather, we should say, the *gammadia*, since this symbol appears in two very distinct forms, although both are generally linked to the same meaning. It owes its name to the fact that the elements that appear in it, in both cases, which are actually squares, are similar in shape to the Greek letter *gamma*⁵²⁸.

The first form of this symbol (fig. 15), sometimes also called the "cross of the Word"⁵²⁹, consists of four squares with their vertices facing the centre; the cross is formed by these squares themselves or, more precisely, by the empty space between their parallel sides, which in a way represents the four

⁵²⁷ [Published in *É. T.*, September 1946].

⁵²⁸ See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. X. As we have pointed out there, these *gammadia* constitute the true "swastika crosses," and it is only among moderns that this designation has been applied to *the swastika*, which can only cause annoying confusion between two entirely different symbols that do not in any way have the same meaning.

⁵²⁹ The reason is undoubtedly in accordance with the general meaning of the symbol, which is considered to be a representation of the Word expressed by the four Gospels; it should be noted that, in this interpretation, the Gospels must be considered as corresponding to four points of view (symbolically related to the "quadrants" of space), whose union is necessary for the integral expression of the Word, just as the four squares that form the cross are joined at their vertices.

roads that start from the centre or lead to it, depending on whether you travel in one direction or the other. Now, this same figure, considered precisely as the representation of a crossroads, is the primitive form of the Chinese character *hsing*, which designates the five elements: in it we see the four regions of space, corresponding to the cardinal points and effectively called "squares" (*fang*)⁵³⁰, around the central region, to which the fifth element corresponds. On the other hand, we must say that these elements, despite a partial similarity in nomenclature⁵³¹, cannot in any way be identified with those of the Hindu tradition and Western antiquity; thus, to avoid any confusion, it would undoubtedly be better, as some have proposed, to translate *hsing* as 'natural agents', since they are properly 'forces' that act on the corporeal world and not constituent elements of those bodies themselves. Nevertheless, it remains true, as can be seen from their respective spatial correspondences, that the five *hsing* can be considered as the *arkans* of this world, just as the elements themselves are also from another point of view, but with a difference in the significance of the central element. Indeed, while ether, not being located on the base plane where the other four elements are found, corresponds to the true 'cornerstone', that of the summit (*rukn el-arkân*), the 'earth' of the Far Eastern tradition must be placed in direct correspondence with the 'foundation stone' of the centre, of which we spoke earlier.

The representation of the five *arkan* appears even more clearly in the other form of the *gammadion* (fig. 16), where four squares, forming the angles (*arkan*, in the literal sense of the term) of a square, surround a cross drawn in the centre of it; the vertices of the squares are then turned outwards, instead of being turned inwards, as in the previous case⁵³². Here, the entire figure can be considered as corresponding to the horizontal projection of a building onto its base plane: the

⁵³⁰ In Far Eastern tradition, the square is essentially the instrument used to "measure the Earth"; cf. *La Grande Triade*, chaps. XV and XVI. It is easy to see the relationship between this figure and that of the square divided into nine parts (*ibid.*, chap. XVI); in fact, to obtain the latter, it is sufficient to join the vertices of the squares and trace the perimeter to frame the central area.

⁵³¹ They are water in the north, fire in the south, wood in the east, metal in the west, and earth in the centre; it can be seen that there are three designations in common with the elements of other traditions, but that earth does not have the same spatial correspondence.

⁵³² On the other hand, it should be noted in this regard that the mound raised in the centre of a region effectively corresponds to the altar or hearth located at the central point of a building.

⁵³³ The vertices of the four squares and the centre of the cross, being the four angles and the centre of the square, respectively, correspond to the 'five points' by which the location of a building is traditionally determined.

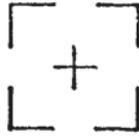


Fig. 16

Four squares then correspond to the foundation stones of the four corners (which, in fact, must be cut "square"), and the cross to the "cornerstone" at the top, which, although not on the same plane, projects onto the centre of the base along the vertical axis. and the symbolic assimilation of Christ to the "cornerstone" further justifies this correspondence.

Indeed, from the point of view of Christian symbolism, both forms of *gammádion* are considered equally as representations of Christ, figured by the cross, in the midst of the four Evangelists, figured by the squares; the whole is therefore equivalent to the well-known figuration of Christ in the midst of the four animals of Ezekiel's vision and of *the Apocalypse*⁵³⁴, which are the most common symbols of the Evangelists⁽⁵³⁵⁾. The assimilation of these to the foundation stones of the four corners is not, moreover, in contradiction with the fact that, on the other hand, St. Peter is expressly designated as the "foundation stone" of the Church; it suffices to see in this the expression of two different points of view, one referring to doctrine and the other to the constitution of the Church; and it is certainly indisputable that, as far as Christian doctrine is concerned, the Evangelists truly and really constitute the foundations.

In Islamic tradition, there is also a similar arrangement, with the name of the Prophet in the centre and those of the first four caliphs in the corners. here too, the Prophet, appearing as *rukn el-arkân*, must be considered, in the same way as Christ in the previous figure, as being on a different level from that of the base and, therefore, also corresponds in reality to the 'cornerstone' at the top. On the other hand, it should be noted that, from the two points of view we have just indicated with regard to Christianity, this figuration directly recalls the one that considers Saint Peter as the 'foundation stone', since it is clear that Saint Peter, as we have already said, is also the *khalîfa*, that is to say,

⁵³⁴ These four symbolic animals also correspond, moreover, to the four *Mahârāja* ['great kings'] who, in Hindu and Tibetan traditions, are the rulers of the cardinal points and the 'quadrants' of space.

⁵³⁵ Ancient Egyptian tradition, according to an entirely analogous arrangement, depicted Horus surrounded by four sons; moreover, in the early days of Christianity, Horus was often taken in Egypt as a symbol of Christ.

the 'vicar' or 'substitute' of Christ. Only in this case, only one 'foundation stone' is considered, that is, the one of the four cornerstones that is placed first, without taking the correspondences any further, whereas the Islamic symbol in question includes all four cornerstones; the reason for this difference is that the first four caliphs do indeed have a special role from the point of view of 'sacred history', whereas in Christianity the first successors of St Peter do not possess any characteristics that could, in a comparable way, clearly distinguish them from all those who followed after them. We would add that, in correspondence with these five *arkàn* manifested in the earthly and human world, Islamic tradition also considers five celestial or angelic *arkàn*, which are *Djibril*, *Rufa'il*, *Mika'il*, *Israfil* and finally *er-Rûh* [respectively: 'Gabriel', 'Raphael', 'Michael', 'Seraphim(?)' and 'the Spirit']; the latter, which, as we have explained on other occasions, is identical to *Metatron*, is also placed on a higher level than the other four, which are like its partial reflections in various less principal or more particularised functions, and, in the celestial world, he is properly *rukn el-arkàn*, the one who occupies, at the boundary separating the *Jalq* ['Creation'] from *el-Haqq* ['the Creator'], the very 'place' through which the exit from the Cosmos can take place.

XLVI

"REUNITE WHAT IS SCATTERED" ⁵³⁶

In one of our works⁵³⁷, on the occasion of the *Ming-tang* and the *Tien-ti Hui*, we quoted a Masonic formula according to which the task of the Masters consists in "spreading the light and gathering what is scattered". In reality, the connection we established at that time referred only to the first part of this formula ⁵³⁸; as for the second part, which may seem more enigmatic, as it has very notable connections in traditional symbolism, we think it interesting to offer some indications in this regard that were not included on that occasion.

To understand this concept as fully as possible, it is necessary to refer first to the Vedic tradition, which is particularly explicit in this regard: according to it, 'the scattered' are the members of the primordial *Purusha* ['Man'], who was divided in the first sacrifice performed by the *Devas* at the beginning, and from whom, through that very division, all manifested beings were born⁵³⁹. It is clear that this is a symbolic description of the transition from unity to multiplicity, without which, in fact, there could be no manifestation whatsoever; and it can already be seen that the "reunion of the scattered", or the reconstitution of *the Purusha* as it was "before the beginning", if one may express it thus, that is, in the state of non-manifestation, is nothing other than the return to the principal unity. This *Purusha* is identical to *Prajapati*, the "Lord of produced beings", all of whom arose from him and are therefore considered, in a certain sense, as his "progeny"⁵⁴⁰; he is also *Viçvakarma*, that is, the "Great Architect of the Universe," and, as such, he himself performs the sacrifice of which he is the victim ⁵⁴¹; and if it is said that he is sacrificed by the *Devas*, this does not really make any difference, for the *Devas* are in short nothing but the "powers" that he carries within himself ⁵⁴².

⁵³⁶ [Published in *É. T.*, October-November 1946].

⁵³⁷ *The Great Triad*, chap. XVI.

⁵³⁸ The motto of the *Tien-ti Hui* referred to there is in fact this: "Destroy darkness (*tsing*), restore light (*ming*)".

⁵³⁹ See *Rg-Veda*, X, 90.

⁵⁴⁰ The Sanskrit word *prāya* is identical to the Latin *progenies*.

⁵⁴¹ In the Christian conception of sacrifice, Christ is both the victim and the priest par excellence.

⁵⁴² Commenting on the passage from the *Rig-Veda* hymn we have mentioned, which states that "through sacrifice the *Devas* offered sacrifice". Śāyana points out that the *Devas* ['gods'] are the forms of the breath (*prāna-rūpa*) of *Prajapati* [the 'Lord of produced beings', that is, the 'Universal Man', determination of the Principle as the creator of the manifested universe]. Cf. what we have said about

We have already said on several occasions that every ritual sacrifice should be considered as an image of that first cosmogonic sacrifice; and also, in every sacrifice, as A. K. Coomaraswamy has pointed out, "the victim, as the *Brāhmaṇas* clearly show, is a representation of the sacrificer, or, as the texts express it, is the sacrificer himself; in accordance with the universal law according to which initiation (*dīkshā*) is a death and a rebirth, it is clear that 'the initiate is the oblation' (*Tattirīya-Sāmhitā*, VI, 1, 4, 5), 'the victim is substantially the sacrificer himself' (*Aitareya-Brāhmaṇa*, II, 11)"⁵⁴³. This brings us directly back to the Masonic symbolism of the Master's degree, in which the initiate is identified, in effect, with the victim; on the other hand, the connections between the legend of Hiram and the myth of Osiris have often been emphasised, so that when it comes to 'gathering what is scattered', one immediately thinks of Isis gathering the scattered limbs of Osiris; but, precisely, at heart, the scattering of Osiris' limbs is the same as that of the limbs of *Purusha* or *Prajapati*: they are, one might say, but two versions of the description of the same cosmogonic process in two different traditional forms. It is true that, in the case of Osiris and Hiram, it is no longer a sacrifice, at least explicitly, but a murder; but this does not introduce any essential change, for it is really the same thing viewed in two complementary aspects: as a sacrifice, in its "deva" aspect, and as a murder, in its "asura" aspect⁵⁴⁴. We merely point this out incidentally, as we could not dwell on it without going into lengthy explanations that are unrelated to our current topic.

Similarly, in Hebrew Kabbalah, although it is no longer strictly speaking a sacrifice or murder, but rather a kind of 'disintegration'—the consequences of which, incidentally, are the same—the fragmentation of the body of *Adam Qadmon* formed the Universe with all the beings it contains, so that these are like parcels of that body, and their 'reintegration' into unity appears as the very reconstitution of *Adam Qadmôn*. This is the 'Universal Man', and *Purusha*, according to one of the meanings of the term, is also the 'Man' par excellence; it is, therefore, exactly the same thing. Let us add,

of angels in "*Monothéisme et Angéologie*" [*E. T.*, October-November 1946. These are, in the Jewish, Christian and Islamic traditions, the exact equivalent of the *Devas* in the Hindu tradition]. It is clear that, in all this, we are always dealing with aspects of the Divine Word, with which the "Universal Man" is ultimately identified.

⁵⁴³ *Atmāyājña*: Self-sacrifice, in the *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, February 1942 issue.

⁵⁴⁴Cf. also, in the Greek mysteries, the death and dismemberment of *Zagreus* by the Titans; it is well known that these constitute the equivalent of the *Asuras* in the Hindu tradition. It may not be useless to point out that, on the other hand, even everyday language applies the term 'victim' in both cases of sacrifice and homicide.

Before going any further, since the degree of Master represents, at least virtually, the end of the "lesser mysteries," what must be considered in this case is properly the reintegration into the centre of the human state; but it is well known that all symbolism is always applicable at different levels, by virtue of the correspondences that exist between them⁵⁴⁵, so that it can refer either to a particular world or to the whole of universal manifestation; and reintegration into the 'primordial state', which is also 'Adamic', constitutes a figure of total and final reintegration, although in reality it is still only a stage on the path leading to it.

In the aforementioned study, A. Coomaraswamy states that "the essential thing in sacrifice is, first, to divide, and second, to reunite"; it therefore involves two complementary phases, "disintegration" and "reintegration", which constitute the whole cosmic process: *Purusha*, "being one, becomes many, and being many, becomes one again". The reconstitution of *Purusha* is performed symbolically, in particular in the construction of the Vedic altar, whose various parts represent all the worlds⁵⁴⁶; and sacrifice, to be performed correctly, requires the cooperation of all the arts, which assimilates the sacrificer to *Viçvakarma* himself⁵⁴⁷. On the other hand, like any ritual action, that is, in short, any truly normal action in accordance with the order (*ṛta*), it can be considered as endowed in a certain way with a "sacrificial" character, according to the etymological meaning of this term (*sacrum facere*), what is valid for the Vedic altar is also valid, in some way and to some degree, for every building constructed according to traditional rules, which always proceed, in reality, from the same "cosmic model", as we have explained on other occasions⁵⁴⁸. This can be seen to be directly related to a 'constructive' symbolism such as that of Freemasonry; and, on the other hand, even in the most immediate sense, the builder effectively gathers the scattered materials to form a building which, if it is truly what it should be, will have an 'organic' unity comparable to that of a living being, if the 'microcosmic' point of view is adopted, or to that of a world, if the 'macrocosmic' point of view is adopted.

⁵⁴⁵Similarly, in alchemical symbolism there is a correspondence between the process of the "white work" and that of the "red work", such that the latter reproduces the former in a certain way at a higher level.

⁵⁴⁶ See "*Iamua caeli*" [here, chap. LVIII].

⁵⁴⁷ Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Hinduism and Buddhism*, p. 26 [cf. p. 71 of the French translation, "Tradition" collection, Gallimard, Paris].

⁵⁴⁸ The rites of foundation of a building generally include, moreover, a sacrifice or an oblation in the strict sense of these terms; even in the West, a certain form of oblation has been maintained to this day in cases where the laying of the foundation stone is performed according to Masonic rites.

We still need to say a few words, in conclusion, about another kind of symbolism, which may seem very different in terms of outward appearances, but which nevertheless has, at its core, an equivalent meaning: it concerns the reconstruction of a word from its literal elements taken separately⁵⁴⁹. To understand this, we must remember that the true name of a being is, from a traditional point of view, nothing other than the expression of its very essence; the reconstruction of the name is therefore, symbolically, the same as that of the being itself. The role played by letters in symbolism such as that of the Kabbalah, in relation to creation or universal manifestation, is also well known; it could be said that the latter is formed by separate letters, which correspond to the multiplicity of elements, and that bringing these letters together reduces it to its Principle, provided that this reunion is carried out in such a way as to effectively reconstitute the name of the Principle⁵⁵⁰. From this point of view, 'bringing together what is scattered' is the same as 'recovering the lost Word', for in reality, and in its deepest sense, that 'lost Word' is nothing other than the true name of the 'Great Architect of the Universe'.

⁵⁴⁹ This corresponds, naturally, in Masonic ritual, to the mode of communication of the "sacred words".

⁵⁵⁰ As long as one remains in the multiplicity of manifestation, it is only possible to "spell out" the name of the Principle by discerning the reflection of its attributes in creatures, where they are expressed only in a fragmentary and scattered manner. The Mason who has not reached the degree of Master is still incapable of "gathering what is scattered," and therefore "only knows how to spell."

XLVII

*BLACK AND WHITE*⁵⁵¹

The Masonic symbol of *the "tessellated pavement"* is one of those that are often insufficiently understood or misinterpreted; this pavement is made up of alternating black and white squares, arranged in exactly the same way as the squares on a chessboard or draughts board. We would add that the symbolism is obviously the same in both cases, since, as we have said on several occasions, games were originally very different from the simple profane distractions they have become today, and, moreover, chess is certainly one of those games in which the vestiges of the original 'sacred' character have remained most evident, despite such degradation.

In the most immediate sense, the juxtaposition of black and white naturally represents light and darkness, day and night, and, consequently, all pairs of opposites or complements (it is hardly necessary to recall that what is opposition at one level becomes complementarity at another, so that the same symbolism is equally applicable to both); in this respect, then, we have the exact equivalent of the Far Eastern symbol of *yin-yang*⁵⁵². It can even be observed that the interpenetration and inseparability of the two aspects, *yin* and *yang*, represented in the latter case by the fact that both halves of the figure are delimited by a sinuous line, are also represented by the checkerboard arrangement of the squares of both colours, whereas another arrangement, for example that of alternating straight black and white bands, would not convey the same idea so clearly, and might even suggest a pure and simple juxtaposition⁵⁵³.

It would be pointless to repeat here all the considerations we have already set out elsewhere about *yin-yang*; we will only recall more specifically that this symbolism, nor the recognition of the cosmic dualities expressed by it, should not be seen as an affirmation of any "dualism", for if such dualities truly and really exist in their order, their terms nevertheless derive from the unity of the same principle (the *T'ai-Ki* of the Far Eastern tradition). This is, in

⁵⁵¹ [Published in *É.T.*, June 1947].

⁵⁵² See *La Grande Triade*, chapter IV. We have had occasion to read an article in which the author referred to the white part as *yin* and the black part as *yang*, when in fact the opposite is true, and he sought to support this erroneous opinion with 'dowsing' experiments. What conclusion can be drawn, if not that in such a case the result obtained is purely and simply due to the influence of the experimenter's preconceived ideas?

⁵⁵³ This latter provision, however, has also been used in certain cases; it is known that it was found, in particular, in the *Beaucéant* of the Knights Templar, where it had the same meaning.

effect, one of the most important points, because it above all gives rise to misinterpretations; some have believed they could speak of "dualism": on the basis of *yin-yang*, probably due to misunderstanding, but perhaps also, at times, with intentions of a more or less suspicious nature; in any case, as far as the "mosaic floor" is concerned, such an interpretation is most often found among the opponents of Freemasonry, who would like to use it as a basis for an accusation of "Manichaeism"⁵⁵⁴. It is certainly possible that certain "dualists" have diverted this symbolism from its true meaning in order to interpret it in accordance with their own doctrines, just as they may have altered, for the same reason, the symbols that express a unity and immutability inconceivable to them; but these are, in any case, nothing more than heterodox deviations that do not affect the symbolism itself in any way, and, when the properly initiatory point of view is adopted, such deviations are not to be considered⁵⁵⁵.

Now, apart from the meaning we have referred to so far, there is also another, more profound meaning, which immediately follows from the double meaning of the colour black, which we have explained on other occasions. We have just considered its lower, cosmological meaning, but we must also consider its higher, metaphysical meaning. A particularly clear example of this can be found in Hindu tradition, where the initiate must sit on a skin with black and white hairs, symbolising respectively the unmanifest and the manifest⁵⁵⁶. The fact that this is essentially an initiatory rite sufficiently justifies the connection with the case of the "mosaic floor" and the express attribution of the same meaning to it, even though, in the current state of affairs, that meaning has been completely forgotten. We thus find a symbolism equivalent to that of *Arjuna*, the

⁵⁵⁴ Such people, if they were logical, should refrain with the utmost care, by virtue of what we said above, from playing chess so as not to run the risk of falling under the same accusation; is not this simple observation enough to show the complete inanity of their arguments?

⁵⁵⁵ We shall also recall, in this regard, what we have said elsewhere on the subject of the 'reversal of symbols', and more particularly the observation we made at the time on the truly diabolical nature of attributing to orthodox symbolism, and in particular to that of initiatory organisations, the reverse interpretation that is in fact characteristic of 'counter-initiation'. (*Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XXX).

⁵⁵⁶ *Çâtâpata-Brâhmana*, III, 2, I, 5-7. On another level, these two colours also represent Heaven and Earth here, but it should be noted that, due to their correspondence with the unmanifested and the manifested, respectively, black refers to heaven and white to earth, so that the relationships existing in the case of *yin-yang* are reversed; this is, moreover, nothing more than an application of the inverse meaning of the analogy. The initiate must touch the meeting place of the black and white hairs, thus uniting the complementary principles from which he will be born as the "Son of Heaven and Earth" (cf. *The Great Triad*, chap. IX).

'white', and *Krishna*, the 'black', which constitute, in being, the mortal and the immortal, the 'I' and the 'Self'⁵⁵⁷; and, since these two are also the 'two inseparably united birds' mentioned in the *Upanishads*, this also evokes another symbol, that of the black and white double-headed eagle that appears in certain high Masonic degrees, a new example which, along with so many others, shows once again that symbolic language is truly universal in nature.

⁵⁵⁷ This symbolism is also that of the Dioscuri; their relationship with the two hemispheres or the two halves of the 'World Egg' brings us back, on the other hand, to the consideration of heaven and earth to which we referred in the previous note (cf. *La Grande Triade*, chap. V).

XLVIII

BLACK STONE AND CUBIC STONE ⁵⁵⁸

We have occasionally had to point out the various linguistic fantasies to which the name Cibeles has given rise; we will not return to them, as they are clearly devoid of any foundation and are due solely to the excessive imagination of some⁵⁵⁹, and we will only address some connections that may seem more serious at first glance, even though they are equally unjustified. Thus, we have recently seen the assumption that Cybele [*Kybelê*] "seems to take her name" from the Arabic *qubbah*, because she "was worshipped in caves" due to her "chthonic" nature. This supposed etymology has two flaws, either of which would be enough to dismiss it: first, like another we will discuss shortly, it only takes into account the first two letters [consonants] of the root of the name Cybele, which contains three, and it goes without saying that the third letter is no less significant than the others; moreover, this hypothesis is based on nothing more than a pure and simple contradiction. In fact, *qubbah* has never meant "vault, vaulted room, crypt", as the author of the hypothesis believes; that word designates a dome or cupola, whose symbolism is precisely "celestial" and not "terrestrial", and therefore exactly opposite to the character attributed to Cybele or the "Great Mother". As we have explained in other studies, the dome crowns a building with a square base, and therefore generally cubic in shape, and it is this square or cubic part that, in the whole thus constituted, has an 'earthly' symbolism; This leads us directly to examine another hypothesis that has been formulated quite often about the origin of the name Cybele, a hypothesis of particular importance for what we are currently proposing.

Some have sought to derive *Kybelê* from *kybos*, and this, at least, is not as nonsensical as the previous suggestion; however, this etymology shares with the previous one the flaw of considering only the first two of the three letters that make up the root of *Kybelê*, which makes it equally impossible from a strictly linguistic point of view⁵⁶⁰. If one wishes to see only

⁵⁵⁸ [Published in *É. T.*, December 1947].

⁵⁵⁹ We will not refer, therefore, to the assimilation of Cybele to a "*cavale*" ["mare"], nor to the relationship that has been sought with the designation of "cavalry", nor to another, no less imaginary, with the "Kabbalah".

⁵⁶⁰Incidentally, we would point out in this regard that it is highly doubtful, despite an exact synonymy and partial phonetic similarity, that there could be any real linguistic relationship between the Greek *Kybos* ['cube'] and the Arabic *Ka'b* [idem], due to the presence of the letter 'ayn in the latter; as this letter has no equivalent in European languages and cannot actually be transcribed [with a value

certain phonetic similarity that may have, as is often the case, some value from a symbolic point of view, it is quite another matter; but, before studying this point more closely, we will say that, in reality, the name Cybele is not of Greek origin, and that its true etymology is, moreover, neither enigmatic nor doubtful. This name is directly linked to the Hebrew *gebal*, Arabic *djābal*, 'mountain'; the difference in the first consonant cannot give rise to any objection in this regard, since the change from *g* to *k* or vice versa is only a secondary modification of which many other examples can be found⁵⁶¹. Thus, Cybele is properly the 'goddess of the mountain'⁵⁶²; and, very noteworthy, her name, because of this meaning, is the exact equivalent of that of *Pārvatī* in the Hindu tradition.

This same meaning of the name Cybele is clearly linked to that of the "black stone" which was her symbol; indeed, it is well known that this stone was conical in shape and, like all "betyls" of the same shape, should be considered a reduced representation of the mountain as an "axial" symbol. On the other hand, since the "sacred stones" were meteorites, this celestial origin suggests that the "chthonic" character we referred to at the beginning does not actually correspond to anything other than one of the aspects of Cybele; moreover, the axis represented by the mountain is not 'terrestrial', but links heaven with earth; and we would add that, symbolically, the fall of the 'black stone' and its final ascent must take place along this axis, as this also concerns the relationship between heaven and earth⁵⁶³. This is not, of course, to deny that Cybele was often assimilated to 'Mother Earth', but only to indicate that she also had other aspects; on the other hand, it is quite possible that the more or less complete oblivion of the latter, as a result of the predominance given to the 'earthly' aspect, has

assimilable to any Latin letter], Westerners often forget or omit it, which results in numerous erroneous assimilations between words whose respective roots are clearly different.

⁵⁶¹ Thus, the Hebrew and Arabic word *kabīr* is clearly related to the Hebrew *gibbor* and the Arabic *djabbār*; it is true that the former has the meaning of 'great' and the latter two have the meaning of 'strong', but this is only a slight nuance; the *Gibborim* of *Genesis* are both 'giants' and 'strong men'.

⁵⁶² Let us note, in passing, that *gebal* was also the name of the Phoenician city of Byblos; its inhabitants were called *giblīm*, a name that remained as a "watchword" in Freemasonry. In this regard, there is a connection that seems to have never been noticed; whatever the historical origin of the name "Ghibellines" (*ghibellini*) in the Middle Ages, it bears a remarkable similarity to the name *giblīm*, and even if it is nothing more than a "coincidence", it is still quite curious.

⁵⁶³ See especially "*Lapsit exillis*" [here, chap. XLIV]. There is a tradition in India according to which the mountains once flew; *Indra* brought them down to earth, where he fixed them in place by striking them with lightning; this is also clearly related to the origin of the "black stones".

This has given rise to certain confusions, particularly that which has led to the assimilation of the "black stone" with the "cubic stone", which are, however, two very different symbols⁵⁶⁴.

The "cubic stone" is essentially a "foundation stone"; it is therefore certainly "earthly", as indicated by its shape, and, moreover, the idea of "stability" expressed by that very shape⁵⁶⁵ fits perfectly with Cybele's role as "Mother Earth", that is, as a representation of the "substantial" principle of universal manifestation. Therefore, from a symbolic point of view, Cybele's relationship with the "cube" is not to be entirely rejected, insofar as it is a phonetic "convergence"; but, of course, that is no reason to derive an "etymology" or to identify the "cubic stone" with a "black stone" that was, in reality, conical. There is only one particular case in which there is a certain relationship between the 'black stone' and the 'cubic stone': that in which the latter is no longer one of the 'foundation stones' located at the four corners of a building, but the *shetiyáh* ['fundamental'] stone that occupies the centre of the base of the building, corresponding to the point of fall of the 'black stone', as well as, on the same vertical axis but at its opposite end, the 'cornerstone' or 'summit stone', which, on the contrary, is not cubic in shape, corresponding to the initial and final 'celestial' position of the 'black stone' itself. We will not dwell on these latter considerations, as we have already discussed them in more detail⁵⁶⁶; and we will only recall, in conclusion, that, in general, the symbolism of the "black stone", with the different locations and forms it can take, is related, from the "microcosmic" point of view, to the various "locations" of *the lúz* or "core of immortality" in the human being.

⁵⁶⁴We have pointed out in a review [*É.T.*, January-February 1946] the incredible assumption that there was a supposed "goddess *Ka'bah*", represented by the "black stone" of Mecca that would bear that name; this is another example of the same confusion, and we were subsequently surprised to read the same thing elsewhere, from which it appears that this error is prevalent in certain Western circles. We would therefore like to point out that the *Ka'bah* is by no means the name of the "black stone", since the latter is not cubic, but rather the name of the building in one of whose corners it is embedded and which is indeed cube-shaped; and, although the *Ka'bah* is also *Beyt Alláh* ('House of God', like the *Beyt-el* of *Genesis*), it has never been considered a deity in itself. On the other hand, it is very likely that the singular invention of the supposed 'goddess *Ka'bah*' was suggested by the connection, which we mentioned earlier, with *Kybelê* and *Kybos*.

⁵⁶⁵ See *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des des temps*. Chapter IX.

⁵⁶⁶ See "Lapsit exillis" [here, chap. XLIV].

XLIX

*UNHEWN STONE AND HEWN STONE*⁵⁶⁷

In an article discussing altars among the ancient Hebrews, which had to be built exclusively from rough stone, we read this rather astonishing sentence: "The symbolism of rough stone has been altered by Freemasonry, which has transposed it from the sacred realm to the profane level; a symbol, originally intended to express the supernatural relations of the soul with the 'living' and 'personal' God, now expresses realities of an alchemical, moralising, social and occult nature." The author of these lines, according to everything we know about him, is one of those in whom prejudice can easily lead to bad faith; that an initiatory organisation has brought a symbol down to the 'profane level' is so absurd and contradictory that we do not believe anyone can seriously maintain it; and, on the other hand, the insistence on the terms 'living' and 'personal' clearly shows a determined intention to limit the 'sacred domain' to the sole point of view of religious exotericism. That the vast majority of Freemasons today no longer understand the true meaning of their symbols, just as the majority of Christians do not understand theirs, is a very different matter; how can Freemasonry, or the Church, be held responsible for such a state of affairs, due solely to the conditions of the modern world, for which both institutions are equally 'anachronistic' because of their traditional character? The 'moralising' tendency, which has indeed been very real since the 18th century, was in short an almost inevitable consequence, if we take into account the mentality and 'speculative' degradation on which we have so often insisted. The same can be said of the excessive importance attributed to the social point of view, and, moreover, in this respect, Freemasons are far from being an exception in our time: examine impartially what is taught today in the name of the Church. And tell us if it is possible to find anything other than simple moral and social considerations. To conclude these observations, it is hardly necessary to emphasise the impropriety, probably deliberate, of the term "occultist", since Freemasonry certainly has nothing to do with occultism, which predates it, even in its "speculative" form; as for alchemical symbolism, or, more accurately, hermetic symbolism, it certainly has nothing profane about it and refers, as we have explained elsewhere, to the domain of the "lesser mysteries", which is precisely the domain of craft initiations in general and Freemasonry in particular.

⁵⁶⁷ [Published in *É. T.*, September 1949].

We have not quoted this phrase simply to make this point, necessary though it may be, but above all because we felt it provided an opportunity to offer some useful clarifications on the symbolism of rough stone and carved stone. It is true that in Freemasonry, rough stone has a different meaning than in the case of Hebrew altars, with which megalithic monuments are associated; but if this is so, it is because that meaning does not refer to the same type of tradition. This is easy to understand for all those who are familiar with our explanations of the essential differences that exist, in a very general way, between the traditions of nomadic peoples and those of sedentary peoples⁵⁶⁸; and, on the other hand, when Israel passed from the first of these states to the second, the prohibition on erecting carved stone buildings disappeared, because it no longer had any reason to exist, as evidenced by the construction of Solomon's Temple, which was undoubtedly not a profane undertaking and to which, at least symbolically, the very origin of Freemasonry is linked. It matters little in this regard that the altars had to remain made of rough stone, as this is a very particular case, for which the primitive symbolism could be preserved without inconvenience, while it is clearly impossible to construct even the most modest building with such stones. Furthermore, the fact that "nothing metallic can be found" on these altars, as the author of the article in question also points out, refers to another order of ideas, which we have also explained, and which is also found in Freemasonry itself, with the symbol of the "stripping of metals".

Now, there is no doubt that, by virtue of cyclical laws, 'prehistoric' peoples, such as those who erected megalithic monuments, whatever they may have been, were necessarily in a state closer to the beginning than the peoples who succeeded them; nor is there any doubt that this state could not be perpetuated indefinitely, but that the changes that occurred in the conditions of humanity at different times in its history required successive adaptations of tradition, which could even occur in the course of the existence of the same people without there being any break in continuity, as shown by the example of the Hebrews, which we have just cited. On the other hand, it is equally true, as we have pointed out elsewhere, that among sedentary peoples the replacement of wooden constructions by stone ones corresponds to a more accentuated degree of 'solidification', in accordance with the stages of cyclical 'descent'; but since this mode of construction was made necessary by new environmental conditions, it was necessary in a traditional civilisation that it receive from tradition itself, through appropriate rites and symbols, the consecration without which it could not be legitimate or integrated into that

⁵⁶⁸ [See *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chapters XXI and XXII].

civilisation, and that is precisely why we have talked about adaptation in this regard. Such legitimisation implied that of all crafts and trades, beginning with the carving of the stones required for these constructions, and could not be truly effective unless the exercise of each of these crafts was linked to a corresponding initiation, since, according to the traditional conception, such craftsmanship had to represent the regular application of principles in their contingent order. This was always the case everywhere, except, of course, in the modern Western world, whose civilisation has lost all traditional character, and this is true not only of the crafts of construction, which we are considering here in particular, but also of all the others whose constitution was equally made necessary by certain conditions of time and place; and it is important to note that this legitimisation, with all that it implies, was always possible in all cases, except for purely mechanical trades, which originated only in the modern era. Now, for stonemasons and for the builders who used the products of that work, rough stone could only represent undifferentiated 'raw material', or 'chaos', with all its microcosmic and macrocosmic correspondences, whereas, on the contrary, stone that was completely carved on all sides represented the fulfilment or perfection of the 'work'. This explains the difference between the symbolic meaning of rough stone in cases such as megalithic monuments and primitive altars, and that of the same rough stone in Freemasonry. We would add, without being able to dwell on it here, that this difference corresponds to a dual aspect of the 'raw material', depending on whether it is considered as the 'universal Virgin' or as the 'chaos' that is at the origin of all manifestation; in the Hindu tradition as well, *Prākṛti*, while being the pure potentiality that literally underlies all existence, is also an aspect of *Çakti*, or the "Divine Mother"; and, of course, the two points of view are in no way mutually exclusive, which, moreover, justifies the coexistence of rough stone altars with carved stone buildings. These brief considerations show once again that, when interpreting symbols as with anything else, it is always necessary to know how to place everything in its exact place, without which one risks falling into the most gross errors.

AXIAL SYMBOLISM AND SYMBOLISM OF PASSAGE

L

*THE SYMBOLS OF ANALOGY*⁵⁶⁹

It may seem strange to some to speak of symbols of analogy, since, if symbolism itself is based on analogy, as is often said, every symbol, whatever it may be, must be the expression of an analogy; but this way of looking at things is not accurate: what symbols are based on, in the most general sense, are the correspondences that exist between different orders of reality, but not all correspondences are analogical. Here we understand analogy exclusively in its most rigorous sense, that is, according to the hermetic formula, as the relationship between 'that which is below' and 'that which is above', a relationship which, as we have often explained on the many occasions when we have had occasion to consider it, essentially implies the application of the 'reverse meaning' of its two terms; this application is, moreover, so clear and manifest in the symbols we are going to discuss that it is surprising that it has so often gone unnoticed, even by those who claim to refer to these symbols, but who thereby show their inability to understand and interpret them correctly.

The construction of the symbols in question is based on the figure of the six-spoked wheel; as we have already said, the wheel in general is above all a symbol of the world, the circumference representing the manifestation produced by the spokes emanating from the centre; but, naturally, the number of spokes drawn, which varies according to the case, adds other more specific meanings. On the other hand, in certain derived symbols, the circumference itself may not be depicted; but, for their geometric construction, they cannot fail to be considered as inscribed in a circumference, and for this reason they must be associated with that of the wheel, even if the outer form of the latter, that is, the circumference that determines its outline and its limit, does not appear explicitly and visibly, which only indicates that attention should not be focused in such a case on the manifestation itself and on the special domain in which it develops, a domain that in such a case remains in a certain way in a state of indeterminacy prior to the actual drawing of the circumference.

The simplest figure, and the basis of all the others, is that constituted solely by the set of six rays; these, opposed two by two from the centre, form three diameters, one vertical and the other two oblique and of equal inclination on either side of the first. If the sun is considered to occupy the centre, these are the six rays of

⁵⁶⁹ [Published in *É.T.*, January 1939].

which we discussed in a previous study⁵⁷⁰; and in this case, the "seventh ray" is represented only by the centre itself. As for the relationship we have indicated with the three-dimensional cross, it is immediately established: the vertical axis remains unchanged, and the two oblique diameters are the projection, on the plane of the figure, of the two axes that form the horizontal cross; this last consideration, which is very necessary for a complete understanding of the symbol, is, on the other hand, outside the scope of those who make it a representation of analogy, for whom it is sufficient to take it in the form it represents in itself, without the need to link it to other symbols with which it is related through different aspects of its complex meaning.

In Christian symbolism, this figure is called the simple chrisim; it is considered to be formed by the union of the letters I and X [*iota* and *khi*], that is, the Greek initials of the words *Iésous Khristós*, and this is a meaning that seems to have been given to it since the early days of Christianity; but it goes without saying that this symbol, in itself, is much older and, in fact, one of those that are widespread everywhere and in all eras. The Constantinian chrisim, formed by the union of the Greek letters X and P, the first two letters of the word *Khristós*, appears at first glance to be immediately derived from the simple chrisim, whose basic layout it preserves exactly and from which it is distinguished only by the addition, at the top of the vertical diameter, of an eyelet intended to transform the I into a P. This eyelet, which is naturally more or less completely circular in shape, can be considered, in this position, as corresponding to the representation of the solar disc that appears at the top of the vertical axis or the 'World Tree', and this observation is particularly important in connection with what we will say later about the symbolism of the tree⁵⁷¹.

It is interesting to note, particularly with regard to heraldic symbolism, that the six rays constitute a kind of general scheme according to which the most diverse figures have been arranged on the coat of arms. Observe, for example, an eagle or any other heraldic bird, and it will not be difficult to notice that this arrangement is indeed found, with the head, tail, and extremities of the wings and legs corresponding respectively to the tips of the six rays; observe then

⁵⁷⁰ [Chap. XLI: "*La porte étroite*"].

⁵⁷¹Certain intermediate forms show, on the other hand, a relationship between the chrisim and the Egyptian "ankh cross", which can easily be understood in light of what we said earlier about the three-dimensional cross; in certain cases, the eyelet of the Greek letter P takes the particular form of the Egyptian symbol of the "eyelet of Horus". Another variant of the chrisim is represented by the "four of the number" of the ancient corporate marks, whose multiple meanings require, moreover, a special study [see chap. LXVII: "The four of the number"]. Let us also note that the chrisim is sometimes surrounded by a circle, which most clearly assimilates it to the six-spoked wheel.

an emblem such as the fleur-de-lis, and the same verification will be made. In the latter case, the historical origin of the emblem, which has given rise to many different hypotheses, is of little importance: whether the fleur-de-lis is truly a flower, which would also be consistent with the equivalence of the wheel and certain floral symbols such as the lotus, the rose and the lily (which, incidentally, actually has six petals); whether it was originally a spearhead, or a bird, or a bee, the ancient Chaldean symbol of royalty (hieroglyph *sâr*), or even a toad⁵⁷²; or, as is more likely, it is the result of a kind of "convergence" or fusion of several of these figures, leaving only their common features. In any case, the fleur-de-lis is strictly in accordance with the scheme we referred to, and this is what essentially matters in determining its main meaning.

On the other hand, if the non-contiguous ends of the six rays are joined in pairs, the well-known figure of the hexagram or 'Seal of Solomon' is obtained, formed by two opposite and intertwined equilateral triangles; the six-pointed star itself, which differs only in that only the outer contour is drawn, is obviously nothing more than a variant of that same symbol. Medieval Christian Hermeticism saw, among other things, in the two triangles of the hexagram a representation of the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of Christ; and the number six, with which this symbol is naturally related, has among its meanings that of union and mediation, which fits perfectly in this case⁵⁷³. That same number is also, according to Hebrew Kabbalah, the number of creation (the "six days' work" of *Genesis*, in relation to the six directions of space); and in this respect, moreover, the attribution of its symbol to the Word is equally well justified: it is, in short, a kind of graphic translation of *the omnia per ipsum facta sunt* of the Gospel of St John.

Now then—and this is what we particularly wanted to arrive at in the present study—the two opposing triangles of the 'seal of Solomon' represent two ternaries, one of which is like the reflection or inverted image of the other; and in this, that symbol is an exact figuration of analogy. It is also possible, in the six-spoked figure, to take the two triads formed respectively by the ends of the three upper spokes and

⁽⁵⁷²⁾ This opinion, strange as it may seem, must have been accepted in ancient times, since the 15th-century tapestries in Reims Cathedral show Clovis's banner bearing three toads. On the other hand, it is quite possible that this toad was originally a frog, an animal which, because of its metamorphosis, is an ancient symbol of 'resurrection' and had retained this meaning in early Christianity.

⁵⁷³ In Far Eastern symbolism, six features arranged differently, in the form of parallel lines, similarly represent the middle ground of the 'Great Triad', that is, the Mediator between heaven and earth, the 'True Man', who unites in himself the two natures: heavenly and earthly.

by those of the three lower ones; being then situated entirely on either side of the plane of reflection, they are separated, instead of intertwined as in the previous case; but their inverse relationship is exactly the same. To further clarify the meaning of the symbol, part of the horizontal diameter is sometimes indicated in the hexagram (and it should be noted that it is also indicated in the fleur-de-lis); this horizontal diameter clearly represents the plane of reflection or the "surface of the Waters". Let us add that there would be yet another representation of the "inverse meaning" if the two oblique diameters were considered as forming the apparent outline of two cones opposed by the vertex, whose axis would be the vertical diameter; here too, as their common vertex, which is the centre of the figure, is located in the plane of reflection, one of these two cones is the inverted image of the other.

Finally, the figure of the six rays, sometimes slightly modified but always perfectly recognisable, also forms the outline of another very important symbol, that of the tree with three branches and three roots, where we also clearly find the two inverse ternaries we have just mentioned. This outline, on the other hand, can be viewed in two opposite ways, so that the branches can take the place of the roots, and vice versa; we will return to this consideration when we study some aspects of the symbolism of the 'Tree of the World' in more detail.

LI

THE 'WORLD TREE'⁵⁷⁴,

We have already spoken on several occasions about the "Tree of the World" and its "axial" symbolism⁵⁷⁵. Without repeating what we have said before, we will add some observations regarding certain more specific points of this symbolism, especially in cases where the tree appears inverted, that is, with its roots pointing upwards and its branches pointing downwards, a subject to which Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has devoted a special study, *The Inverted Tree*⁵⁷⁶. It is easy to understand that, if this is the case, it is primarily because the root represents the principle while the branches represent the unfolding of manifestation; but to this general explanation, we must add certain considerations of a more complex nature, which, moreover, are always based on the application of the "reverse meaning" of the analogy, to which the inverted position of the tree clearly refers. In this regard, we have already indicated that the scheme of the tree with three branches and three roots is constructed precisely on the symbol of analogy itself, that is, on the figure of six spokes whose ends are grouped into two mutually inverted triads; and this scheme can be viewed in two opposite ways, which shows that the two corresponding positions of the tree must refer to two different and complementary points of view, depending on whether one looks at it, in a certain way, from the bottom up or from the top down, that is, in short, depending on whether one adopts the point of view of manifestation or that of the Principle⁵⁷⁷.

⁵⁷⁴ [Published in *É. T.*, February 1939].

⁵⁷⁵ See in particular *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chapters IX and XXV.

⁵⁷⁶ In *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. V, we have quoted the texts from the *Katha-Upānīshad*, VI, 1, and the *Bhāgavad-Gītā* XV, 1, where the tree is presented in this aspect; Coomaraswamy also cites several others that are no less explicit, especially *Rg-Veda*, I, 24, 7, and *Maitri-Upānīshad* VI, 4.

⁵⁷⁷ We have pointed out elsewhere that the ternary tree can be considered a symbol of unity and duality, which in biblical symbolism are represented respectively by the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Knowledge"; the ternary form is found especially in the three "columns" of the "Sephirotic tree" of Kabbalah, and it goes without saying that the "axial" one is then the "middle column" (see *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IX); To reduce this form to the diagram we have just indicated, it is necessary to join the ends of the side 'columns' by two lines that intersect at the central point of the 'middle column', that is, at *Tiféret* ['Splendour'], whose 'solar' character fully justifies this position of the 'radiating' centre.

In support of this consideration, A. K. Coomaraswamy cites the two inverted trees described by Dante⁵⁷⁸ as being near the summit of the "mountain", that is, immediately below the plane where the earthly Paradise is located; whereas, when this is reached, the trees appear restored to their normal position; and thus those trees, which seem to be, in reality, different aspects of the single "Tree", "are inverted only below the point where the rectification and regeneration of man occurs". It is important to note that, although the Earthly Paradise is still, in effect, part of the "cosmos", its position is virtually "supracosmic"; it could be said that it represents the "summit of contingent being" (*bhavâgra*), so that its plane is identified with the "surface of the Waters". With this surface, which must be considered essentially as a "plane of reflection," we are led back to the symbolism of the inverted image by reflection, to which we have referred when speaking of analogy; 'what is above', or above the 'surface of the Waters', that is, the main or 'supracosmic' domain, is reflected in reverse in 'what is below', that is, below that surface, in the 'cosmic' domain; in other words, everything above the "plane of reflection" is upright, everything below is inverted. Therefore, if we assume that the tree is erected above the Waters, what we see as long as we remain in the "cosmos" is its inverted image, with the roots facing upwards and the branches facing downwards; on the contrary, if we place ourselves above the Waters, we no longer see that image, which is then, so to speak, under our feet, but rather its source, that is, the real tree, which naturally appears to us in its upright position; the tree is always the same, but our position in relation to it has changed, and consequently so has the point of view from which we consider it.

This is further confirmed by the fact that certain traditional Hindu texts speak of two trees, one 'cosmic' and the other 'supracosmic'; as these two trees are naturally superimposed, one can be considered as the reflection of the other, and at the same time, their trunks are continuous, so that they constitute two parts of a single trunk, which corresponds to the doctrine of "one essence and two natures" in *Brahma*. In the Avestan tradition, the equivalent of this is found in the two *Haoma* trees, the white and the yellow, one heavenly (or rather 'paradisical', as it grows on the summit of Mount *Alborj*) and the other earthly; the second appears as a substitute for the first for humanity far from the "primordial dwelling place," just as the indirect vision of the image is a "substitute" for the direct vision of reality. The *Zohar* also speaks of two trees, one upper and one lower; and in some figurations, particularly in an Assyrian seal, two superimposed trees are clearly distinguished.

⁵⁷⁸*Purgatory*, XXII-XXV.

The inverted tree is not only a 'macrocosmic' symbol, as we have just seen; it is also sometimes, and for the same reasons, a 'microcosmic' symbol, that is, a symbol of man; thus, Plato says that "man is a heavenly plant, which means that he is like an inverted tree, whose roots tend towards the sky and whose branches tend downwards, towards the earth" [cf. *Timaeus*, 89 c]. In our time, occultists have often abused this symbolism, which for them is nothing more than a simple comparison, whose deeper meaning completely escapes them, and they interpret it in a crudely 'materialised' way, trying to justify it by anatomical or rather 'morphological' considerations of extraordinary puerility; This is one example, among many others, of the distortion to which they have subjected fragmentary traditional notions which, without understanding them, they have sought to incorporate into their own conceptions⁵⁷⁹.

Of the two Sanskrit terms that are mainly used to designate the "World Tree", one, *nyagrodha*, gives rise to an interesting observation in this regard, as it literally means "growing downwards", not only because such growth is in fact represented by that of the aerial roots in the species of tree bearing that name, but also because, when it comes to the symbolic tree, it is itself considered to be inverted⁵⁸⁰. The name *nyagrodha* therefore refers specifically to this position of the tree, while the other designation, *açvattha*, is interpreted as the "station of the horse" (*açva-stha*), where the horse, which is here the symbol of *Agni* or the Sun, or both at the same time, must be considered as having reached the end of its course and stopped once it has reached the "Axis of the World"⁵⁸¹. In this regard, we should remember that in various traditions the image of the sun is also linked to that of the tree in another way, as it is represented as the fruit of the "World Tree"; at the beginning of a cycle it leaves its tree and comes to rest on it again at the end of the cycle, so that, in this case too, the tree is effectively the "station of the Sun"⁵⁸².

As for *Agni*, there is something else: he himself is identified with the 'World Tree', hence his name *Vanáspati* or 'Lord of the Trees'; and this identification, which confers a fiery nature on the axial 'Tree', makes him visibly

⁵⁷⁹ The assimilation of man to a tree, but without allusion to an inverted position of the latter, plays a considerable role in the ritual of Carbonarism.

⁵⁸⁰ Cf. *Aitareya-Brahmana* VII 30; *Çatapata-Brahmana* XII, 2, 7, 3.

⁵⁸¹ Similarly, according to Greek tradition, eagles—another solar symbol—starting from the ends of the earth, stopped at the *Omphalos* of Delphi, which represented the "Centre of the World".

⁵⁸² See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chapter IX. The Chinese ideogram for sunset depicts it setting on its tree at the end of the day.

related to the "burning bush" which, on the other hand, as the place and support for the manifestation of the Divinity, must also be conceived as situated in a "central" position. We have previously spoken of the "pillar of fire" or the "pillar of smoke" as substitutes, in certain cases, for the tree or pillar as an "axial" representation; the observation just made completes the explanation of this equivalence and gives it its full meaning⁵⁸³. A. K. Coomaraswamy quotes in this regard a passage from *the Zohar* where the "Tree of Life", described as "extending from top to bottom", that is, inverted, is represented as a "Tree of Light", which is entirely in accordance with that identification; and we can add another, no less notable, concordance taken from Islamic tradition. In the sura *En-Nûr* ['The Light']⁵⁸⁴, there is mention of a 'blessed tree', that is, one laden with spiritual influences⁵⁸⁵, which is 'neither eastern nor western', clearly defining its 'central' or 'axial' position⁵⁸⁶; and this tree is an olive tree whose oil feeds the light of a lamp; that light symbolises the light of *Allah*, which is in fact *Allah* himself, for, as it says at the beginning of the same verse, "*Allah* is the Light of the heavens and the earth". It is clear that if the tree is represented here as an olive tree, this is due to the illuminating power of the oil extracted from it, and therefore to the fiery and luminous nature within it; thus, in this case too, we are referring to the "Tree of Light" mentioned above. On the other hand, in at least one of the Hindu texts describing the inverted tree⁵⁸⁷, it is expressly identified with *Brahma*; if in other places it is identified with *Agni*, there is no contradiction in this, since *Agni*, in the Vedic tradition, is but one of the names and aspects of *Brahma*; in the Koranic text, *Allah*, in the aspect of Light, illuminates all worlds⁵⁸⁸; it would undoubtedly be difficult to take the similarity any further, and here we also have one of the most notable examples of unanimous agreement among all traditions.

⁵⁸³ It should be noted that this "pillar of fire" and the "pillar of smoke" are found precisely in *Exodus*, XIV, where they appear alternately guiding the Hebrews on their departure from Egypt, and were, moreover, a manifestation of the *Shekinah* or "Divine Presence".

⁵⁸⁴ *Qur'an*, XXIV, 35.

⁵⁸⁵ In Hebrew Kabbalah, these same spiritual influences are symbolised by the "dew of light" emanating from the "Tree of Life".

⁵⁸⁶ Similarly, and in the most literal "geographical" sense, the Pole is located neither in the east nor in the west.

⁵⁸⁷ *Maitri-Upânishad*, VI, 4.

⁵⁸⁸ This Light is, according to the continuation of the text, "light upon light", that is, a double superimposed light, which evokes the superimposition of the two trees we referred to earlier; here too we find "one essence," that of the single Light, and "two natures," that of the high and the low, or the unmanifest and the manifest, to which correspond respectively the light hidden in the nature of the tree and the light visible in the flame of the lamp, the former being the essential "support" of the latter.

LII

THE TREE AND THE VAJRA ⁵⁸⁹

We have previously considered the diagram of the tree with three branches and three roots, constructed on the general symbol of analogy and capable of being considered in two opposite senses. We will now add some complementary observations in this regard, which will better highlight the close connection between seemingly different symbols of the "Axis of the World". Indeed, as can be easily seen from the accompanying figure, the diagram in question is, in essence, identical to the figure of the double *vajra*,



Fig. 17

whose opposite ends also reproduce the analogical symbolism we have discussed. In one of our previous studies on the *vajra*, we had already pointed out this similarity in relation to the triplicity often found in "axial" symbolism, representing both the axis itself, which naturally occupies the central position, and the two cosmic currents on the right and left that accompany it, an example of which can be found in certain representations of the "World Tree"; We noted that, in this case, the double triplicity of the branches and roots recalls, even more precisely, that of the two ends of *the vajra*, which, as is well known, are in the shape of a trident or *trishula*⁵⁹⁰.

However, one might ask whether the relationship thus established between the tree and the symbol of the lightning bolt, which at first glance may seem very different, is capable of going even further than the mere fact of that "axial" significance that is manifestly common to them; The answer lies in what we have said about the fiery nature of the 'World Tree', with which *Agni* himself, as *Vanáspati*, is identified in Vedic symbolism, and of which, therefore, the 'pillar of fire' is an exact representation.

⁵⁸⁹ [Published in *É. T.*, March 1939].

⁵⁹⁰ "Les armes symboliques" [here, chap. XXVI: "The symbolic weapons"]. On the figurations of the *vajra*, see A. K. Coornaraswamy, *Elements of Buddhist Iconography*.

equivalent as a representation of the axis. It is evident that lightning is also fiery or luminous in nature; moreover, lightning is one of the most common symbols of 'enlightenment' understood in its intellectual or spiritual sense. The "Tree of Light" we have spoken of traverses and illuminates all worlds; according to the passage from *the Zohar* quoted in this regard by A. Coomaraswamy, "illumination begins at the top and spreads in a straight line through the entire trunk"; and this propagation of light can easily evoke the idea of lightning. Moreover, in general, the 'Axis of the World' is always considered, more or less explicitly, to be luminous; we have already had occasion to recall that Plato, in particular, describes it as a "luminous diamond axis", which also refers directly to one of the aspects of *the vajra*, since this term has both the meanings of 'ray' and 'diamond'⁵⁹¹.

There is more: one of the most widespread designations of the axial tree, in various traditions, is that of "Tree of Life"; and the immediate relationship established by traditional doctrines between "Life" and "Light" is well known; we will not dwell further on this point, as it is a question we have already dealt with⁵⁹²; we will only recall, with immediate reference to our topic, that Hebrew Kabbalah unites the two notions in the symbolism of the "dew of light" that emanates from the "Tree of Life". Furthermore, in other passages from *the Zohar* that Coomaraswamy also quotes in his study on the "inverted tree"⁵⁹³, where two trees are discussed, one superior and one inferior and therefore in a certain sense superimposed, these two trees are designated respectively as the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Death". This, which is reminiscent of the role of the two symbolic trees in the Garden of Eden, is also particularly significant in completing the connection we are referring to, since these meanings of "life" and "death" are also effectively linked to the dual aspect of the ray, represented by the two opposite directions of *the vajra*, as we explained earlier⁽⁵⁹⁴⁾. As we said then, it is in fact, in the most general sense, the dual power of production and destruction, of which life and death are the expression in our world, and which is related to the two phases, the 'expir' and the 'aspir', of universal manifestation; and the correspondence of these two phases is

⁵⁹¹ In this regard, we have also established a link with the Buddhist symbolism of the "Diamond Throne", located at the foot of the axial tree; in all this, the diamond must be considered, on the one hand, for its luminosity and, on the other, for its indivisibility and unalterability, which is an image of the essential immutability of the axis.

⁵⁹² "*Verbum, Lux et Vita*" [chap. XLVIII of *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*].

⁵⁹³ [*The Inverted Tree*.]

⁵⁹⁴ See "Les armes symboliques" and also "Les pierres de foudre" [here, chap. XXVI: "The Symbolic Weapons," and chap. XXV: "The 'Stones of Lightning'"]

This is also clearly indicated in one of the texts of *the Zohar* to which we referred, since the two trees are represented there as ascending and descending, so that each takes the place of the other, according to the alternation of day and night: does this not make the perfect coherence of all this symbolism even more evident?

LIII

THE "TREE OF LIFE" AND THE LIQUEUR OF IMMORTALITY⁵⁹⁵

When discussing the "Tree of the World," we have mentioned in particular, among its various representations, the *Haorna* tree of the Avestan tradition; this tree (and more precisely the white *Haoma*, the "paradisiacal" tree, since the other, the yellow *Haoma*, is nothing more than a later "substitute") is especially related to its aspect as the "Tree of Life," since the liquor extracted from it, also called *haoma*, is the same thing as the Vedic *soma*, which, as is well known, is identified with *amrita* or "liquor of immortality." The fact that *soma* is extracted from a simple plant rather than a tree is not a valid objection to this connection with the symbolism of the 'World Tree'; in fact, the latter is designated by multiple names, and, along with those that refer to trees proper, there are also those of 'plant' (*óshadhi*) and even 'cane' (*vétasa*)⁵⁹⁶.

If we compare this with the biblical symbolism of the Garden of Eden, the only notable difference in this regard is that immortality is not granted by a liquor extracted from the "Tree of Life" but by its fruit itself; it is therefore a matter of a "food of immortality" rather than a drink⁵⁹⁷; but in all cases, it is always a product of the tree or plant, and a product in which the sap is concentrated, which is in a way the very "essence" of the plant⁵⁹⁸. It should also be noted that, of all the plant symbolism of the earthly Paradise, only the "Tree of Life" survives with that character in the description of the heavenly Jerusalem, while all the rest of the symbolism there is mineral; and that tree then bears twelve fruits, which are the twelve "Suns", that is, the equivalent of the twelve *Adityas* of Hindu tradition, the tree itself being their common nature, to the unity of which they finally return⁵⁹⁹; we recall here what we have said about the tree considered as the "station of the Sun" and about the symbols that appear to the sun as coming to rest on the tree at the end of a cycle. The *Adityas* are the sons of *Aditi*, and the idea of "indivisibility" expressed by this name clearly implies "indissolubility" and therefore "immortality"; *Aditi*, moreover, is not unrelated, in certain

⁵⁹⁵ [Published in *É. T.*, April 1939].

⁵⁹⁶ Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Inverted Tree*, p. 12.

⁽⁵⁹⁷⁾ Among the Greeks, "ambrosia", as distinct from "nectar", is also a non-liquid food, although its name is etymologically identical to that of *ámrita*.

⁵⁹⁸ In Sanskrit, the word *rasa* means both 'sap' and 'essence'.

⁵⁹⁹ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chaps. IV and XI; see also what we said in the same book about the "drink" of immortality and its various traditional "substitutes" (chaps. V and VI).

respects, with the "vegetative essence", for the same reason that she is considered the "goddess of the earth" ⁶⁰⁰, while also being the "mother of the Devas"; and the opposition between *Āditi and Diti*, from which the opposition between the *Devas* and the *Asuras* derives, can be linked, according to the same relationship, to that between the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Death" to which we referred in a previous study. This opposition is also found, moreover, in the symbolism of the sun itself, since it is also identified with "Death" (*Mṛtyu*) insofar as it faces the "world below" ⁶⁰¹, and is at the same time the "gateway to immortality", so that it could be said that its other face, the one turned towards the "extra-cosmic" realm, is identified with immortality itself. This last observation brings us back to what we said earlier about the earthly Paradise, which is still, in effect, a part of the "cosmos", but whose position is, however, virtually "supracosmic": this explains why the fruit of the "Tree of Life" can be reached there, which is to say that the being who has reached the centre of our world (or any other state of existence) has already conquered immortality for that very reason; and what is true of the earthly Paradise is also true, of course, of the heavenly Jerusalem, since both are ultimately nothing more than two complementary aspects of the same reality, depending on whether it is considered in relation to the beginning or the end of a cosmic cycle.

It goes without saying that all these observations must be related to the fact that plant symbols appear in various traditions as "tokens of resurrection and immortality": the "golden branch" of the ancient Mysteries, the acacia that replaces it in Masonic initiation, as well as the branches or palms in the Christian tradition; and also with the role generally played in symbolism by evergreen trees and those that produce incorruptible gums or resins⁶⁰². On the other hand, the fact that plants are sometimes considered in the Hindu tradition to be of an 'asuric' ['demonic'] nature cannot constitute an objection; in fact, the growth of plants is partly aerial, but also partly subterranean, which implies in a certain sense a dual nature, corresponding in a certain sense to the 'Tree of Life' and the 'Tree of Death'. Moreover, the root, or the underground part, constitutes the original 'support' of the aerial vegetation, which corresponds to the 'priority' of the nature of the *Asuras* over the *Devas*; and it is surely not without reason that the struggle between the *Devas* and the *Asuras* is mainly fought over the possession of the 'elixir of immortality'.

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *The Inverted Tree*, p. 28.

⁶⁰¹ In this regard, considerations could also be developed on the relationship between the sun and its revolutions and time (*Kāla*), which "devours" manifested beings.

⁶⁰² Cf. *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chap. V, and *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. IV.

The close relationship between the "elixir of immortality" and the "Tree of Life" has a very important consequence from the point of view of traditional sciences: the "elixir of life" is more closely related to what can be called the "vegetable" aspect of alchemy⁶⁰³, corresponding to what is the "philosopher's stone" in the "mineral" aspect of alchemy; in short, it could be said that the "elixir" is the "vegetable essence" par excellence. On the other hand, the use of expressions such as 'golden liquor' should not be objected to, which, just like the 'golden branch' we referred to earlier, actually alludes to the 'solar' nature of the object in question; and we will also recall, in this regard, the representation of the sun as the "fruit of the Tree of Life", a fruit which, moreover, is also designated precisely as a "golden apple". It is clear that, since we are approaching these things from the point of view of the principle, the vegetable and the mineral must be understood here symbolically above all, that is to say, it is fundamentally a question of their 'correspondences' or what they represent, respectively, in the cosmic order; but this does not in any way prevent them from also being taken literally when certain particular applications are considered. In this regard, it would not be difficult to find the opposition we have spoken of regarding the dual nature of plants: thus, plant alchemy, in its medical application, has as its "reverse", so to speak, the "science of poisons"; moreover, by virtue of this opposition, everything that is a "remedy" in one respect is at the same time a "poison" in a contrary respect⁶⁰⁴. Naturally, we cannot develop here all that this last observation implies; but it will at least allow us to glimpse the precise applications of which a symbolism as "principal" in itself as that of the "Tree of Life" and the "Tree of Death" is capable in a domain such as traditional medicine.

⁶⁰³ This aspect has been developed above all in the Taoist tradition, more explicitly than in any other.

⁶⁰⁴ In Sanskrit, the word *visha*, 'poison' or 'death drink', is considered the antonym of *āmṛta* or 'drink of immortality'.

LIV

*THE SYMBOLISM OF THE LADDER*⁶⁰⁵

We have mentioned above ⁶⁰⁶ the symbolism preserved among the Indians of North America, according to which the different worlds are represented as a series of superimposed caves and beings pass from one world to another by climbing up a central tree. A similar symbolism is found in various cases in rites in which climbing a tree represents the ascent of the being along the 'axis'; such rites are both Vedic and 'shamanic', and their very diffusion is an indication of their truly 'primordial' character.

The tree can be replaced by some other equivalent "axial" symbol, such as the mast of a ship; it should be noted in this regard that, from a traditional point of view, the construction of a ship, like that of a house or a car, is the realisation of a "cosmic model"; and it is also interesting to note that the "crow's nest", located at the top of the mast and surrounding it circularly, occupies very precisely the place of the "eye" of the dome, crossed in its centre by the axis even when this is not physically represented. On the other hand, folklore enthusiasts will note that the common "greasy pole" of rural festivals is nothing more than the misunderstood vestige of a ritual similar to those we have just referred to: in this case too, a particularly significant detail is the circle suspended at the top of the mast, which must be reached by climbing the mast (a circle which the pole crosses and pierces, just as that of the ship pierces the crow's nest and that of *the stūpa* pierces the dome); that circle is also, manifestly, the representation of the 'solar eye', and it will be recognised that it is certainly not the supposed 'popular soul' that could have invented such symbolism.

Another widespread symbol immediately linked to the same idea is that of the ladder, which is also an "axial" symbol. As A. K. Coomaraswamy says, "the Axis of the Universe is like a ladder by which a perpetual upward and downward movement takes place" ⁽⁶⁰⁷⁾. Allowing such movement to take place is, in effect, the essential purpose of the ladder; and since, as we have just seen, the tree or mast also performs the same function, it can well be said that in this respect the ladder is its equivalent. On the other hand, the particular shape of the ladder suggests some observations; its two vertical crossbars correspond to the

⁶⁰⁵ [Published in *Ê. T.*, May 1939].

⁶⁰⁶ [Chap. XLI: "The Narrow Gate".]

⁶⁰⁷ *The Inverted Tree*, p. 20.

duality of the "Tree of Knowledge", or, in Hebrew Kabbalah, to the two "columns", the right and the left, of the "Sephirotic tree"; neither of these are strictly "axial", and the "middle column", which is strictly "axial", is not depicted in a noticeable way (as in the case of the central pillar of a building); but, otherwise, the entire ladder, as a whole, is in a certain way "unified" by the rungs that connect the two crossbars to each other and which, being located horizontally between them, necessarily have their respective midpoints located on the axis itself⁶⁰⁸. The ladder thus offers a very complete symbolism: it is, one might say, like a vertical "bridge" that rises through all the worlds and allows one to traverse their entire hierarchy, passing from step to step; and, at the same time, the steps are the worlds themselves, that is, the different levels or degrees of universal Existence⁶⁰⁹.

This significance is evident in the biblical symbolism of Jacob's ladder, along which angels ascend and descend; and it is well known that Jacob, in the place where he had his vision of that ladder, placed a stone, which he "set up as a pillar" and which is also a figure of the "Axis of the World", in a way as a substitute for the ladder itself⁶¹⁰. The angels properly represent the higher states of being; to them, therefore, the rungs also correspond more particularly, which is explained by the fact that the ladder must be considered as resting on the ground at its lower end, that is, for us, our world itself is the "support" from which the ascent must take place. Even supposing that the ladder extends underground to encompass all the worlds—as it must in reality—its lower part would in that case be invisible, as is the entire part of the Central Tree that extends below it for beings who have reached a "cave" located at a certain level; in other words, since the lower rungs have already been climbed, they cannot be taken into account in terms of the further realisation of being, in which only the climbing of the upper rungs can play a part.

Therefore, especially when the ladder is used as an element in certain initiation rites, its rungs are expressly considered to represent the various heavens, that is, the higher states of being. Thus, particularly in the mysteries of Mithras, the ladder had seven rungs corresponding to the seven

⁶⁰⁸ In ancient Christian Hermeticism, a certain symbolism of the letter H, with its two vertical strokes and the horizontal stroke connecting them, is found to be equivalent in this respect.

⁶⁰⁹ The symbolism of the "bridge", in its various aspects, could naturally give rise to many other considerations [see chapters LXIII and LXIV]; it is also worth recalling, in relation to this subject, the Islamic symbolism of the "preserved tablet" (*el-lawhu-l-mahfûz*), the "timeless" prototype of the sacred Scriptures, which descends vertically from the highest heavens, passing through all worlds.

⁶¹⁰ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. IX.

planets, and, according to what is said, made of the metals corresponding respectively to those; the path of these steps represented that of so many successive degrees of initiation. This seven-step ladder is also found in certain medieval initiatory organisations, from where it undoubtedly passed, more or less directly, to the high degrees of Scottish Freemasonry, as we have pointed out when discussing Dante ⁶¹¹; here the steps refer to as many "sciences", but this does not imply any fundamental difference, since, according to Dante himself, these "sciences" are identified with the "heavens"⁶¹². It goes without saying that, in order to correspond to higher states and degrees of initiation, these sciences could only be traditional sciences understood in their deepest and most properly esoteric sense, and this even for those whose names, for moderns, no longer designate, by virtue of the degradation to which we have repeatedly alluded, but profane sciences or arts, that is, something that, in relation to those true sciences, is in reality nothing more than an empty shell and a "residue" deprived of life.

In certain cases, there is also the symbol of a double staircase, which implies the idea that the ascent must be followed by a descent; on one side, one climbs steps that are "sciences", that is, degrees of knowledge corresponding to the realisation of so many states, and on the other side, one descends steps that are "virtues", that is, the fruits of those same degrees of knowledge applied to their respective levels⁶¹³. Moreover, it can be observed that, even in the case of the simple ladder, one of the crossbars can also be considered, in a certain sense, as 'ascending' and the other as 'descending', according to the general meaning of the two cosmic currents, the right and the left, with which these crossbars are also in correspondence, precisely because of their "lateral" position with respect to the true axis, which, although invisible, is still the main element of the symbol, to which all its parts must be referred if their meaning is to be fully understood.

To these various indications we will add, finally, that of a somewhat different symbolism that is also found in certain initiation rituals: the ascent of a spiral staircase; in this case, it is, one might say, a less direct ascent, since, instead of being carried out vertically along the axis itself, it is carried out along the turns of the helix that winds around the axis, so that its

⁶¹¹ *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chaps. II and III.

⁶¹² *Convivio*, II, XIV.

⁶¹³It must be said that this correspondence between ascent and descent sometimes appears to be reversed; but this may simply be due to some alteration of the original meaning, as often occurs in the more or less confused and incomplete state in which Western initiation rituals have arrived at the present day.

advancement appears more 'peripheral' than 'central'; but, in principle, the final result must nevertheless be the same, for it is always a matter of ascending through the hierarchy of states of being, and the successive coils of the helix are also, as we have explained at length on another occasion⁶¹⁴, an accurate representation of the degrees of universal Existence.

⁶¹⁴See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*.

LV

THE "EYE OF THE NEEDLE"⁶¹⁵

As we have said previously, one of the representations of the symbol of the "narrow gate" is the "eye of the needle," which is particularly mentioned with that meaning in a well-known Gospel text⁶¹⁶. The expression "eye of the needle" is particularly significant in this regard, as it relates this symbol more directly to some of its equivalents, such as the "eye" of the dome in architectural symbolism: these are various representations of the "solar gate", which in turn is also referred to as the "Eye of the World". It should also be noted that the needle, when placed vertically, can be taken as a figure of the "Axis of the World", and then, with the perforated end at the top, there is an exact coincidence between the position of the "eye" of the needle and that of the "eye" of the dome.

This same symbol also has other interesting connections, which have been pointed out by Ananda K. Coomaraswamy: in a *Jātaka* [or account of the 'Previous Lives' of the Buddha], which deals with a miraculous needle (actually identical to *the vajra*), the eye of the needle is designated by the Pāli word *pāsa*. This word is the same as the Sanskrit *pāṣa*, which originally meant 'knot' or 'eyelet'; this seems to indicate, first of all, as Coomaraswamy points out, that in very ancient times needles were not pierced as they were later, but only curved at one end, thus forming a kind of eyelet through which the thread passed; but what is most important for us is the relationship between this application of the term *pāṣa* to the eye of the needle and its other more common meanings, which are also derived from the original idea of 'knot'.

In Hindu symbolism, the *pāṣa* is most often a "slipknot" or "noose" used in hunting to catch animals; in this form, it is one of the main emblems of *Mṛtyu* [Death] or *Yama* [the god of the dead], and also of *Varuna*; and the "animals" caught by means of this *pāṣa* are in reality all living beings (*paṇu*). Hence also the meaning of 'bond' or 'tie': the animal, thus caught, is bound by the noose that closes around it; in the same way, the living being is bound by the limiting conditions that retain it in its particular state of manifested existence. To escape

⁶¹⁵ [Published in *É. T.*, January 1940].

⁶¹⁶ *St Matthew*, XIX, 24.

⁶¹⁷ *Some Pāli Words*, s. v. *Pāsa*, pp. 166-67.

⁶¹⁸ *Jātaka* 3, 282: *pāse vijjhivā*, 'pierced by a hole' or 'an eye'.

From this state of *paçu*, it is necessary for the being to free itself from these conditions, that is, in symbolic terms, to escape from *pâça*, or to pass through the noose without it tightening around it; which is equivalent to saying that the being passes through the jaws of Death without them closing on it⁶¹⁹. The eyelet of *the pâça* is, therefore, as Coomaraswamy says, another aspect of the "narrow gate", just as "threading the needle" represents the passage through that same "solar gate" in the symbolism of embroidery; we would add that the thread that passes through the eye of the needle also has an equivalent in another symbolism, that of archery, the arrow that pierces the centre of the target; and this is properly referred to as "hitting the target", an expression that is also very significant in the same respect, since the passage in question, through which the "exit from the cosmos" takes place, is also the "target" or goal that must be reached in order to finally find oneself "liberated" from the bonds or ties of manifested existence.

This last observation leads us to specify, with Coomaraswamy, that only in regard to the "last death," the one that immediately precedes "liberation" and after which there is no return to any conditioned state, does "threading the needle" truly represent passing through the "solar gate," since in any other case it cannot yet be considered a "departure from the cosmos." However, analogically and in a relative sense, one can also speak of "passing through the eye of the needle"⁶²⁰ or "escaping the *pâça*" to designate any passage from one state to another, since this passage is always a "death" in relation to the preceding state and a "birth" in relation to the subsequent state, as we have already explained on several occasions.

There is yet another important aspect of the symbolism of *pâça* that we have not yet discussed: that which refers more particularly to the "vital knot"⁶²¹, and we still need to show how this is equally strictly related to the same order of considerations. Indeed, the "vital knot" represents the bond that holds together the different elements that constitute individuality; it is, therefore, what keeps the being in its condition of *paçu*, since when that link is broken or undone, the disintegration of those elements follows, which is, properly speaking, the death of individuality, entailing the passage of the being to another state. Transposing this to the order of final "Liberation", it can be said that when the being manages to pass through the eyelet of *the pâça* without it tightening and catching him again, it is as if that eyelet were untied for him, and this in a definitive way; in short, they are nothing more than two different ways

⁶¹⁹Cf. the symbolic representations of *Shinje*, the Tibetan form of *Yama*.

⁶²⁰Cf. Dante, *Purgatorio*, X, 16.

⁶²¹ This symbol of the "vital knot" in the rites of *Compagnonnage* is represented by a tie knotted in a special way; the equivalence with the slipknot or the eyelet of *the pâça* [Sanskrit form corresponding to *the Pali pâsa*] is evident.

to express the same thing. We will not dwell here on this matter of the "vital knot", which could lead us to many other developments; we have indicated elsewhere⁶²² how, in architectural symbolism, it has its correspondence in the "sensitive point" of the building, this being the image of a living being as well as of a world, depending on whether it is approached from a "microcosmic" or "macrocosmic" point of view; but for the moment, what we have just said is enough to show that the "dissolution" of this knot, which is also the "Gordian knot" of Greek legend, also constitutes, in essence, an equivalent of the passage of the being through the "solar gate".

⁶²² [See the article 'Cologne ou Strasbourg?', in *V. I.*, January 1927, a text that will be included in the posthumous compilation *Tradition primordiale et formes particulières*].

LVI

*THE PASSAGE OF THE WATERS*⁶²³

Ananda K. Coomaraswamy has pointed out that, in Buddhism as in Brahmanism, the "Way of the Pilgrim", represented as a "journey", can be related in three different ways to the symbolic river of life and death: the journey can be accomplished either by going upstream to the source of the waters, by crossing the waters to the other shore, or by going downstream to the sea⁶²⁴. As this author rightly points out, such use of different symbolisms, contrary only in appearance but in reality with the same spiritual meaning, is consistent with the very nature of metaphysics, which is never 'systematic' without always being perfectly coherent; it is only necessary, then, to take into account the precise meaning in which the symbol of the "river", with its source, its banks and its mouth, should be understood in each case.

The first, that of "swimming upstream", is perhaps the most notable in certain respects, since the river must always be conceived as identified with the "Axis of the World": it is the "celestial river" that descends to earth and, in Hindu tradition, is designated by names such as *Gangā* [Ganges] and *Sarāsvatī*, which are actually the names of certain aspects of *Çakti*. In Hebrew Kabbalah, this "river of life" corresponds to the "channels" of the Sephirothic tree, through which the influences of the "world above" are transmitted to the "world below", and which are also directly related to the *Shechinah* ['Divine Presence'], which is in short the equivalent of *Shakti*; and in Kabbalah there is also talk of waters that "flow upwards", which is an expression of the return to the celestial source, represented not precisely by the act of going upstream, but by a reversal of the direction of that current itself. In any case, it is always a matter of a "reversal" (*retournement*), which, according to Coomaraswamy, was represented in Vedic rites by the inversion of the sacrificial pole, another image of the "Axis of the World"; and it is immediately apparent that all this is closely linked to the symbolism of the "inverted tree", to which we have referred earlier.

It should also be noted that there is both a similarity and a difference here with the symbolism of the four rivers of the earthly Paradise: these flow horizontally across the surface of the earth, and not vertically, according to the "axial" direction; but they have their source at the foot of the "Tree of Life", which is, of course, the same "Axis of the World" and

⁶²³ [Published in *É. T.*, February 1940].

⁶²⁴ *Some Pāli Words*, s. v. *Samudda*, pp. 184-88.

also the Sephirothic tree of Kabbalah. It can therefore be said that the celestial influences, descending from the "Tree of Life" and thus reaching the centre of the earthly world, immediately spread throughout it in the direction of the four rivers; or, replacing the "Tree of Life" with the "celestial river", that this river, reaching the earth, divides and flows in the four directions of space. Under such conditions, the act of "going upstream" can be considered as taking place in two phases: the first, on the horizontal plane, leads to the centre of this world; the second, starting from here, is carried out vertically along the axis, and this is the one considered in the preceding case; let us add that the two successive phases have, from the initiatory point of view, their respective correspondence in the domains of the 'lesser mysteries' and the 'greater mysteries'.

The second case, that of the symbolism of crossing from one bank to another, is undoubtedly more common and more widely known; the "crossing of the bridge" (which may also be a ford) is found in almost all traditions and also, more particularly, in certain initiation rituals⁶²⁵; the crossing can also be made on a raft or in a boat, which then corresponds to the very general symbolism of navigation⁶²⁶. The river to be crossed in this way is more specifically the "river of death"; the shore from which one departs is the world subject to change, that is, the realm of manifested existence (considered in particular, more often than not, in its human and corporeal state, since this is where we must actually depart from), and the "other shore" is *Nirvana*, the state of being definitively liberated from death.

As for the third case, that of the "descent of the current", the Ocean⁶²⁷ should here be considered not as an expanse of water to be crossed, but, on the contrary, as the objective or goal to be reached, and therefore as a representation of *Nirvana*; the symbolism of the two banks is then different from that in the previous case, and there is even an example of the double meaning of symbols, since it is no longer a question of passing from one to the other, but of avoiding both equally: they are, respectively, the

⁶²⁵ Hence the symbolic significance of words such as *Pontifex* and *Tirthānkara*, which we have discussed elsewhere; hence also, in Sanskrit, various terms that etymologically contain the idea of "crossing", including *Avatāra*, which literally expresses a "descending crossing" (*avatāraṇa*), that is, the "descent" of a Saviour.

⁶²⁶ Coomaraswamy observes, in this regard, that the symbol of the saving boat (in Sanskrit *nāvā*, in Latin *navis*) is found in the designation of the "ship" of a church; that boat is an attribute of Saint Peter after having been that of Janus, as well as the keys, as we have explained elsewhere.

⁶²⁷ *Samudra* (in Pali, *samudda*) is literally the 'gathering of waters', which recalls the words of *Genesis*: 'Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together in one place'; it is the place where all rivers come together, just as, in the various symbolisms of the dome, the wheel and the parasol, the beams or the rays, as the case may be, all converge towards the central part.

the "world of men" and the "world of gods", or, in other words, the "microcosmic" (*adhyâtma*) and "macrocosmic" (*adhidévatā*) conditions. To achieve this goal, there are also other dangers to avoid in the current itself; these are symbolised, in particular, by the crocodile, which remains "against the current", which clearly implies that the journey is made in the direction of the current; this crocodile with its jaws open, from which one tries to escape, represents Death (*Mrtyu*) and, as such, is the "guardian of the Gate", which is then represented by the mouth of the river (which should be considered more accurately, according to Coomaraswamy, as a "mouth" of the sea, into which the river flows); Here, then, we have yet another symbol of the "Gate", which can be added to all those we have had the opportunity to study previously.

LVII

THE SEVEN RAYS AND THE RAINBOW ⁶²⁸

We have spoken on various occasions about the symbolism of the 'seven rays' of the sun ⁶²⁹; one might wonder whether these 'seven rays' have any connection with what is commonly referred to as the 'seven colours' of the rainbow, since these literally represent the different radiations that make up sunlight. There is, in fact, a connection, but at the same time, these supposed "seven colours" are a typical example of how authentic traditional information can sometimes be distorted by common misunderstanding. This distortion, in a case such as this, is easily explained: it is known that there must be a septenary, but since one of its terms cannot be found, it is replaced by another that has no real reason for being there; the septenary thus appears to be reconstituted, but in such a way that its symbolism is entirely distorted. If one now asks why one of the terms of the true septenary thus escapes the common people, the answer is equally easy: that term is the one corresponding to the "seventh ray", that is, the "central" or "axial" ray that passes "through the sun" and which, not being a ray like the others, cannot be represented like them ⁶³⁰; for this very reason, and also because of all its symbolic and properly initiatory connections, this term has a particularly mysterious character; and, from this point of view, it could be said that the substitution we are discussing has the effect of concealing the mystery from the eyes of the uninitiated; it matters little, moreover, whether the origin of this was intentional or due to unintentional misunderstanding, which would undoubtedly be very difficult to determine exactly ⁶³¹.

⁶²⁸ [Published in *Ê. T.*, June 1940].

⁶²⁹ [See chap. XLI: 'The Narrow Gate', and L: 'The Symbols of Analogy'].

⁶³⁰ With reference to the beginning of the *Tao-te king*, it could be said that each of the other rays is "a way" but that the seventh is "the Way".

⁶³¹We have found, unfortunately without a precise reference, a rather curious indication in this regard: Emperor Julian alludes somewhere to the "divinity of the seven [luminous] rays" (*Heptaktis*), whose solar character is evident, saying that it was a subject on which it was advisable to maintain the utmost reserve in the doctrine of the Mysteries; if it were established that the erroneous notion of the "seven colours" dates back to Antiquity, one might wonder whether it was deliberately spread by those initiated into these Mysteries, who would thus have found a way to ensure the preservation of traditional knowledge without, however, revealing its true meaning to the outside world; otherwise, it would have to be assumed that the substitute term was invented in a certain way by the common people themselves, who were simply aware of the existence of a septenary whose real constitution they were unaware of; on the other hand, the truth may lie in a combination of both hypotheses, as it is quite possible that the currently prevailing opinion of the 'seven colours' represents the culmination of several distortions.

In reality, rainbows do not have seven colours, but only six; and it does not take much thought to realise this, as it is enough to appeal to the most basic notions of physics: there are three fundamental colours, blue, yellow and red, and three complementary colours, namely orange, violet and green, making a total of six colours. There are also, of course, an infinite number of intermediate shades, and the transition from one to another is actually continuous and imperceptible; but there is obviously no valid reason to add any of these shades to the list of colours, because if we did, we could equally well consider a whole multitude of them, and in such circumstances, the very limitation of colours to seven becomes, in essence, incomprehensible. We do not know if any opponent of symbolism has ever made this observation, but if so, it would be very surprising that they did not take the opportunity to describe this number as 'arbitrary'. Indigo, which is usually listed among the colours of the rainbow, is in reality nothing more than a simple intermediate shade between violet and blue⁶³², and there is no more reason to consider it a distinct colour than there would be to consider any other shade, such as greenish or yellowish blue, in the same way. Furthermore, the introduction of this shade into the list of colours completely destroys the harmony of their distribution, which, if we stick to the correct notion, is carried out regularly according to a very simple geometric scheme that is also very significant from a symbolic point of view. In fact, the three fundamental colours can be placed at the vertices of a triangle and the three respective complementary colours at the vertices of a second triangle inverted with respect to the first, so that each fundamental colour and its complementary colour are located at two diametrically opposite points; and we see that the figure thus formed is none other than the "Seal of Solomon". If we draw the circumference in which this double triangle is inscribed, each of the complementary colours will occupy the midpoint of the arc between the points where the two fundamental colours whose combination produces it are located (and which are, of course, the two fundamental colours other than the one whose complementary colour is the colour in question); the intermediate shades will naturally correspond to all the other points on the

successive iterations of the initial data.

⁽⁶³²⁾The designation "indigo" itself is clearly modern, but it may have replaced some other older designation, or that shade itself may at some time have replaced another to complete the common septenary of colours; to verify this, it would of course be necessary to undertake historical research for which we do not have the time or material available; However, this point is of only secondary importance to us, since our aim is simply to show how the current conception expressed by the ordinary enumeration of the colours of the rainbow is erroneous and how it distorts the true traditional conception.

circumference⁶³³ but, in the double triangle, which is essential here, there is obviously only room for six colours⁶³⁴. These considerations might even seem too simple to be worth dwelling on, but, in truth, it is often necessary to recall things of this kind in order to correct commonly accepted ideas, for what should be most immediately apparent is precisely what most people fail to see; true "good sense" is very different from "common sense", with which it is annoyingly confused, and is certainly far from being, as Descartes claimed, "the most evenly distributed thing in the world".

To resolve the question of the seventh term that must actually be added to the six colours to complete the septenary, we must refer to the geometric representation of the "seven rays", as we have explained on another occasion, by the six directions of space, which form the three-dimensional cross, and by the very centre from which those directions emanate. It is important to note, first of all, the close similarities between this representation and the one we have just indicated for the colours: like the colours, the six directions are opposed two by two, according to three straight lines which, extending from one part of the centre to another, correspond to the three dimensions of space; and, if one wishes to give a flat representation, one can obviously only represent them by three diameters forming the six-spoked wheel (general outline of the 'chrism' and other equivalent symbols); now then: these diameters are those that join the opposite vertices of the two triangles of the "Seal of Solomon", so that the two representations are in fact identical⁶³⁵. It follows from this that the

⁶³³ If one wished to consider an intermediate colour between each of the six main colours, such as indigo between violet and blue, there would be a total of twelve colours rather than seven; and if one wished to take the distinction between shades even further, it would be necessary, again for obvious reasons of consistency, to establish the same number of divisions in each of the intervals between two colours; In short, it is nothing more than an entirely elementary application of the principle of sufficient reason.

⁶³⁴ We may observe in passing that the fact that visible colours thus occupy the entire circumference and join together without any discontinuity shows that they truly and genuinely constitute a complete cycle (with violet participating both in blue, which is its neighbour, and in red, which is at the other end of the rainbow), and that, consequently, the other non-visible solar radiations, such as those that modern physics calls "infrared rays" and "ultraviolet rays", do not belong in any way to light and are entirely different in nature from it; there are not, as some seem to believe, "colours" that an imperfection in our organs prevents us from seeing, since these supposed colours could not be located anywhere on the circle, and it certainly cannot be argued that the circle is an imperfect figure or that it presents any discontinuity.

⁶³⁵ Let us also point out that an indefinite multitude of directions could be considered, involving all the intermediate directions, which thus correspond to the intermediate shades between the six main colours; but only the six "oriented" directions that form the orthogonal coordinate system to which all space is referred and by which it is

seventh term should play the same role with respect to the six colours as the centre does with respect to the six directions; and, in fact, it will also be located at the centre of the diagram, that is, at the point where the apparent oppositions, which in reality are nothing more than complementarities, are resolved into unity. This is equivalent to saying that this seventh term is not a colour, just as the centre is not a direction, but that, just as the centre is the principle from which all space with the six directions proceeds, so too must this term be the principle from which the six colours derive and in which they are synthetically contained. It can therefore only be white, which is effectively "colourless", just as the point is "dimensionless"; it does not appear in the rainbow, just as the "seventh ray" does not appear in a geometric representation; but all colours are nothing more than the product of a differentiation of white light, just as the directions of space are nothing more than the development of the possibilities contained in the primordial point.

The true septenary, then, is formed here by white light and the six colours into which it differentiates itself; and it goes without saying that the seventh term is in reality the first, since it is the beginning of all the others, which could not exist without it; but it is also the last, in the sense that all finally return to it: the reunion of all colours reconstitutes the white light that gave birth to them. It could be said that, in a septenary thus constituted, one is in the centre and six are on the circumference; in other words, such a septenary is formed by the unit and the senary, the unit corresponding to the unmanifested principle and the senary to the whole of manifestation. We can establish a link between this and the symbolism of the "week" in the Hebrew *Genesis*, for here too the seventh term is essentially different from the other six: Creation, in fact, is the "work of six days" and not of seven; and the seventh day is that of "rest". This seventh term, which could be distinguished as the 'Sabbath term', is truly also the first, for such 'rest' is nothing other than the return of the creative Principle to its initial state of non-manifestation, a state from which, moreover, it has only apparently departed, with regard to creation and in order to produce it according to the sixfold cycle, but without ever actually leaving it, considered in itself. Just as the point is not affected by the unfolding of space, even though it seems to leave itself to describe the six directions in it, nor is white light affected by the radiation of the rainbow, even though it seems to divide itself in it to form the six colours, so the unmanifested Principle, without which manifestation could not be in any way, although it seems to act and express itself in the "work of the six days," is nevertheless not affected at all by

in a certain sense "measured" in its entirety; in this respect too, the correspondence between the six directions and the six colours is therefore perfectly exact.

that manifestation; and the "seventh ray" is the "Way" by which the being, having traversed the heaven of manifestation, returns to the unmanifested and effectively unites with the Principle, from which, however, in manifestation itself, it has never been separated except in an illusory manner.

LVIII

IANUA CAELI⁶³⁶

In his important study "*Svayamâttrinnâ Ianua Caeli*"⁶³⁷, Ananda K. Coomaraswamy explains the symbolism of the superstructure of the Vedic altar, and more specifically that of the three perforated bricks (*svayamâttrinnâ*) that constitute one of its essential parts. These bricks, which may also be stones (*çârkara*), should in principle, according to their designation, be "perforated by themselves", that is, naturally, although in practice such perforation may have been artificial. In any case, these are three ring-shaped bricks or stones which, when superimposed, correspond to the "three worlds" (Earth, Atmosphere and Sky) and which, together with three other bricks representing the "Universal Lights" (*Agni, Vâtyu* and *Aditya*), form the vertical axis of the Universe. Furthermore, ancient Indian coins (and similar representations are also found on Babylonian seals) feature a representation of the 'three worlds' in the form of three rings linked together by a vertical line passing through their centres⁶³⁸.

Of the three overlapping bricks, the lowest corresponds architecturally to the hearth (with which, moreover, the altar itself is identified as the place of *Agni's* manifestation in the earthly world), and the highest to the "eye" or central opening of the dome⁶³⁹; thus, as Coomaraswamy says, they form both a "chimney" and a "path" (and the similarity of the two words is certainly not without significance, even if, as may be the case, they are not directly related etymologically)⁶⁴⁰, "by

⁶³⁶ [Published in *É. T.*, January-February 1946].

⁶³⁷ In *Zalmoxis*, vol. II, 1939.

⁶³⁸In Islamic architecture, it is very common to see, at the top of a minaret or a *qubbah*, a set of three superimposed globes crowned by a crescent moon; these three globes also represent three worlds, which are '*âlam el-mulk*, '*âlam el-malakût* and '*âlam el-djâbarût* ['World of Royalty', 'World of Majesty', 'World of Omnipotence'], and the crescent moon that dominates them, symbol of divine Majesty [or Grandeur] (*el-Djalâl*), corresponds to the fourth world, '*âlam el-'izzah* ['World of Power or Glory], which is "extracosmic" and therefore beyond the "gate" we are discussing here; the vertical shaft supporting the whole is, of course, identical to the mast of a Buddhist *stûpa*, as well as to the other various similar axial symbols we have discussed on other occasions.

⁶³⁹ See "La Porte étroite" [here, chap. XLI: "The Narrow Gate"].

⁶⁴⁰ Coomaraswamy recalls in this regard the case of "folkloric" characters such as Saint Nicholas and the various personifications of Christmas, who are depicted as descending and ascending through the chimney, which, in fact, is not unrelated to the subject at hand. [As for the similarity between the words "chimney" and "path", much greater in French (*cheminée, chemin*) than in Spanish, it is also visible in the Latin terms (of different origins) from which they derive: *caminus* and *camminus*. (Translator's note)].

where *Agni* travels and where we ourselves must travel towards Heaven. Furthermore, by allowing passage from one world to another, a passage that necessarily takes place along the Axis of the Universe, and this in both opposite directions, they are the way by which the *Devas* ascend and descend through these worlds, using the three "universal Lights" as so many steps, according to a symbolism whose best-known example is "Jacob's ladder"⁽⁶⁴¹⁾. What unites these worlds and is in a certain way common to them, although in different ways, is the "Total Breath" (*sarvprāna*), which corresponds here to the central void of the superimposed bricks⁶⁴²; and it is also, according to another, essentially equivalent mode of expression, the *sūtrātmā* which, as we have already explained elsewhere, links all states of being to each other and to their total centre, generally symbolised by the sun, so that the *sūtrātmā* itself is then represented as a "sunbeam", and more precisely as the "seventh ray, which passes directly through the sun"⁶⁴³.

Indeed, the symbolism of the upper brick refers more properly to this passage "through the Sun", since, as we said, it corresponds to the "eye" of the dome or "cosmic ceiling" (and we will recall in this regard that the sun is also designated as the "Eye of the World"), that is, to the opening through which the exit from the cosmos is accomplished (and, in fact, cannot be accomplished except "from above"), the cosmos, with the various worlds it encloses, being represented by the building as a whole in architectural symbolism. The correspondence of this upper opening is the *Brahma-randhra* in the human being, that is, the orifice located at the crown of the head, through which the subtle axial artery *sushumnā* is in constant continuity with the "solar ray" analogously called *sushumna*, which is none other than the *sūtrātmā* considered in its particular relationship with this being; thus, the upper brick can also be assimilated to the skull of the "Cosmic Man", if an "anthropomorphic" symbolism is adopted to represent the cosmos as a whole. On the other hand, in zodiacal symbolism, this same opening corresponds to Capricorn, which is the "gateway of the gods" and refers to the *deva-yāna*, in which the passage "beyond the Sun" is accomplished; while Cancer is the "gateway of the

⁶⁴¹ See "Le Symbolisme de l'échelle" [here, chap. LIV: "The Symbolism of the Ladder"]. It is clear that the *Devas* are, in the Hindu tradition, the same as the Angels in the Judeo-Christian and Islamic traditions. ⁶⁴² This is clearly related to the general symbolism of breathing and that of the "breaths

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⁶⁴³ All this symbolism must be understood in both a macrocosmic and microcosmic sense, since it applies both to the worlds considered as a whole, as seen here, and to each of the beings manifested in them. This connection of all things with the sun is naturally established by the "heart", that is, by the centre; and it is well known that the heart itself corresponds to the sun and is like its image in each particular being.

men" and refers to *pitṛ-yāna*, whereby the being does not leave the cosmos⁶⁴⁴; and it can also be said that these two "solstice gates" correspond, for beings passing through one or the other, to cases in which the "solar gate" is, respectively, open or closed. As Coomaraswamy points out, the two *yāna*, which are thus related to the two halves of the annual cycle, refer to the north and south insofar as the apparent movement of the sun is, on the one hand, an ascent towards the north starting from Capricorn, and on the other, a descent towards the south starting from Cancer.

Thus, the sun, or rather what it represents in the principal order (since it goes without saying that it is actually the "spiritual Sun")⁶⁴⁵, is truly, as the "Eye of the World", the "gate of Heaven", *Ianua Caeli*, also described in various terms as an "eye"⁶⁴⁶, as a "mouth"⁶⁴⁷, or also as the hub of a cartwheel; the axial meaning of this last symbol is, moreover, evident⁶⁴⁸. However, a distinction must be made here to avoid what, for some at least, could lead to confusion: we have said on other occasions, with regard to the lunar aspect of the symbolism of Janus (or, more precisely, of *Ianus-Iana*, identified with *Lunus-Luna*), that the Moon is both *Ianua Caeli* and *Ianua Inferni*; in this case, instead of the two halves, ascending and descending, of the annual cycle, it would naturally be necessary, in order to establish an analogous correspondence⁶⁴⁹, to consider the two halves, waxing and waning, of the lunation or monthly cycle. Now, if the sun and the moon can both be considered as *Ianua Caeli*, it is because, in reality, the sky has not been taken in the same sense in both cases: in general, in fact, the term 'sky' can be used to designate everything that refers to superhuman states; but it is clear that a great difference must be established between those states that still belong to the cosmos⁶⁵⁰ and what, at the

⁶⁴⁴ See "Les portes solsticiales" [here, chap. XXXV: "The Solstice Gates"] and "Le Symbolisme du Zodiaque chez les pythagoriciens" [here, chap. XXXVI: "The Symbolism of the Zodiac among the Pythagoreans"].

⁶⁴⁵ Coomaraswamy often uses the expression "Supernal Sun". [The author's note, after the English term, adds: "which we do not think it possible to translate accurately and literally into French", where, in fact, there is no derivative of the Latin *supernus*. (*Translator's note*)].

⁶⁴⁶ See "Le 'trou de l'aiguille'" [here, chap. LV: "The Eye of the Needle"].

⁶⁴⁷ We will return to this point in more detail [in the following chapter].

⁶⁴⁸ The two wheels of the "cosmic chariot", located at both ends of the axle (which is then the Axis of the Universe), are heaven and earth (see "Le dôme et la roue" [here, chap. XL: "The Dome and the Wheel"]); this is, of course, the "celestial" wheel.

⁶⁴⁹ Analogous, we say, but not equivalent, for even in the case of *the pitṛiyāna*, it can never be said that the sun is *Ianua Inferni*.

⁶⁵⁰ These are, strictly speaking, the states of non-formal manifestation; it must be considered that the Cosmos comprises all manifestation, both non-formal and formal, while that which is beyond the

On the contrary, it is beyond the cosmos itself. As far as the "solar gate" is concerned, it refers to the sky that can be called supreme or "extra-cosmic"; on the other hand, as far as the "lunar gate" is concerned, it refers only to *svarga*, that is, to the one of the three worlds which, although the highest, is nevertheless included in the cosmos just like the other two. Returning to the consideration of the highest of the three perforated bricks of the Vedic altar, it can be said that the "solar gate" is located on its upper face (which is the true summit of the building as a whole), and the "lunar gate" on its lower face, since that brick itself represents *svarga*; on the other hand, the lunar sphere is described as touching the upper part of the atmosphere or intermediate world (*antariksha*), represented here by the middle brick⁶⁵¹. It can therefore be said, in terms of Hindu tradition, that the "lunar gate" gives access to *Indra-loka* (since *Indra* is the ruler of *svarga*) and the "solar gate" to *Brahma-loka*; in the traditions of Western antiquity, *Indra-loka* corresponds to the "Elysium" and *Brahma-loka* to the "Empyrean", the former being "intracosmic" and the latter "extracosmic"; and we must add that only the "solar gate" is properly the "narrow gate" we spoke of earlier, through which the being, leaving the cosmos and thus being definitively liberated from the conditions of all manifested existence, truly passes "from death to immortality".

Cosmos is the unmanifested.

⁶⁵¹This intermediate world and the earth (*Bhūmi*) both belong to the domain of the human state, of which they constitute, respectively, the subtle and gross or dense (*grossière*) modalities; Therefore, as Coomaraswamy accurately observes when pointing out the correspondence between the Vedic symbolism of perforated bricks and that of the ritual jades *pi* and *tsung* in the Chinese tradition, which represent heaven and earth respectively, the *pi*, which is a disc perforated in the centre, corresponds to the upper brick, while the *tsung*, shaped like a hollow cylinder on the inside and a square-based parallelepiped on the outside, should be considered as corresponding to the other two bricks together, with the entire human domain thus being represented by a single object.

LIX

"KÁLA-MUKHA"⁶⁵²

In the study we have just mentioned⁶⁵³, A. K. Coomaraswamy incidentally examines another symbol whose meaning is related to the *Ianua Caeli*: it is a "monster head" which, in various and often more or less stylised forms, is found in the most diverse areas, where it has been given equally diverse names, in particular *Kālamukha* and *Kīrti-mukha* in India, and *T'ao-t'ie* in China. It is also found not only in Cambodia and Java, but even in Central America, and is not uncommon in medieval European art. What is important to note above all is that this figure is generally placed above the lintel of a door or on the keystone of an arch, or at the top of a niche (*torana*) containing the image of a deity; in one way or another, it seems most often linked to the idea of the door, which clearly determines its symbolic value⁶⁵⁴.

A number of explanations have been given for this figure (we are not referring, of course, to those who see it as merely a 'decorative' motif), which may contain some truth, but most of which are insufficient, if only because they cannot be applied indiscriminately to all cases. Thus, K. Marchal has observed that in the figurines he has studied in particular, the lower jaw is almost always missing; this fact, together with the round shape of the eyes⁶⁵⁵ and the way the teeth stand out, leads him to suppose that it must have originally been the image of a human skull⁶⁵⁶. However, the lower jaw is not always absent, and is particularly present in the Chinese *T'ao-t'ie*, although it has a rather unusual appearance, as if it had been cut into two symmetrical parts and then placed on either side of the head, which Carl Hentze explains as a representation of the

⁶⁵² [Published in *Ê. T.*, March-April 1946].

⁶⁵³ "*Swayamātrinnā: Ianua Caeli*," in *Zalmoxis*, vol. II, 1939.

⁶⁵⁴ Coomaraswamy reproduces a figure of *T'ao-t'ie*, from the Han dynasty, from which a ring appears to be suspended. This could be considered, in a way, as the prototype of the common form of door knockers still in use today: that of an animal mask with a ring in its mouth. This ring is itself, in this case, a symbol of the 'narrow gate', as the open jaws of the monster are in others.

⁶⁵⁵ This form is, in fact, very generally a characteristic feature of the traditional representation of 'terrible' entities; thus, Hindu tradition attributes it to the *Yaksha* and other 'guardian' genies, and Islamic tradition to the *Djinn*.

⁶⁵⁶ "The Head of the Monster in Khmer and Far Eastern Decoration", in *Journal of the Indian Society of Oriental Art*, 1948.

spread remains of a bear or a tiger⁶⁵⁷ ; this may be accurate in that particular case, but it will not be so in others, where the monster has a normal-shaped mouth that is more or less open; and even with regard to the *T'ao-t'ie*, this explanation has only "historical" value and has nothing to do, of course, with symbolic interpretation.

The *T'ao-t'ie*, in reality, is neither a tiger nor a bear nor any other specific animal, and C. Hentze describes the heterogeneous nature of this fantastic mask as follows: "the jaws of a carnivorous beast armed with large fangs, buffalo or ram horns, an owl's face and feathers, stumps of wings and talons of a bird of prey, and a cicada-shaped ornament on the forehead". This figure is very ancient in China, as it is found almost constantly in the bronzes of the Shang dynasty⁶⁵⁸; the name *T'ao-t'ie*, which is usually translated as 'glutton' or 'ogre', seems to have been given to it much later, but this name is no less accurate, as it is, in fact, a 'devouring' monster. This also applies to its equivalents in other traditions, which, even if they are not as heterogeneous as the *T'ao-t'ie*, seem, in any case, to never be reducible to the representation of a single animal: thus, in India, it can be a lion (and then it has been agreed to give it more specifically the name *Kāla*), or a *Mākara* (symbol of *Varuna*, which deserves to be taken into account in view of the considerations that follow), or even an eagle, that is, a *Garuda*; but, under all these forms, the essential meaning always remains the same.

Regarding this meaning, C. Hentze, in the aforementioned article, sees the *T'ao-t'ie* primarily as a "demon of darkness"; this may be true in a certain sense, but only if explained precisely, as the author has done in a later work⁶⁵⁹. It is not a "demon" in the ordinary sense of the term, but in the original sense of the Vedic *Asura*, and the darkness in question is in fact the "higher darkness"⁶⁶⁰ ; in other words, it is a symbol of the "Supreme Identity" insofar as it alternately absorbs and emits the "Light of the World". The *T'ao-t'ie*

⁶⁵⁷ "Le Culte de l'ours et du tigre et le 'T'ao-t'ie'", in *Zalmoxis*, vol. I, 1938.

⁶⁵⁸Cf. H. G. Creel, *Studies in Early Chinese Culture*; this author places particular emphasis on the elements of this representation corresponding to the ox and the ram, and sees in this a possible connection with the fact that these animals were the ones most often used for sacrifices during the Shang dynasty.

⁶⁵⁹*Die Sakralbronzen und ihre Bedeutung in der Frühchinesischen Kulturen*, Antwerp, 1941. We are not directly familiar with this work, but we owe Coomarasvamy for pointing out the meaning in which the *T'ao-t'ie* is interpreted in it.

⁶⁶⁰ See our study on "Les deux nuits" [included as chapter XXXI in the volume *Initiation et réalisation spirituelle*].

The other similar monsters correspond, then, to *Vrtra* and his various equivalents, and also to *Varuna*, by whom light or rain is alternately withheld or released, an alternation that is that of the involutive and evolutionary heavens of universal manifestation⁶⁶¹; thus, Coomaraswamy has rightly said that this face, whatever its various appearances, is truly the "Face of God" that both "kills and gives life"⁶⁶². It is not, therefore, precisely a "skull", as K. Marchal supposes, unless this designation is taken in a symbolic sense; but rather, as Coomaraswamy says, it is "the head of Death", that is, of *Mrtyu*, another of whose names is also *Kāla*⁶⁶³.

Kāla is properly speaking the "devouring" Time⁶⁶⁴, but it also designates, by transposition, the Principle itself as "destroyer", or rather "transformer", with respect to manifestation, which it reduces to the unmanifest state by reabsorbing it in a certain way into itself, which constitutes the highest sense in which Death can be understood. It is also symbolically assimilated to the Sun, and it is well known that the lion, whose mask (*sinha-mukha*) it adopts, is more particularly a solar symbol; this brings us back to what we said earlier about the *Ianua Caeli*, and Coomaraswamy recalls in this regard that Christ, who said, "I am the Door," is also, at the same time, the "Lion of Judah" and the "Sun of men"⁶⁶⁵. In Byzantine churches, the figure of *the Pantokrator* or Christ 'in majesty' occupies the central position of the vault, that is, the position that corresponds precisely to the 'eye' of the dome; and this, as we have explained elsewhere, represents, at the upper end of the 'Axis of the World', the door through which the 'exit from the cosmos' takes place⁶⁶⁶.

⁶⁶¹ Light and rain are two symbols of celestial influences; we will return to this equivalence [see chap. LX].

⁶⁶² *El-Muhyi* and *el-Mumit* ['The Giver of Life' and 'The Slayer'] are two divine names in the Islamic tradition.

⁶⁶³ Coomaraswamy points out in this regard Indonesian sabre hilts depicting devouring monsters; it is clear that a symbol of Death is particularly appropriate in such cases. Furthermore, a connection can be established with certain representations of *Shinje*, the Tibetan form of *Yama*, where he appears with the "wheel of existence" before him and looks as if he is about to devour all the beings depicted on it (see M. Pallis, *Peaks and Lamas*, p. 146 [Spanish translation: *Cumbres y lamas*, p. 212]).

⁶⁶⁴ This word's primary meaning is 'black', which once again brings us back to the symbolism of 'darkness', which, moreover, is applicable within the manifestation itself to any transition from one state to another.

⁶⁶⁵ The 'solar gate' (*sūrya-dvāra*) is the 'gate of Liberation' (*mukti-dvāra*); the 'gate' (*dvāra*) and the 'mouth' (*mukha*) are equivalent symbols here. The sun, as the "Face of God," is also represented by a lion mask on a Christian sarcophagus in Ravenna.

⁶⁶⁶ See "La Porte étroite" [here, chap. XLI: "The Narrow Gate"].

Returning to *Kāla*, the heterogeneous figure known in Java as *Kāla-mākara*, in which the features of the *Mākara* are combined with those of the lion, also has an essentially solar significance, and at the same time, due to its *Mākara* appearance, refers more precisely to the symbolism of *Vārūna*. As the latter is identified with *Mrtyu* or *Yama*⁶⁶⁷, the *Mākara* is the crocodile (*çiçumâra* or *çiçumârî*) with open jaws that stands "against the current" and represents the only path through which every being must necessarily pass, thus presenting itself as the "guardian of the Gate" that one must cross in order to free oneself from the limiting conditions (also symbolised by *Vārūna's pâça*) that hold one back in the realm of contingent and manifested existence⁶⁶⁸. On the other hand, the *Mākara* is, in the Hindu Zodiac, the sign of Capricorn, that is, the "gate of the Gods"⁶⁶⁹; it therefore has two apparently opposite aspects, "beneficial" and "malefic", if you like, which also correspond to the duality of *Mitra* and *Varuna* (united in an indissoluble pair under the dual form *Mitrâvārūnau*), or that of the "daytime Sun" and the "night-time Sun", which is to say that, depending on the state reached by the being that appears before it, its mouth is for that being the "gateway to Liberation" or the "jaws of Death"⁶⁷⁰.

The latter case is that of the ordinary man who, passing through death, must return to another state of manifestation, while the former case is that of the being "qualified to pass through the medium of the Sun"⁶⁷¹, via the "seventh ray", because he has already identified with the Sun itself and thus, to the question: "Who are you?", which is asked when he reaches that door, he can truthfully answer: "I am You".

⁶⁶⁷ See "Le 'trou de l'aiguille'" [here, chap. LV: "The 'eye of the needle'"].

⁶⁶⁸ See "Le passage des eaux" [here, chap. LVI: "The Passage of the Waters"]. This crocodile is the *Ammî* of the ancient Egyptians, a monster that awaits the result of the "psychostasis" or "weighing of souls" to devour those who have not passed this test satisfactorily. It is also the same crocodile that, with its jaws open, stalks the "fool" of the twenty-first arcane of the Tarot; the "fool" is generally interpreted as the image of the profane who does not know where he comes from or where he is going, and walks blindly without awareness of the abyss into which he is about to plunge.

⁶⁶⁹ See "Quelques aspects du symbolisme du poisson" [here, chap. XXII: "Some aspects of the symbolism of the fish"]. Instead of the "devouring" crocodile aspect, the *Mākara* then takes on the aspect of the "saving" dolphin.

⁶⁷⁰ In certain traditions, the duality of *Mitrâvārūnau* corresponds to the association of the symbols of Love and Death, which we have had occasion to point out with regard to the "Faithful of Love". This same duality is also, in a certain sense, that of the "two hemispheres" referred to in particular by the symbolism of the Dioscuri (see "The Double Spiral" [chap. V of *The Great Triad*]).

⁶⁷¹ *Jaiminîya-Upânishad-Brâhmana*, 1, 6, 1.

LX

*THE LIGHT AND THE RAIN*⁶⁷²

We have alluded to a certain relationship between light and rain, in that both symbolise celestial or spiritual influences⁶⁷³. This meaning is evident with regard to light; as regards rain, we have indicated it elsewhere⁶⁷⁴, pointing out that it is above all a question of the descent of these influences to the earthly world, and emphasising that this is in fact the profound meaning, entirely independent of any 'magical' application, of the widespread rites whose purpose is to 'make it rain'⁶⁷⁵. On the other hand, both light and rain have a 'life-giving' power, which accurately represents the action of the influences in question⁶⁷⁶; this character is also linked, more particularly, to the symbolism of dew, which, naturally, is closely connected with that of rain and is common to numerous traditional forms, from Hermeticism⁶⁷⁷ and the Hebrew Kabbalah⁶⁷⁸ to the Far Eastern tradition⁶⁷⁹.

It is important to note that light and rain, viewed in this way, do not refer only to the sky in a general sense, but also, more specifically, to the sun; and this is strictly in accordance with the nature of the corresponding physical phenomena, that is, light and rain themselves understood in their literal sense. Indeed, on the one hand, the sun is truly and really the source of light in our world; and, on the other hand, it also evaporates water, "drawing" it in a certain way towards the upper regions of the atmosphere, from where it then descends again in the form of rain onto the earth. It should also be noted in this regard that the sun's action in producing rain is due precisely to its heat; we thus find the two complementary terms, light and heat, in which the fiery element is polarised, according to

⁶⁷² [Published in *É. T.*, May 1946].

⁶⁷³ [Chapter LIX: "Kāla-mukha"].

⁶⁷⁴ *The Great Triad*, chap. XIV.

⁶⁷⁵ This symbolism of rain has been preserved, through Hebrew tradition, even in Catholic liturgy: *Rorate Caeli desuper et nubes pluant iustum* (*Isaiah*, XLV, 8).

⁶⁷⁶ See in this regard, concerning light, *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVII.

⁶⁷⁷ The Rosicrucian tradition associates dew and light in a very special way, establishing a relationship of consonance between *Rosa-Lux* and *Rosa-Crux*.

⁶⁷⁸ We should also remember in this regard that the name *Metatron*, due to the different interpretations given to it, is linked both to "light" and to "rain"; and the specifically "solar" nature of *Metatron* places him in direct relation to the considerations we will develop below.

⁶⁷⁹ See *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. III, and *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IX.

We have already pointed this out on several occasions, and this observation explains the double meaning of a symbolic representation that seems to have been rather misunderstood in general.

The sun has often been represented, in very different times and places, and even in the Western Middle Ages, with rays of two types, alternately straight and wavy; a notable example is found on an Assyrian tablet in the British Museum dating from the 1st century BC⁶⁸⁰; on it, the sun appears as a kind of eight-rayed star⁶⁸¹: each of the four vertical and horizontal rays consists of two straight lines forming a very acute angle, and each of the four intermediate rays consists of a set of three parallel wavy lines. In other equivalent representations, the wavy rays are made up, like the straight lines, of two lines joined at their ends, thus reproducing the familiar appearance of the 'flaming sword'⁶⁸²; in all cases, it goes without saying that the essential elements are respectively the straight line and the wavy line, to which the two types of rays can ultimately be reduced in the most simplified representations; but what exactly is the meaning of these two lines?

Firstly, according to the meaning that may seem most natural when referring to a representation of the sun, the straight line represents light and the wavy line represents heat; this corresponds, moreover, to the symbolism of the Hebrew letters *rêsh* and *shîn* as respective elements of the roots *ar* ['r'] and *ash* ['sh'], which express precisely these two complementary modes of fire⁶⁸³. However, on the other hand—and this seems to complicate matters—the wavy line is also, very generally, a symbol of water; on the same Assyrian tablet we mentioned, water is represented by a series of wavy lines entirely similar to those seen in the rays of the sun. The truth is that, taking into account what we have already explained, there is no contradiction in this: rain, which naturally corresponds to the general symbol of water, can really be considered as coming from the sun; and furthermore, as it is an effect

⁶⁸⁰ This tablet is reproduced in *The Babylonian Legends of the Creation and the Fight between Bel and the Dragon as told by Assyrian Tablets from Nineveh*, published by the British Museum.

(⁶⁸¹) The number 8 may have a certain connection here with the Christian symbolism of the *Sol Iustitiae* or 'Sun of Justice' (cf. the symbolism of the 8th arcane of the Tarot); the sun god before whom this figure is placed holds in one hand 'a disc and a bar, which are conventional representations of the rule and rod of justice'; with regard to the first of these two emblems, we recall the relationship between the symbolism of 'measurement' and that of 'sunbeams' (see *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. III).

⁶⁸² We will note incidentally that this undulating shape is sometimes also a representation of lightning, which, moreover, is also related to rain, insofar as rain appears as a consequence of the action of lightning on clouds, which releases the water contained in them.

⁶⁸³ See Fabre d'Olivet, *La Langue hébraïque restituée*.

of solar heat, its representation can legitimately be confused with that of heat itself⁶⁸⁴. Thus, the double radiation we are considering is certainly light and heat in one respect; but at the same time, in another respect, it is also light and rain, through which the sun exerts its life-giving action on all things.

On this subject, it is worth noting the following: fire and water are two opposing elements; but this opposition is nothing more than the outward appearance of a complementary relationship and, beyond the realm where opposites assert themselves, they must, like all opposites, be reconciled and united in some way. In the Principle itself, of which the sun is a perceptible image, both are identified in a certain way, which further justifies the figuration we have just studied; and even at levels below that, but corresponding to states of manifestation higher than the corporeal world to which fire and water belong in their 'dense' or 'coarse' aspect, which gives rise to their mutual opposition, there may be between them an association equivalent, so to speak, to a relative identity. This is true of the "higher Waters," which are the possibilities of non-formal manifestation, and which in a certain sense are symbolically represented by the clouds, from which rain descends upon the earth⁶⁸⁵ while at the same time being the residence of fire in the form of lightning⁶⁸⁶; and the same occurs, in the order of formal manifestation, with certain possibilities belonging to the "subtle" domain. It is particularly interesting to note, in this regard, that alchemists "understand by waters, the rays and the brightness of their fire" and that they give the name "ablution" not to "the action of washing something with water or other liquid", but to a purification that is operated by fire, of

⁶⁸⁴According to Far Eastern tradition, light is *yang*, heat is considered dark and is *yin* in relation to light, just as water is *yin* in relation to fire. The straight line is therefore *yang*, and the wavy line is *yin*, also from these two points of view.

⁶⁸⁵Rain, in fact, to represent spiritual influences, must be considered as "heavenly" water, and it is well known that the Heavens correspond to non-formal states; the evaporation of terrestrial waters by solar heat is, on the other hand, the image of a "transformation" [in the sense of "passing beyond forms"], so that there is in it a kind of alternative transit from the "lower waters" to the "higher waters", and vice versa.

⁶⁸⁶ This should be considered in relation to the observation we made earlier regarding lightning, and it further justifies the similarity between its representation and the symbol of water. In ancient Far Eastern symbolism, there is only a slight difference between the representation of thunder (*lei-wen*) and that of clouds (*yün-wen*); both consist of a series of spirals, sometimes rounded and sometimes square; it is usually said that the former are *yün-wen* and the latter *lei-wen*, but there are intermediate forms that make this distinction very subtle in reality; moreover, both are equally connected with the symbolism of the Dragon (cf. H. G. Creel, *Studies in Early Chinese Culture*, pp. 236-37). Let us also note that this representation of thunder by spirals confirms what we said earlier about the relationship between the symbol of the double spiral and that of *the vajra* (*The Great Triad*, chap. VI).

In this way, "the ancients have concealed this ablution under the enigma of the salamander, which they say feeds on fire, and of the incombustible flax⁶⁸⁷, which is purified and bleached in fire without being consumed⁶⁸⁸. It can thus be understood why Hermetic symbolism frequently alludes to a 'fire that does not burn' and 'water that does not wet the hands', and also why 'animated' mercury, that is, mercury vivified by the action of sulphur, is described as 'fiery water' and sometimes even as 'liquid fire'⁶⁸⁹.

To return to the symbolism of the sun, we will only add that the two types of rays we have referred to are found in certain symbolic representations of the heart, and that the sun, or what it represents, is in fact considered to be the 'Heart of the World', so that, in this case too, it is actually the same thing; but this, insofar as the heart appears as a centre of both light and heat, may give rise to further considerations⁶⁹⁰.

⁶⁸⁷ This "fireproof flax" (*ásbestos*) is actually asbestos.

⁶⁸⁸ Dom A.-J. Pernéty, *Mytho-Hermetic Dictionary*, p. 2.

⁶⁸⁹ See *La Grande Triade*, chap. XII.

⁶⁹⁰ [This will be discussed in particular in chap. LXIX: "The Radiant Heart and the Heart on Fire"].

LXI

*THE CHAIN OF WORLDS*⁶⁹¹

The *Bhagavad Gita* says: "In Me all things⁶⁹² are strung like a string of pearls on a thread"⁶⁹³. This refers to the symbolism of *the sūtrātmā*, which we have already discussed on other occasions: it is the *Ātmā* which, like a thread (*sūtra*), penetrates and unites all worlds, while also being the "breath" which, according to the texts, sustains them and keeps them alive, without which they could have no reality or exist in any way. We are speaking here of the worlds from a "macrocosmic" point of view, but it is clear that the states of manifestation of a being could equally be approached from a "microcosmic" point of view, and that the symbolism would be exactly the same in either of these applications.

Each world, or each state of existence, can be represented by a sphere that the thread crosses diametrically, so as to constitute the axis that joins the two poles of the sphere; it can thus be seen that the axis of this world is, strictly speaking, only a segment of the axis of the entire universal manifestation, and in this way the effective continuity of all the states included in that manifestation is established. Before delving into the examination of this symbolism, we must first dispel a rather annoying confusion about what should be considered "high" and "low" in such a representation: in the realm of 'physical' appearances, if one starts from any point on the spherical surface, 'low' is always the direction towards the centre of the sphere; but it has been observed that this direction does not stop at the centre, but continues from it to the opposite point on the surface, and then beyond the sphere itself, and it has been believed that the descent must continue in the same way, from which it has been concluded that there would not only be a 'descent towards matter', that is, in relation to our world, towards what is coarsest in the corporeal order, but also a 'descent towards spirit'⁶⁹⁴, so that, if such a conception were to be admitted, spirit itself would have a "malefic" aspect.

⁶⁹¹ [Published in *É. T.*, June-July and August 1946].

⁶⁹² *Sārvam idam*, 'that all', that is, the totality of manifestation, which comprises all worlds and not just 'everything in this world', as stated in a recently published translation '*according to Shri Aurobindo*'.

⁶⁹³ *Bhagavad-Gita*, VII, 7.

⁶⁹⁴ R. P. V. Poucel, *La Parabole du Monde*, p. III. The abuse that is so often made nowadays of the words 'spirit' and 'spiritual' certainly has something to do with this misunderstanding; but it would have been necessary to denounce the abuse instead of seeming to accept it and thus drawing erroneous conclusions.

In reality, things must be approached in a very different way: in such a configuration, the centre is the lowest point ⁶⁹⁵, and beyond it, one can only ascend, just as Dante ascended from Hell following the same direction in which he had first descended, or at least what appears to be geometrically the same direction⁶⁹⁶, since the mountain of the earthly Paradise is located, in its spatial symbolism, at the antipodes of Jerusalem ⁶⁹⁷. Moreover, it suffices to reflect for a moment to realise that otherwise the representation would not be coherent, as it would not be in accordance with the symbolism of heaviness in any way, which is particularly important to consider here. Furthermore, how could what is "low" for one point on the sphere be at the same time "high" for the point diametrically opposite to it, and how would things appear if, on the contrary, one had started from the latter point?⁶⁹⁸ It is only true that the point of arrest of the descent is not situated in the corporeal order, for there really and truly exists an 'infracorporeal' in the prolongations of our world; but this 'infracorporeal' is the lower psychic domain, which not only cannot be assimilated to anything spiritual, but is even precisely the furthest thing from all spirituality, to such an extent that it would seem in a way to be its opposite in every respect, if it were possible to say that the spirit has an opposite; the confusion we have just pointed out is, therefore, ultimately nothing more than a particular case of the widespread confusion between the psychic and the spiritual⁶⁹⁹.

The only objection that could be made to what we have just said is that, if the states of manifested existence are hierarchical, that is, if there are higher and lower states among them, there is also, by the very "thread" that unites them, a direction towards the top and

⁶⁹⁵ On the contrary, it is the highest point when a kind of 'reversal' of the figure can be operated to effect the application of the 'reverse direction', which, moreover, corresponds to the true role of the centre as such (see *La Grande Triade*, chap. XXIII).

⁶⁹⁶ We make this reservation because the very passage through the centre or the lowest point already implies a 'straightening out' (represented in Dante by the way he contours Lucifer's body), that is, a change of direction, or, more precisely, a change in the 'qualitative' sense in which that direction is travelled.

⁶⁹⁷ See *L'Ésotérisme de Dante*, chap. VIII.

⁶⁹⁸ Due to a similar error, but limited to the 'physical' order and the literal sense, the antipodes have sometimes been represented with their heads downwards.

⁶⁹⁹ Let us add in this regard that, contrary to what the author we have just quoted also says in the same passage, there can be no such thing as 'spiritual illusion'; the constant fear (and, it must be acknowledged, very often justified to a certain extent) that most mystics have of being deceived by the devil proves very clearly that they do not go beyond the psychic realm, since, as we have explained elsewhere, the devil has direct access only to this realm (and indirect access, through it, to the corporeal realm), and everything that truly belongs to the spiritual realm is, by its very nature, absolutely closed to him.

an opposite direction towards the bottom. This is true in a certain sense, but it must be added first of all that such a distinction in no way affects the *sūtrātmā*, which is everywhere and always identical to itself, whatever the nature or quality of the states it penetrates and sustains; and secondly, that this concerns the chain of worlds itself and not each of these worlds considered separately, isolated from the others. In fact, any of these worlds, to the full extent of its capacity, constitutes only an infinitesimal element in the whole of universal manifestation, so that, strictly speaking, its representation should be considered as reduced to a point; one could also, applying the geometric symbolism of the vertical and horizontal senses, represent the worlds as an indefinite series of horizontal discs strung on a vertical axis⁷⁰⁰; in any case, it can be seen that, within the limits of each world, the axis cannot truly be reached except at a single point, and therefore only by going beyond those limits can a 'high' and a 'low' or a downward direction be considered on the axis.

We can add yet another observation: the axis in question can be likened, according to another symbolism we have already discussed, to the 'seventh ray' of the sun; if a world is represented by a sphere, this axis should not actually be any of the diameters of this sphere, because if we consider the three orthogonal diameters that form the axes of a three-dimensional coordinate system, the six directions opposite each other in pairs that they determine are none other than the other six rays of the sun; the "seventh ray" should also be perpendicular to all of them, for only it, as the axis of universal manifestation, is what could be called the absolute vertical, with respect to which the coordinate axes of the world under consideration are all relatively horizontal. It is evident that this is not geometrically representable⁽⁷⁰¹⁾, which shows that any representation is necessarily inadequate; at least, the "seventh ray" cannot be represented except by a single point, which coincides with the very centre of the sphere; and this also indicates that, for any being enclosed within the limits of a given world, that is, within the special conditions of a given state of existence, the axis itself is truly "invisible" and only the point that is its "trace" in that world can be perceived. Moreover, it goes without saying that this last observation, necessary for the symbolism of the axis and its relations with the worlds united by it to be conceived in the most complete way possible, does not prevent

⁷⁰⁰ This representation also clearly shows that, as continuity is established exclusively by the axis, communication between the different states can only be effectively operated through their respective centres.

⁷⁰¹ Some might be tempted to bring the "fourth dimension" into play here, but this cannot be represented in itself, as it is in reality nothing more than an algebraic construction expressed in geometric language.

In fact, as we said at the beginning, the "chain of worlds" is most often represented by a series of spheres⁷⁰²strung together like pearls on a necklace⁷⁰³; and, to tell the truth, it would undoubtedly be impossible to give it any other sensible representation.

What is important to note is that the "chain" can only be traversed in one direction, corresponding to what we have called the ascending direction of the axis; This is particularly clear when temporal symbolism is used, assimilating worlds or states of existence to successive cycles, such that, in relation to any given state, the previous cycles represent the lower states, and the subsequent cycles the higher states, which implies that their chaining must be conceived as irreversible. On the other hand, this irreversibility is also implied in the conception of this chain as having a properly "causal" character, although this essentially implies simultaneity and no longer succession, since, in a cause-and-effect relationship, the two terms can never be reversed; and, ultimately, the notion of a causal chain constitutes the true meaning of what is symbolically translated by the appearances of a cyclical succession, with the point of view of simultaneity always responding to a deeper order of reality than that of succession.

The "chain of worlds" is generally depicted in a circular form⁷⁰⁴, since if each world is considered as a cycle and symbolised as such by a circular or spherical figure, the entire manifestation, which is the sum of all worlds, appears in a certain way as a "cycle of cycles". Thus, the chain can not only be traversed continuously from its origin to its end, but can then be traversed again, and always in the same direction, which corresponds, on the other hand, in the unfolding of manifestation, to another level than that in which the simple passage from one world to another takes place⁷⁰⁵, and, as this journey can be continued indefinitely, the indefiniteness of manifestation itself is thus expressed in an even more sensitive way.

⁷⁰² In certain cases, these spheres are replaced by discs perforated in the centre, which correspond to the discs, considered as horizontal in relation to the axis, that we have just mentioned.

⁷⁰³ Furthermore, it is reasonable to assume that such a necklace must have originally been a symbol of the "chain of worlds" because, as we have often pointed out, attributing a purely "decorative" or "ornamental" character to an object is always the result of a certain degradation that stems from a misunderstanding of the traditional point of view.

⁷⁰⁴ This form in no way contradicts the "verticality" of the axis or thread that represents it, since, as it must naturally be considered to be of indefinite length, each of its portions can be assimilated to a straight line that is always vertical, that is, perpendicular to the domain of existence constituted by the world it traverses, a domain which, as we have said above, is nothing more than an infinitesimal element of manifestation, which necessarily comprises an indefinite multitude of such worlds.

However, it is essential to add that, if the chain closes ⁷⁰⁶, the point of closure itself is in no way comparable to its other points, since it does not belong to the series of manifested states; the origin and the end come together and coincide, or rather, they are in reality one and the same thing, but this can only be so because they are situated not at any level of manifestation, but beyond it, in the Principle itself ⁷⁰⁷.

In the various traditional forms, the most common symbol of the "chain of worlds" is the rosary; and we will note first of all, in connection with what we said at the beginning about the "breath" that sustains the worlds, that the formula pronounced on each bead corresponds, in principle at least if not always in fact, to a breath, whose two phases symbolise, respectively, as is well known, the production of a world and its reabsorption. The interval between two breaths, corresponding, naturally, to the passage from one bead to another, therefore represents a *pralaya* ['dissolution']; the general meaning of this symbolism is thus quite clear, whatever particular forms it may take in different cases. It should also be noted that the most essential element here is actually the thread that joins the beads; this may even seem obvious, since there can be no rosary without first and foremost that thread on which the beads are then inserted "like the pearls of a necklace". If it is necessary, however, to draw attention to this, it is because, from an external point of view, the beads are more visible than the thread; and this is very significant, since the beads represent manifestation, while the *sûrâtmâ*, represented by the thread, is in itself unmanifested.

In India, the rosary is called *aksha-mâlâ* or 'akshâ garland' (and also *aksha-sûtra*); but what is meant by *aksha*? This question is, in truth, quite complex⁷⁰⁸; the verbal root *aksh-*, from which this word derives, means 'to reach', 'to penetrate', 'to pass through', hence the primary meaning of *aksha* as 'axis'; and,

⁷⁰⁵ In terms of Hindu tradition, this transition from one world to another is a *prâlaya*, and the passage through the point where the ends of the chain meet is a *mahâprâlaya*; this, on the other hand, would also be applicable, analogously, to a particular degree, if, instead of considering the worlds with respect to the totality of manifestation, only the various modalities of the same world with respect to the totality of the world were considered.

⁷⁰⁶ Perhaps it would be more accurate, in a sense, to say that the chain *seems* to close, so as not to give rise to the assumption that a new journey along that chain could be nothing more than a kind of repetition of the previous journey, which is impossible; but, in another sense or in another respect, the chain closes real and effectively, since, from the point of view of principle (and no longer from the point of view of manifestation), the end is necessarily identical to the origin.

⁷⁰⁷ We refer here to what we have said in "La jonction des extrêmes" [*É. T.*, May 1940=chap. XXIX of *Initiation et Réalisation spirituelle*].

⁷⁰⁸ We owe the following information on this subject to the kindness of A. K. Coomaraswamy.

On the other hand, *aksha* and the Latin *axis*, 'axis', are clearly identical. Referring back to the considerations already outlined, one can immediately see a direct relationship with the essentially 'axial' meaning of *sūtrātmā*; but how did *aksha* come to designate not the thread, but the beads of the rosary themselves? To understand this, it is necessary to realise that, in most of its secondary applications, this designation, that of the axis itself, has been transferred in a certain way (from the active to the passive sense, so to speak) to that which is pierced by it, and more particularly to its point of penetration. Thus, for example, *aksha* is the 'eye' of a wheel, that is, its hub ⁷⁰⁹; and the idea of 'eye' (a meaning that *aksha* often has, especially in its compounds) leads us back to the symbolic conception of the axle as 'sunbeams' that illuminate the world by penetrating it. *Aksha* is also the 'die', apparently because of the 'eyes' or dots with which its faces are marked ⁷¹⁰; and it is also the name of a type of grain commonly used to make rosaries, because the perforation of the beads is also an 'eye' intended precisely to allow the 'axial' thread to pass through ⁷¹¹. This, moreover, confirms what we said earlier about the primordial importance of the axial thread in the symbol of the 'chain of worlds', for it is from this thread that the beads of which it is composed receive their secondary designation, just as, one might say, the worlds are not really 'worlds' except insofar as they are penetrated by the *sūtrātmā*⁷¹².

The number of beads on a rosary varies according to tradition, and may even vary according to certain special applications; but, at least in Eastern forms, it is always a cyclical number: thus, particularly in India and Tibet, that number is usually 108. In reality, the states that constitute the universal manifestation are indefinitely numerous, but it is evident that this multitude could not be adequately represented in a symbol of a sensible order such as the one in question here, and it is necessary that the beads be of a definite number ⁷¹³. That being the case, a cyclical number is naturally suitable for a circular figure such as the one considered here, which

⁷⁰⁹ We recall what we said earlier about various related symbols, such as the "eye" of the dome and the "eye" of the spire.

⁷¹⁰ It is also noteworthy, from the point of view of the doctrine of the heavens, that the designations of these faces, according to the number of their points, are the same as those of the *Yugas*.

⁷¹¹ The name of the *rudrāksha* bead is interpreted as 'provided with a red eye' (in its natural state, and before drilling); the rosary is also called *rudrāksha-vālaya*, 'ring or circle of *rudrāksha*'.

⁷¹² It is well known that the Sanskrit word *loka*, 'world', is etymologically related to light and sight, and therefore also to the symbolism of the 'eye' and the 'sunbeam'.

⁷¹³ Similarly, in language itself, indefiniteness is often expressed symbolically by numbers such as ten thousand, as we have explained elsewhere (cf. *Les Principes du calcul infinitésimal*, chap. IX).

It represents in itself a cycle or rather, as we said earlier, a 'cycle of cycles'.

In Islamic tradition, the number of beads is 99, also a 'circular' number due to its factor 9, and in this case also referring to the divine names⁷¹⁴; since each bead represents a world, this can also refer to the angels considered to be 'rulers of the spheres'⁷¹⁵, each representing or expressing in a certain way a divine attribute⁷¹⁶, which will thus be more particularly linked to that of the worlds of which that angel is the "spirit". On the other hand, it is said that one bead is missing to complete the hundred (which is equivalent to reducing multiplicity to unity), since $99=100-1$, and that this bead, which refers to the "Name of the Essence" (*Ismu-dhDhât*), can only be found in Paradise⁷¹⁷; and this is a point that still requires some explanation.

The number 100, like 10, of which it is the square, can normally refer only to a straight line and not to a circle⁷¹⁸, so that it cannot be counted on the circumference itself of the "chain of worlds"; but the missing unit corresponds precisely to what we have called the point of union of the ends of that chain, a point which, let us remember once again, does not belong to the series of manifested states. In geometric symbolism, that point, instead of being on the circumference representing the whole of manifestation, will be at its very centre, for the return to the Principle is always figured as a return to the centre⁷¹⁹. The Principle, in fact, cannot appear in manifestation except through its attributes, that is, according to the language of the Hindu tradition, through its "non-supreme" aspects, which are, one might also say, the forms taken on by the *sâtrâtmâ* with

⁷¹⁴ The 99 beads are also divided into three series of 33; we thus find here the multiples whose symbolic importance we have already pointed out on other occasions.

⁷¹⁵ It should be remembered that, in the West too, St Thomas Aquinas expressly taught the doctrine that *angelus movet stellam* ['the angel moves the star']; this doctrine was, moreover, commonplace in the Middle Ages, but it is one of those that moderns, even when they call themselves 'Thomists', prefer to overlook so as not to clash too much with commonly accepted 'mechanistic' conceptions.

⁷¹⁶ Although we have already pointed this out on several occasions, we intend to return to it specifically in a future article.

⁷¹⁷ In the angelic correspondence we have just mentioned, that hundredth count must refer to the "Angel of the Face" (who is, in reality, more than an angel): *Metatron* [in Hebrew Kabbalah] or *er-Râh* [in Islamic tradition].

⁷¹⁸ Cf. *The Great Triad*, chap. VIII.

⁷¹⁹ This "return" is expressed in the *Qur'an* (II 156) by the words: *innâ li-llâhi wa innâ râdjî'ûn* ["Truly we belong to (or are for) God, and to Him we shall return" (the reference to the Qur'anic text seems to be incorrect (*Translator's note*)).

with regard to the different worlds it traverses (although, in reality, the *sûtrâtrnâ* is in no way affected by these forms, which are ultimately nothing more than appearances due to manifestation itself); but the Principle itself, that is, the "Supreme" (*Paramâtmâ*, not *sûtrâtmâ*), or the "Essence" regarded as absolutely independent of any attribution or determination, could not be considered as entering into relation with the manifested, even if only in an illusory way, although the manifestation proceeds from and depends on it entirely in all that it is, without which it would have no degree of reality whatsoever: the circumference exists only because of the centre; but the centre does not depend on the circumference in any way or in any respect. The return to the centre, moreover, can be approached on two different levels, and the symbolism of 'Paradise', which we spoke of a moment ago, is equally applicable in both cases: if, in the first instance, only the multiple modalities of a given state of existence, such as the human state, are considered, the integration of these modalities will culminate in the centre of that state, which is effectively Paradise (*el-Djannah*) understood in its most immediate and literal sense; but this is still only a relative meaning, and if we are dealing with the totality of manifestation, it is necessary, in order to be liberated from it without any residue of conditioned existence, to effect a transposition from the centre of a state to the centre of total being, which is properly designated by analogy as the "Paradise of Essence" (*Djânnatu-dh-Dhât*). Let us add that, in the latter case, the "hundredth bead" of the rosary is, in truth, the only one that remains, for all the others have finally been reabsorbed into it: in absolute reality, in fact, there is no longer any place for any of the names that "distinctively" express the multiplicity of attributes in the unity of Essence; there is nothing but *Allah*, exalted *'ammâ yasifûn*, that is, beyond all attributes, which are only, of the divine Truth, the refracted aspects that contingent beings, as such, are capable of conceiving and expressing.

⁷²⁰ The absolute transcendence of the Principle itself necessarily entails the "irreciprocity of relationship," which, as we have explained elsewhere, formally excludes any "pantheistic" or "immanentist" conception.

LXII

THE "ROOTS OF PLANTS"⁷²¹

According to Kabbalistic tradition, among those who entered the *Pardes*⁽⁷²²⁾ there were some who "devastated the garden," and it is said that this devastation consisted more precisely in "cutting the roots of the plants." To understand what this means, it is necessary to refer first of all to the symbolism of the inverted tree, which we have already discussed on other occasions⁷²³: the roots are at the top, that is, at the Principle itself; cutting these roots is therefore to consider the "plants" or beings symbolised by them as endowed in a certain way with an existence and reality independent of the Principle. In the case in question, these beings are mainly angels, since this naturally refers to degrees of existence of a superhuman order; and it is easy to understand what the consequences may be, particularly for what has been agreed to call "practical Kabbalah". Indeed, the invocation of angels thus regarded, not as the "celestial intermediaries" that they are from the point of view of traditional orthodoxy, but as truly independent powers, constitutes properly "association" (Arabic: *shirk*) in the sense given to this term by Islamic tradition, for then such powers inevitably appear as "associated" [on an equal footing] with the divine Power itself, rather than simply derived from it. These consequences are also found, and with greater reason, in the lower applications belonging to the domain of magic, a domain where, moreover, those who commit such an error are necessarily confined sooner or later, for, for that very reason, in their case, any real possibility of "theurgy" is excluded, since all effective communication with the Principle becomes impossible once "the roots are cut". We would add that the same consequences extend even to the most degenerate forms of magic, such as "ceremonial magic"; only in the latter case, if the error is always essentially the same, the actual dangers are at least mitigated by the very insignificance of the results that can be achieved⁷²⁴. Finally, it should be noted that this immediately explains at least one

⁷²¹ [Published in *É. T.*, September 1946].

⁷²² The *Pardes*, symbolically represented as a 'garden', should be considered here as representing the domain of higher and reserved knowledge: the four letters P R D S, related to the four rivers of Eden, designate respectively the different meanings contained in the sacred Scriptures, to which correspond so many degrees of knowledge; it goes without saying that those who "devastated the garden" had not actually reached a degree beyond which it is still possible to stray.

⁷²³ See especially "L'Arbre du Monde" [here, chap. II: "The Tree of the World"].

in the sense that the origin of such deviations is sometimes attributed to "fallen angels"; angels, in fact, are truly and really "fallen" when they are considered in this way, for from their participation in the Principle they actually have everything that constitutes their being, so that when that participation is unknown, only a purely negative aspect remains, like a kind of inverted shadow with respect to that very being⁷²⁵.

According to orthodox belief, an angel, as a "heavenly intermediary," is essentially nothing more than the expression of a divine attribute in the order of non-formal manifestation, since only this allows for the establishment, through the angel, of real communication between the human state and the Principle itself, of which it thus represents an aspect that is more particularly accessible to beings in that human state. This is, moreover, what the angelic names themselves clearly show, for they are always, in effect, designations of divine attributes; here, above all, the name corresponds fully to the nature of the being and is in fact identified with its very essence. As long as this meaning is not lost sight of, the "roots" cannot, therefore, be "cut off"; it could therefore be said that, in this respect, the error of believing that the divine name belongs to the angel as such and as a "separate" being is only possible when the understanding of the sacred language becomes obscured, and if one considers all that this actually implies, one can understand that this observation has a much deeper meaning than it might seem at first glance⁷²⁶. These considerations also give full value to the Kabbalistic interpretation of *Mal'achi*, 'My angel' or 'My envoy'⁷²⁷, as 'the angel in whom is My name', that is, in short, in whom is God Himself, at least

⁷²⁴On the question of "ceremonial magic," cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XX. The use of divine and angelic names in their Hebrew forms is undoubtedly one of the main reasons that led A. E. Waite to believe that all ceremonial magic originated with the Jews (*The Secret Tradition in Freemasonry*, pp. 397-99); we do not consider this opinion to be entirely well-founded, since the truth is rather that ceremonial magic contains elements taken from older and more authentic forms of magic, and that in the Western world, these forms had no other sacred language at their disposal for their formulas than Hebrew.

⁷²⁵It could be said, and it matters little whether literally or symbolically, that in such conditions, anyone who believes they are summoning an angel runs a great risk of seeing a demon appear instead.

⁷²⁶In this regard, we recall what we indicated earlier regarding the correspondence between the various degrees of knowledge and the more or less "inner" meanings of the sacred Scriptures; it is clear that this has nothing in common with entirely external knowledge, which is all that can be gained from the study of a secular language, and even, we might add, from the study of a sacred language using methods such as those employed by modern linguists.

⁷²⁷It is well known that the etymological meaning of the word "angel" (Greek *ángelos*) is "envoy" or "messenger," and that the corresponding Hebrew word, *mal'ach*, also has the same meaning.

in some of its "attributive" aspects ⁷²⁸. This interpretation applies, first and foremost, to *Metatron*, the "Angel of the Face"⁷²⁹, or to *Mija'el* [Michael] (a name of which *Mal'aji* is an anagram) insofar as, in his "solar" role, he is identified in a certain way with *Metatron*; but it is also applicable to any of the angels, for they are truly, with regard to manifestation and in the strictest sense of the term, the "bearers" of so many divine names, and even, seen from the side of "Truth" (*el-Haqq*), they are really nothing but those names. The difference is nothing more than that which results from a certain hierarchy that can be established among the divine attributes, according to whether they proceed more or less directly from the Essence, so that their manifestation can be considered as situated at different levels, and such is, in short, the foundation of the angelic hierarchies; such attributes or aspects must necessarily be conceived, moreover, as an indefinite multitude when viewed "distinctively", and this corresponds to the very multitude of angels⁷³⁰.

One might ask why, in all this, it is only angels that are concerned, when, in truth, every being, whatever it may be and whatever order of existence it may belong to, also depends entirely on the Principle in all that it is, and this dependence, which is at the same time a participation, constitutes, one might say, the very measure of its reality; and, moreover, every being also has within itself, and more precisely in its 'centre', at least virtually, a divine principle without which its existence would not even be an illusion, but purely and simply nothingness. This corresponds exactly, on the other hand, to the Kabbalistic teaching according to which the 'channels' through which the influences emanating from the Principle are communicated to manifested beings do not stop at a certain level, but extend continuously to all degrees of universal Existence, including the lowest⁷³¹, so that, to return to the preceding symbolism, nowhere could there be any being that could be likened to a "plant without roots". However, it is clear that degrees must be considered in the participation in question, and that these degrees correspond precisely to those of

⁷²⁸ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, p. 33. From the point of view of principle, it is the angel, or rather the attribute represented by him, who is in God, but the relationship appears to be reversed with regard to manifestation.

⁷²⁹ The name *Metatron* is numerically equivalent to the divine name *Shadday*.

⁷³⁰ It should be borne in mind that we are dealing here with a "transcendental" multitude and not with a numerical indefiniteness (cf. *Les Principes du calcul infinitésimal*, chap. III); angels are in no way "enumerable", since they do not belong to the domain of existence conditioned by quantity.

⁷³¹ The symbolism of these 'channels' that descend gradually through all states can help us to understand, if we look at them in an ascending sense, how beings on a higher level can, in general, act as 'intermediaries' for those on a lower level, since communication with the Principle is not possible for the latter except through the former.

Existence; that is why they have so much more reality the higher they are, that is, the closer they are to the Principle (although there is certainly no common measure between any state of manifestation, even the highest of all, and the principal state itself). In this as in any other respect, it is important to note first of all a distinction between the case of beings situated in the domain of non-formal or supra-individual manifestation, to which the angelic states correspond, and that of beings situated in the domain of formal or individual manifestation; and this still needs to be explained in a somewhat more precise manner.

Only in the non-formal order can it be said that a being truly and as fully as possible expresses or manifests an attribute of the Principle; here, the distinction between these attributes constitutes the very distinction between beings, which can be characterised as a 'distinction without separation' (*bhedābhedā*, in Hindu terminology)⁷³², since it goes without saying that, ultimately, all attributes are really "one"; and moreover, this is the minimum conceivable limitation in a state which, by virtue of being manifested, is also conditioned. On the other hand, since the nature of each being is then reduced entirely, in a certain sense, to the expression of a single attribute, it is evident that said being thus possesses, in itself, a unity of a very different and much more real order than the completely relative, fragmentary and "composite" unity proper to individual beings as such; and, ultimately, due to this reduction of angelic nature to a defined attribute, with no "composition" other than the mixture of act and potency necessarily inherent in all manifestation⁷³³, St. Thomas Aquinas was able to consider the differences between angels as comparable to specific differences and not to individual differences⁷³⁴. If we now wish to find, in the order of formal manifestation, a correspondence or reflection of what we have just said, we must not look for it in individual beings taken each in particular (and this is clear from our last observation), but rather in the "worlds" or states of existence themselves, for each of them, as a whole and 'globally', is more specifically related to a particular divine attribute, of which it is, if one may so express it, the particular production⁷³⁵; and this is directly linked to the conception of angels as

⁷³² Cf. *The Reign of Quantity and the Signs of the Times*, chap. IX.

⁷³³ It could be said that the angelic being is in act in relation to the attribute expressed by it, but is in potency in relation to all other attributes.

⁷³⁴ Cf. *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XI.

⁷³⁵ It goes without saying that such a way of speaking is valid only to the extent and from the point of view that the attributes themselves can be considered "distinctly" (and they can only be so with respect to manifestation), and that the indivisible unity of the divine Essence itself, to which everything ultimately reduces, is in no way affected by this.

"rulers of the spheres" and with the considerations we have already set forth in this regard in our previous study on the "chain of worlds".

LXIII

*THE SYMBOLISM OF THE BRIDGE*⁷³⁶

Although we have already discussed the symbolism of the bridge on several occasions, we will add a few more considerations in connection with a study by Luisa Coomaraswamy on this subject⁷³⁷, in which she particularly emphasises a point that shows the close relationship between this symbolism and the doctrine of *sūtrātmā*. This concerns the original meaning of the word *setu*, the oldest of the various Sanskrit terms used to designate a bridge, and the only one found in the *Rig Veda*: this word, derived from the root *si-*, 'to bind', properly means a 'bond'; and, indeed, a bridge spanning a river is certainly what binds one bank to the other; but apart from this general observation, there is something much more precise implied by this term. It is necessary to imagine the bridge as originally consisting of lines, which are its most orthodox natural model, or of a rope fixed in the same way as those lines, for example to a pair of trees growing on the banks and thus appearing to be effectively 'bound' to each other by means of that rope. The two banks symbolically represent two different states of being, and it is clear that the rope is in this case the same as the 'thread' that joins these states together, that is, the *sūtrātmā* itself; the nature of this bond, both tenuous and resistant, is also an appropriate image of its spiritual nature; and that is why the bridge, also likened to a ray of light, is often, in traditional descriptions, as thin as the edge of a sword, or, if made of wood, is formed by a single beam or a single trunk⁷³⁸. Such narrowness also highlights the 'dangerous' nature of the path in question, which is, moreover, the only one possible, but not everyone manages to traverse it, and very few can do so without help and by their own means⁷³⁹, for there is always a certain danger in passing from one state to another; but this refers above all to the dual meaning, "beneficial" and "malefic", that the bridge has, like so many other symbols, and to which we shall return shortly.

⁷³⁶ [Published in *É. T.* January-February 1947].

⁷³⁷ "The Perilous Bridge of Welfare," in *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, August 1944 issue.

⁷³⁸ Let us recall in this regard the double meaning of the English word *beam*, which refers both to a 'beam' and a 'ray of light', as we have already noted elsewhere ("Maçons et Charpentiers," in *É. T.*, December 1946 [text to be included in the posthumous compilation *Tradition primordiale et formes particulières*]).

⁷³⁹This is an exclusive privilege of 'solar heroes' in myths and tales featuring the crossing of the bridge.

The two worlds represented by the two banks are, in the most general sense, heaven and earth, which were originally united and were separated by the very fact of manifestation, whose entire domain is then likened to a river or a sea stretching between them⁷⁴⁰. The bridge is therefore exactly equivalent to the pillar that unites heaven and earth while keeping them separate; and because of this significance, it must be conceived essentially as vertical⁷⁴¹, just like all the other symbols of the "Axis of the World", for example the axis of the "cosmic chariot" when its two wheels represent, in the same way, heaven and earth⁷⁴²; this also establishes the fundamental identity of the symbolism of the bridge with that of the ladder, which we have discussed on another occasion⁷⁴³. Thus, crossing the bridge is ultimately nothing more than travelling along the axis, the only means of mutual union between the different states; the shore from which it departs is, in fact, this world, that is, the state in which the being who must cross it currently finds itself; and the shore to which it arrives, after having crossed the other states of manifestation, is the principal world; the first of the shores is the domain of death, where everything is subject to change, and the other is the domain of immortality⁷⁴⁴.

⁷⁴⁰In any more restricted application of this symbolism, it will always refer to two states which, for a certain "reference level", are related to each other in the same way as heaven and earth.

⁷⁴¹In this regard, and in relation to what we have just said, we recall the often-described "rope test," in which a rope thrown into the air remains or appears to remain vertical while a man or child climbs up it until they disappear from view. even if, at least in most cases, this is a phenomenon of suggestion, it matters little from the point of view we are taking here, and, just like climbing a mast, it is still a very significant representation of what we are discussing.

⁽⁷⁴²⁾ Ms Coomaraswamy points out that, although in some cases the bridge is described as being arch-shaped, which more or less explicitly identifies it with the rainbow, these cases are far from being the most common in traditional symbolism. We would add that this does not necessarily contradict the concept of the bridge as vertical, since, as we have said in relation to the 'chain of worlds', a curved line of indefinite length can be assimilated in each of its portions to a straight line that will always be 'vertical' in the sense that it will be perpendicular to the domain of existence it crosses. Furthermore, even when there is no identification between the bridge and the rainbow, the latter is still considered, in a very general way, as a symbol of union between heaven and earth.

⁷⁴³ "Le symbolisme de l'échelle" [here, chap. LIV: "The symbolism of the ladder"].

⁷⁴⁴ It is clear that, in the general symbolism of crossing waters, seen as a transition "from death to immortality", crossing by means of a bridge or a ford is only appropriate when the crossing is from one bank to the other, excluding cases where it is described as the process of going upstream towards the source or, conversely, as going downstream to the sea, in which the journey must necessarily be accomplished by other means, for example in accordance with the symbolism of navigation, which, moreover, is applicable to all cases (see 'Le passage des eaux' [here, chap. LVI: 'The Passage of the Waters']).

We recalled a moment ago that the axis both unites and separates heaven and earth; in the same way, if the bridge is truly and really the path that connects the two banks and allows passage from one to the other, it can also be, in a certain sense, like an obstacle placed between them, and this brings us back to its "dangerous" nature. This is also implicit in the meaning of the word *setu*, which is a 'bond' in the double sense in which it can be understood: on the one hand, that which links two things together, but also a snare in which a being is caught; a rope can serve both purposes equally well, and the bridge will thus appear in one form or the other, that is, in short, as 'beneficial' or 'malefic', depending on whether the being manages to cross it or not. It can be observed that the double symbolic meaning of the bridge also results from the fact that it can be crossed in both opposite directions, although it should only be crossed in one direction, that which goes from 'this bank' to 'the other bank', since any retreat constitutes a danger to be avoided⁷⁴⁵, except in the unique case of the being who, already freed from conditioned existence, can henceforth "move at will" through all worlds, and for whom such a retreat is, moreover, nothing more than an illusory appearance. In any other case, the part of the bridge already crossed must normally be "lost from sight" and treated as if it did not exist, just as the symbolic ladder is always considered to be fixed in the very domain where the being climbing it currently finds himself, and its lower part disappears for him as he ascends⁷⁴⁶. As long as the being has not reached the principal world, from where it can then descend back to manifestation without being affected by it in any way, realisation can only be achieved in an ascending sense; and for those who cling to the path for the path's sake, thus taking the means for the end, that path will truly become an obstacle instead of effectively leading them to liberation, which implies a continuous destruction of the bonds that tie them to the stages already traversed, until the axis is finally reduced to the single point that contains everything and is the centre of the total being.

⁷⁴⁵Hence the frequent references in myths and legends of all origins to the danger of turning back halfway and 'looking back'.

⁷⁴⁶ Here we have a "reabsorption" of the axis by the being that travels along it, as we have already explained in *La Grande Triade*, a book to which we will also refer for certain related points, in particular the identification of that being with the axis itself, whatever symbol the latter may represent, and consequently also with the bridge, which gives the true meaning of the "pontifical" function, and to which, among other traditional formulas, this phrase from the Celtic *Mabinogion*, quoted as a motto by Mrs. Coomaraswamy, alludes very clearly: "He who would be Chief must be the Bridge."

LXIV

*THE BRIDGE AND THE RAINBOW*⁷⁴⁷

We have pointed out, with regard to the symbolism of the bridge and its essentially "axial" meaning, that the assimilation between this symbolism and that of the rainbow is not as frequent as is commonly believed. There are certainly cases in which such assimilation exists, and one of the clearest is found in Scandinavian tradition, where the *Byfrost* bridge is expressly identified with the rainbow. In other cases, when the bridge is described as rising in one part of its course and descending in the other, that is, in the shape of a vaulted arch, it seems rather that, in general, these descriptions have been influenced by a secondary connection with the rainbow, without implying a true identification between the two symbols. This connection is easily explained by the fact that the rainbow is generally considered a symbol of the union between heaven and earth; there is an obvious connection between the means by which communication between earth and heaven is established and the sign of that union, but this does not necessarily imply identification or assimilation. We would add that this very meaning of the rainbow, which is found in one form or another in most traditions, results directly from its close relationship with rain, since rain, as we have explained elsewhere, represents the descent of celestial influences to the earthly world⁷⁴⁸. The best-known example in the West of this traditional meaning of the rainbow is, of course, the biblical text where it is expressed very clearly⁷⁴⁹; in particular, it says: "I have set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth", but it should be noted that this "sign of the covenant" is in no way presented as a means of passing from one world to another, a passage to which the text, moreover, makes no reference whatsoever. In other cases, the same meaning is expressed in very different ways: among the Greeks, for example, the rainbow was assimilated to the peplos of Iris, or perhaps to Iris herself at a time when, in symbolic representations, 'anthropomorphism' had not yet been taken as far as it was later; here, this meaning is implied by the fact that Iris was the 'messenger of the Gods' and therefore played the role of intermediary between heaven and earth; but it goes without saying that such a representation is very far removed in every sense from the symbolism of the

⁷⁴⁷ [Published in *É. T.*, March 1947].

⁷⁴⁸ See "La lumière et la pluie" [here, chap. LX: "Light and Rain"]; cf. also *La Grande Triade*, chap. XIV.

⁷⁴⁹ *Genesis*, IX, 12-17.

bridge. Ultimately, the rainbow seems, in general, to have been associated above all with the cosmic currents through which an exchange of influences between heaven and earth takes place, rather than with the axes along which direct communication between the different states occurs; and, moreover, this is more consistent with its curved shape⁷⁵⁰, for although, as we have noted above, this shape is not necessarily in contradiction with the idea of 'verticality', it remains true that this idea cannot be suggested in this case by immediate appearances, as it is, on the contrary, in the case of all properly axial symbols.

It must be acknowledged that the symbolism of the rainbow is actually very complex and has many aspects; but among them, one of the most important, although it may seem surprising at first glance, and in any case the one that has the most obvious connection with what we have just pointed out, is the one that assimilates it to a snake, which is found in many different traditions. It has been observed that the Chinese characters for rainbow contain the radical 'snake', although this assimilation is not formally expressed in any other way in Far Eastern tradition, so that it could be seen as something of a reminder of something that probably goes back a long way⁷⁵¹. It would seem that this symbolism was not entirely unknown to the Greeks themselves, at least in the archaic period, for, according to Homer, the rainbow was represented on Agamemnon's breastplate by three cerulean serpents, 'an imitation of the bow of Iris and a memorable sign for humans, which Zeus imprinted on the clouds' (⁷⁵²). In any case, in certain regions of Africa, particularly in Dahomey, the "celestial serpent" is assimilated to the rainbow and at the same time is considered the mistress of precious stones and wealth. otherwise, there may seem to be some confusion between two different aspects of snake symbolism, for although the role of lord or guardian of treasures is indeed attributed to snakes and dragons, among other entities described in various forms, these beings are then underground rather than celestial in nature; but it may also be

⁷⁵⁰ It is clear that a circular or semicircular shape, such as that of a rainbow, can always be considered, from this point of view, as the flat projection of a segment of a helix.

⁷⁵¹ Cf. Arthur Waley, *The Book of Songs*, p. 328.

⁷⁵² *Iliad*, XI. We regret not having been able to find a more precise reference, especially since this representation of the rainbow by three serpents seems at first glance rather strange and would undoubtedly merit closer examination. [The lack of a precise reference is undoubtedly due to the fact that, when he wrote the article, the author was living a relatively secluded life in a suburb of Cairo. The Homeric passage reads, literally (*Il.*, XI, 26-28): "and on either side three serpents (or dragons: *drákontes*) the colour of steel stood up by the neck, like the rainbow that Cronus fixed in the cloud, a prodigious sign (*téras*) for men... (*Translator's note*)].

that there is a correspondence between these two seemingly opposite aspects comparable to that between planets and metals⁷⁵³. On the other hand, it is at least curious that, in this respect, the 'celestial serpent' bears a rather striking resemblance to the 'green serpent' which, in Goethe's well-known symbolic tale, transforms itself into a bridge and then fragments into precious stones; if such a serpent were also to be considered in relation to the rainbow, one would find in this case the identification of the latter with the bridge, which in short would be hardly surprising, since Goethe may well have been thinking more particularly of the Scandinavian tradition in this regard. It must be said, however, that this tale is very unclear both as to the origin of the various elements of symbolism that may have inspired Goethe and as to its very meaning, and that all the interpretations that have been attempted are in fact unsatisfactory on the whole⁷⁵⁴; we do not wish to dwell on this further, but we thought it might be of some interest to point out this possible and somewhat unexpected connection⁷⁵⁵.

It is well known that one of the main symbolic meanings of the serpent refers to the cosmic currents we mentioned earlier, currents that, ultimately, are nothing more than the effect and expression of the actions and reactions of the forces emanating respectively from heaven and earth⁷⁵⁶. This provides the only plausible explanation for the assimilation of the rainbow to the serpent, and such an explanation is in perfect accord with the recognised character of the rainbow as the sign of the union of heaven and earth, a union which, in effect, is in a certain way manifested by these currents, since the latter could not occur without the former. It should be added that the serpent, in this sense, is most often associated with axial symbols such as the tree

⁷⁵³ Cf. *La Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. XXII.

⁷⁵⁴ On the other hand, there is often something confusing and nebulous in Goethe's use of symbolism, and this can also be seen in his reworking of the legend of Faust; we might add that there are more than a few questions to be asked about the sources he may have drawn on more or less directly, as well as about the exact nature of any initiatory connections he may have had, apart from Freemasonry.

⁷⁵⁵ For a more or less complete assimilation of Goethe's serpent with the rainbow, we cannot take into consideration the colour green attributed to it, even though some have wanted to make green a kind of synthesis of the rainbow, because it would be the central colour; but, in fact, green only occupies that central position on condition that indigo is included in the list of colours, and we have previously explained the reasons why this introduction is in reality insignificant and devoid of any value from a symbolic point of view ("Les sept rayons et l'arc-en-ciel" [here, chap. LVII: "The Seven Rays and the Rainbow"]). In this regard, we will note that the axis corresponds properly to the "seventh ray" and therefore to the colour white, while the very differentiation of the colours of the rainbow indicates a certain "exteriority" in relation to the axial ray.

⁷⁵⁶ See *La Grande Triade*, chapter V.

or the staff, which is easy to understand, since the direction of the axis itself determines that of the cosmic currents, without, however, the latter being confused in any way with the former, just as, to return to the corresponding symbolism in its most rigorous geometric form, a helix drawn on a cylinder is not confused with the axis of the cylinder itself. Between the symbol of the rainbow and that of the bridge, a similar connection would, in short, be considered the most normal; but, subsequently, this connection has led in certain cases to a kind of fusion of the two symbols, which would not be entirely justified if the duality of the differentiated cosmic currents were not considered to be resolved in the unity of an axial current. However, it should also be borne in mind that the figurations of the bridge are not identical when it is assimilated to the rainbow and when it is not, and in this respect, one might wonder whether between the straight bridge⁷⁵⁷ and the arched bridge there is not, at least in principle, a difference in meaning corresponding in a certain way to that which exists, as we have indicated above, between the vertical ladder and the spiral staircase⁷⁵⁸, a difference that is that of the "axial" path that leads the being directly back to the principal state and the more "peripheral" path that involves a different passage through a series of hierarchical states, although in both cases the final goal is necessarily identical⁷⁵⁹.

⁷⁵⁷ We shall recall that this straight and, naturally, vertical form is the one that corresponds especially to the precise meaning of the expression *es-sirātu-l-mustaqīm* ['the straight path'] in Islamic tradition (cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XXV).

⁷⁵⁸ See "Le Symbolisme de l'échelle" [here, chap. LIV: "The Symbolism of the Ladder"].

⁽⁷⁵⁹⁾ The initiatory use of the spiral staircase can be explained by the identification of the degrees of initiation with different states of being. An example of this can be found in Masonic symbolism, in the *winding staircase* with 15 steps, distributed in 3+5+7, which leads to the "Middle Chamber". In the other case, the same hierarchical states are also represented by the steps, but their arrangement and shape indicate that it is not possible to stop on them and that they are merely the instrument of a continuous ascent, whereas it is always possible to remain for a longer or shorter time on the steps of a staircase, or at least on the "landings" between the different sections into which it is divided.

LXV

*THE CHAIN OF UNION*⁷⁶⁰

Among the Masonic symbols that seem to be little understood nowadays is the "chain of union"⁷⁶¹ that surrounds the upper part of the Lodge. Some see it as the cord used by operative masons to trace and mark out the outline of a building; they are undoubtedly correct, but this is not enough, and we must at least ask ourselves what the symbolic value of this cord itself was⁷⁶². The position assigned to an instrument intended for marking out a line on the ground could also be considered unusual, and this too requires some explanation.

To understand what this is about, it is necessary first of all to remember that, from a traditional point of view, every building, whatever it may be, was always constructed according to a cosmic model; on the other hand, it is expressly specified that the Lodge is an image of the cosmos, and this is undoubtedly the last remnant of that which has survived to this day in the Western world. That being the case, the location of a building had to be determined and 'framed' by something that corresponded in some way to what might be called the 'framework' of the cosmos itself; we shall see shortly what this is, and we can already say that the layout 'materialised' by the string represented, strictly speaking, its terrestrial projection. We have already seen something similar elsewhere with regard to the layout of cities established according to traditional rules⁷⁶³; in fact, this case and that of individual buildings do not differ essentially in this respect, since it is always a question of imitating the same cosmic model.

When the building is constructed, and even when it has begun to be erected, the cord obviously no longer has any role to play; thus, the position of the "chain of union" does not refer precisely to the layout it has helped to create, but rather to its cosmic prototype, the reference to which, on the other hand, always has its *raison d'être* in determining the symbolic significance of the Lodge and its various parts. The cord itself, in this form of 'chain of union', then becomes the symbol of the 'framework' of the cosmos; and its position is easily understood if, as indeed

⁷⁶⁰ [Published in *É. T.*, September 1947].

⁷⁶¹ In *Compagnonnage*, it is called a "chain of alliance".

⁷⁶² This symbol also has another name, "scaloped canopy" (*huppe dentelée*), which seems to refer more specifically to the outline of a canopy; now, it is well known that the canopy is a symbol of the sky (for example, in the canopy of the chariot in Far Eastern tradition); but, as will be seen shortly, there is really no contradiction in this.

⁷⁶³ See "Le Zodiaque et les points cardinaux" [here, chap. XIII: "The Zodiac and the Cardinal Points"].

occurs, that "rnarco" is no longer terrestrial in nature, but celestial⁷⁶⁴; through this transposition, we might add, the earth does nothing more than restore to the sky what it had previously taken from it.

What makes the meaning of the symbol particularly clear is this: while the string, as an instrument, is naturally a simple line, the "chain of union", on the contrary, has knots at intervals⁷⁶⁵; these knots are, or should normally be, twelve in number⁷⁶⁶, and thus correspond, obviously, to the signs of the Zodiac⁷⁶⁷. Indeed, the Zodiac, within which the planets move, truly constitutes the envelope of the cosmos, that is, the "framework" we spoke of earlier⁷⁶⁸, and it is clear that it is in fact, as we said, a "celestial framework".

Now then, there is another equally important point: among the functions of a 'framework', perhaps the most important is to hold in place the various elements it contains or encloses within it, so as to form an orderly whole, which, as we know, is the very etymological meaning of the word 'cosmos'⁷⁶⁹. That frame must, therefore, in a certain way, "bind" or "unite" those elements together, which is

⁷⁶⁴ That is why assimilation to the outline of a canopy is equally justified, whereas it would obviously not be justified for the terrestrial projection of that celestial "picture".

⁷⁶⁵ These knots are called *lacs d'amour* ('love knots'); this name, as well as the particular shape of such knots, perhaps bears the imprint of the 18th century in a certain sense, but there may also be a vestige of something that goes back much further and could even be linked quite directly to the symbolism of the 'Fidèles de l'amour' (Faithful of Love).

⁷⁶⁶ The "*Tableau de la Loge*" (*Tableau of the Lodge*), on the other hand, which appears at the beginning of Ragon's *Maçonnie occulte*, is manifestly incorrect, both in terms of the number of knots in the "chain of union" and the rather strange and even inexplicable position attributed to the signs of the zodiac.

⁷⁶⁷ Some believe that these twelve knots imply, at least "ideally", the existence of an equal number of columns, that is, ten in addition to the two columns in the West corresponding to the ends of the "chain of union". It should be noted in this regard that such an arrangement, albeit circular in shape, is found in certain megalithic monuments whose relationship to the Zodiac is no less evident.

⁷⁶⁸ With regard to the zodiacal division of cities, we refer once again to the study we mentioned in Chapter XIII. It should be noted, in relation to what we have yet to say here, that this division assigns respective places to the different elements that together constitute the city. Another example of zodiacal "envelopment" is found in the Far Eastern symbolism of *the Ming-tang*, with its twelve openings, which we have explained elsewhere (*The Great Triad*, chap. XVI).

⁷⁶⁹ It can be said that our world is "ordered" by the set of temporal and spatial determinations linked to the Zodiac, on the one hand by virtue of its direct relationship with the annual cycle, and on the other, by its correspondence with the directions of space (it goes without saying that this latter point of view is also closely related to the issue of the traditional orientation of buildings).

This is formally expressed by the name "chain of union", and even this results, as far as it is concerned, in its deepest meaning, since, like all symbols that appear in the form of a chain, rope or thread, it ultimately refers to *the sūtrātmā*. We will limit ourselves to drawing attention to this point, without going into further explanation at this time; we will soon have the opportunity to return to it, as this characteristic becomes even clearer in the case of some other symbolic "frames" that we will examine shortly.

LXVI

FRAMES AND LABYRINTHS ⁷⁷⁰

A. K. Coomaraswamy has studied⁷⁷¹ the symbolic significance of certain 'knots' found among Albrecht Dürer's engravings; these 'knots' are very complicated intertwining patterns formed by a continuous line, and the whole is arranged in a circular figure; in several cases, Dürer's name is inscribed in the centre. These "knots" have been linked to a similar figure generally attributed to Leonardo da Vinci, in the centre of which the words "*Accademia Leonardi Vinci*" can be read. Some have seen in them the "collective signature" of an esoteric "Academy", as existed in a certain number in Italy at the time, and they are undoubtedly not without reason. Indeed, such drawings have sometimes been called 'mazes' or 'labyrinths', and, as Coomaraswamy points out, despite the difference in form, which may be due in part to technical reasons, they are closely related to labyrinths, and more particularly to those traced on the tiled floors of certain medieval churches. Now, these are also considered a "collective signature" of builders' guilds. Insofar as they symbolise the bond that unites the members of an initiatory, or at least esoteric, organisation, such designs clearly bear a striking resemblance to the Masonic "chain of union"; and if we recall the knots of the latter, the name "knots" (*Knoten*) given to such drawings, apparently by Dürer himself, is also very significant. For this reason, and for another which we will return to later, it is also important to note that these are lines without interruption⁷⁷²; the labyrinths in churches could also be traversed from end to end without encountering any point of interruption that would force one to stop or retrace one's steps, so that they actually constituted a very long path that had to be completed in its entirety before reaching the centre⁷⁷³. In certain cases, such as in Amiens, the "master

⁷⁷⁰ [Published in *É. T.*, October–November 1947].

⁷⁷¹ "The Iconography of Dürer's 'Knots' and Leonardo's 'Concatenation'" in *The Art Quarterly*, Spring 1944 issue.

⁷⁷² One may recall here the *pentalpha*, which, as a sign of recognition among the Pythagoreans, had to be drawn in a continuous line. [It is a five-pointed star formed by five straight segments, resembling five intertwined capital alphas whose transverse lines form a central pentagon. (*Translator's note*)].

⁷⁷³Cf. W. R. Lethaby, *Architecture, Mysticism and Myth*, chap. VII. This author, who was an architect, has gathered in his book a great deal of interesting information about architectural symbolism, but unfortunately he has failed to see its true significance.

de obra" had been represented in the central part, just as Vinci and Dürer inscribed their names on it; they thus symbolically placed themselves in a "Holy Land"⁷⁷⁴, that is, in a place reserved for the "chosen ones", as we have explained elsewhere⁷⁷⁵, or in a spiritual centre which was, in all cases, an image or reflection of the true "Centre of the World", just as in the Far Eastern tradition the Emperor always placed himself in the central place⁷⁷⁶.

This leads us directly to considerations of another order, which refer to a more "inner" and profound meaning of this symbolism: since the being who travels through the labyrinth or any other equivalent figuration finally finds the "central place", that is, from the point of view of initiatory realisation, his own centre⁷⁷⁷, the journey itself, with all its complications, is clearly a representation of the multiplicity of states or modalities of manifested Existence⁷⁷⁸, through whose indefinite series the being has first had to "wander" before being able to establish itself in that centre. The continuous line is then the image of the *sūtrātmā* that unites all states with each other, and, moreover, in the case of "Ariadne's thread" in connection with the journey through the labyrinth, that image is presented with such clarity that one is amazed that it could have gone unnoticed⁷⁷⁹; thus justifying the observation with which we concluded our previous study on the symbolism of the "chain of union". On the other hand, we have emphasised more particularly the "framing" character that it presents; and one need only look at the figures of Dürer and Leonardo to realise that they also form true "frames" around the central part, which constitutes a further similarity between these

⁷⁷⁴It is well known that these labyrinths were commonly called "paths to Jerusalem" and that walking them was considered equivalent to a pilgrimage to the Holy Land; in Saint-Omer, the centre contained a representation of the Temple of Jerusalem.

⁷⁷⁵ "La Caverne et le Labyrinthe" [here, chap. XXIX: "The Cave and the Labyrinth"].

⁷⁷⁶ See *La Grande Triade*, chap. XVI. In connection with this link, one might recall the title of *Imperator* given to the head of certain Rosicrucian organisations.

⁷⁷⁷Naturally, depending on the case, this may refer either to the centre of a particular state of existence or to the centre of the total being; the former corresponds to the term "lesser mysteries", the latter to "greater mysteries".

⁽⁷⁷⁸⁾ We say "modalities" in the case where only the set of a single state of manifestation is considered, as is necessarily the case when dealing with the "lesser mysteries".

⁷⁷⁹It is also important to note in this regard that Dürer and Leonardo's drawings bear a clear resemblance to "arabesques", as Coomaraswamy has pointed out; the last vestiges of designs of this kind in the Western world are found in rubrics and other intricate ornaments, always formed by a single continuous line, which were dear to calligraphers and masters of writing until about the middle of the 19th century, even though by then their symbolism was probably no longer understood.

symbols; and there are other cases in which we will find that same character again, in a way that once more highlights the perfect harmony between the various traditions.

In a book we have already referred to elsewhere ⁷⁸⁰, Jackson Knight has pointed out that two small clay models of houses belonging to the archaic period known as the "Geometric" period ⁷⁸¹ had been found in Greece, near Corinth. ; on the outer walls, meanders can be seen surrounding the house, the layout of which seems to have constituted a kind of "substitute" for the labyrinth. Insofar as the labyrinth represented a defence, either against human enemies or, above all, against hostile psychic influences, these meanders can also be considered to have had a protective value, and even a double one, as they prevented not only evil influences from entering the dwelling, but also beneficial influences from leaving it and dispersing outside. On the other hand, it may be that at certain times they were seen as nothing more than that, but it should not be forgotten that the reduction of symbols to a more or less 'magical' use already corresponds to a state of degradation from the traditional point of view, a state in which the deeper meaning of these symbols has been forgotten ⁷⁸². Therefore, there must have been something more to them at the beginning, and it is easy to understand what this really is if we remember that, traditionally, every building is constructed according to a cosmic model; as long as there was no distinction between 'sacred' and 'profane', that is, as long as the profane point of view had not yet emerged as a result of a weakening of tradition, this was always and everywhere the case, even for private houses. The house was then an image of the cosmos, that is, like a 'small world' closed and complete in itself; and if we notice that it appears 'framed' or 'enclosed' by the meander exactly like the Lodge, whose cosmic significance has not been lost, it is 'framed' by the 'chain of union', the identity between the two symbols is completely evident: in both cases, it is ultimately nothing more than a representation of the 'framework' of the cosmos itself.

Another notable example, from the point of view of the symbolism of "frames", is provided by certain Chinese characters that originally referred to rites of fixation or stabilisation⁷⁸³ consisting of drawing concentric circles or a spiral around

⁷⁸⁰ *Cumacian Gates*; see our study on "La Caverne et le Labyrinthe" [here, chap. XXIX: "The Cave and the Labyrinth"].

⁷⁸¹ Reproductions of these two models can be found on page 67 of the aforementioned book.

⁷⁸² Naturally, this profound meaning does not exclude a 'magical' application, nor does it exclude any other legitimate application, but the degradation consists in the fact that the principle has been lost sight of and is now considered only as a simple, isolated application of a lower order.

⁷⁸³ These rites obviously correspond to a particular case of what in hermetic language is referred to as "coagulation" (see *La Grande Triade*, chap. VI).

objects; the character *heng*, which designates such a rite, was formed in ancient writing by a spiral or two concentric circles between two straight lines. Throughout the ancient world, new foundations, whether camps, cities or villages, were 'stabilised' by drawing spirals or circles around them⁷⁸⁴, and we might add that this also reveals the true identity of 'frames' with labyrinths. With

respect to the character *chie*, which recent commentators simply translate as 'Great', the aforementioned author says that it denotes the magic that ensures the integrity of spaces by 'framing' them with protective signs; such is the purpose of embroidery designs in ancient works of art. A *chie-fu* is a blessing that has been directly or symbolically 'framed' or 'enclosed' in this way; a plague can also be 'framed' to prevent it from spreading. Here too, it is not explicitly a question of 'magic', or what is supposed to be such, but the idea of 'fixation' or 'stabilisation' shows very clearly what is at the heart of the matter: it is the function, which essentially has the 'frame' or 'framing', as we have said before, of bringing together and keeping in place the various elements surrounded by it. On the other hand, in Lao-tsè there are passages where these characters appear and which are very significant in this regard: "When one frames (or circumscribes, *ying*, a character that evokes an idea similar to that of *heng*) the seven animal spirits and encompasses the Unity, one can be closed, concluded and incorruptible"⁷⁸⁵; and elsewhere: "Thanks to properly framed knowledge (*chie*), we walk steadily along the great Way"⁷⁸⁶. In the first of these two passages, it is clearly a question of establishing or maintaining the normal order of the various constituent elements of being in order to unify it; in the second, "well-framed knowledge" is properly a knowledge in which each thing is placed exactly where it belongs. Moreover, the cosmic significance of the 'framework' or 'setting' has by no means disappeared in this case: indeed, according to all traditional conceptions, is not the human being the 'microcosm', and should not knowledge also encompass the cosmos in its entirety in a certain way?

⁷⁸⁴ A. Waley, "The Book of Changes" in *Bulletin of the Museum of Far Eastern Antiquities*, no. 5, Stockholm, 1934.

* Written *chieh*⁴ in the Wade system; in other systems, *kie*, or, rarely, *kiá*; *jiè* in the romanisation currently in use in mainland China. The ideogram consists of two vertical strokes topped by an eave-shaped angle. (*Translator's note*).

⁷⁸⁵ *Tao-te Ching*, chapter X, unpublished translation by Jacques Lionnet. [Text slightly different in the edition published in 1962]. [For this and the following passage from Lao-tsè, it should be noted that, for partly philological reasons, existing translations of *the Tao-te King* often diverge, sometimes to a considerable degree. (*Translator's note*).]

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, chap. LIII, same translation [and same note regarding the 1962 edition].

LXVII

THE "FOUR OF NUMBER" ⁷⁸⁷

Among the ancient corporate marks, there is one that is particularly enigmatic: the one known as the 'four of figures', because it is shaped like the number 4, to which additional horizontal or vertical lines are often added, and which is generally combined with other symbols, letters or monograms to form a complex whole in which it always occupies the upper part. This sign was common to a large number of corporations, if not all, and we do not know why an occult author, who moreover gratuitously attributes its origin to the Cathars, has recently claimed that it belonged exclusively to a "secret society" of printers and booksellers; it is true that it is found in many imprints, but it is no less common among stone carvers, stained glass painters, and upholsterers, to name but a few examples, which are sufficient to show that such an opinion is untenable. It has even been observed that individuals or families had this sign appear on their houses, tombstones or coats of arms; but here, in certain cases, there is no proof that the sign should not be attributed to a stone carver rather than to the owner himself, and in other cases, it certainly refers to individuals who were linked in some way, sometimes hereditarily, to certain guilds⁷⁸⁸. In any case, there is no doubt that the sign in question is corporate in nature and is directly related to craft initiations; and even, judging by its use, it can be assumed that it was essentially a mark of mastery.

As for the meaning of the "four of figures", which is obviously of interest to us, the authors who have discussed it are far from agreeing, especially since they generally seem to ignore the fact that a symbol may well be open to several different but not mutually exclusive interpretations. There is nothing surprising about this, whatever the opinion of those who adhere to a profane point of view, since not only is multiplicity of meaning generally inherent in symbolism, but also, in this case as in many others, there may have been an overlap and even a fusion of several symbols into one. W. Deonna, who has had occasion to cite the "four of the number" among other symbols appearing in

⁷⁸⁷ [Published in *É. T.*, June 1948].

⁷⁸⁸ We have referred elsewhere to links of this kind in relation to "accepted" Freemasons (*Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XXIX).

antique weapons⁷⁸⁹ refers, albeit rather briefly, to the origin and meaning of this mark and mentions the opinion that it represents what it rather extravagantly calls 'the mystical value of the number 4'; without entirely rejecting this interpretation, it nevertheless prefers another, suggesting 'that it is an astrological sign', that of Jupiter. This sign does indeed bear a certain resemblance to the number 4 in its general appearance, and it is also certain that the use of this sign may have some connection with the idea of 'mastery'; nevertheless, contrary to Mr Deonna's opinion, we believe that this is only a secondary association, which, however legitimate it may be⁷⁹⁰, merely adds to the primary and principal meaning of the symbol.

We have no doubt that it is primarily a quaternary symbol, not so much because of its resemblance to the number 4, which could ultimately be nothing more than 'incidental' in a way, but for another more decisive reason: that number 4, in all the marks in which it appears, has a shape that is exactly that of a cross in which the upper end of the vertical crossbar and one of the ends of the horizontal crossbar are joined by an oblique line; now, it is indisputable that the cross, without prejudice to all its other meanings, is essentially a symbol of the quaternary⁷⁹¹. This interpretation is further confirmed by the fact that there are cases in which the 'number four', in its association with other symbols, clearly occupies the place of the cross in other more common figurations, identical to those with that single difference; this is particularly the case when the "number four" is found in the figure of the "globe of the world", or when it is above a heart, as is often the case, especially in printers' marks⁷⁹².

⁷⁸⁹ "Armes avec motifs astrologiques et talismaniques", in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, July-October 1924 issue.

⁷⁹⁰ We find another case of the same association between the symbolism of Jupiter and that of the quaternary in the fourth arcane of the Tarot.

⁷⁹¹ The cross represents the quaternary in its "dynamic" aspect, while the square represents it in its "static" aspect.

(⁷⁹²) The heart crowned with a cross is, naturally, in Christian iconography, the representation of the "Sacred Heart", which, from a symbolic point of view, is an image of the "Heart of the World"; and it should be noted that, since the geometric shape of the heart is a triangle with the apex pointing downwards, the entire symbol is nothing other than the alchemical symbol for sulphur in an inverted position, which represents the fulfilment of the "Great Work". [In the article "Le Chrisme et le Coeur dans les anciennes marques corporatives" (The Christ and the Heart in Ancient Corporate Marks), by *Regnabit*. November 1925, Guénon added, with regard to this same symbolic link: 'Here we find the inverted triangle, whose equivalence with the heart and the cup we have already pointed out; in isolation, this triangle is the alchemical sign of water, while the right triangle, i.e. with the apex pointing upwards, is that of fire. Now, among the various meanings that water constantly has in the most diverse traditions, there is one

That is not all, and there is something else that is perhaps no less important, even though Mr Deonna has refused to admit it: in the article to which we have referred, after pointing out that there has been an attempt to "derive that mark from the Constantinian monogram, already freely interpreted and distorted in Merovingian and Carolingian documents"⁷⁹³, he says that "this hypothesis seems entirely arbitrary" and that "no analogy imposes it". We are far from sharing this opinion; moreover, it is curious to note that among the examples reproduced by this same author, there are two that show the complete chrism, in which the P ['ro'] is replaced purely and simply by the "four"; should this not have prompted him to at least exercise greater caution? It should also be noted that two opposite orientations of the "four digit"⁷⁹⁴ are found indifferently; and when it is turned to the right instead of to the left according to the normal position of the 4, it bears a particularly striking resemblance to the P. We have already explained⁷⁹⁵ that a distinction is made between the simple chrism and the chrism known as 'Constantinian': the former is formed by six rays opposed two by two from a centre, that is, by three diameters, one vertical and the other two oblique, and, as a 'chrism', it is considered to be formed by the union of the Greek letters I and X; the second, which is similarly considered to be a combination of the Greek letters X and P, derives directly from the first by the addition, at the top of the vertical diameter, of an eyelet that is intended to transform the I into a P, but which also has other meanings and appears in various different forms⁷⁹⁶, which

Particularly interesting to note here: it is the symbol of Grace and of the regeneration it brings about in the being who receives it; suffice it to recall, in this regard, the baptismal water, the four fountains of living water in the earthly Paradise, and also the water that flows together with blood from the Heart of Christ, the inexhaustible source of Grace. Finally—and this further corroborates these explanations—the inversion of the symbol of sulphur signifies the descent of spiritual influences to the 'world below', that is, to the earthly and human world; it is, in other words, the 'heavenly dew' of which we have already spoken.

⁷⁹³ On the other hand, a careful distinction should be made between accidental distortions, due to a misunderstanding of symbols, and intentional and significant distortions.

⁷⁹⁴ We say this without distinction, but it may have corresponded to some difference in rites or corporations; incidentally, let us add in this regard that even if the presence of a quaternary sign in the marks indicated possession of the fourth degree of an initiatory organisation, which is not impossible although it is undoubtedly difficult to establish, this obviously had no effect on the symbolic value inherent in the sign.

⁷⁹⁵ "Les symboles de l'analogie" [here, chap. L: "The symbols of analogy"].

⁷⁹⁶ We have mentioned the case in which this eyelet of the P ['ro'] takes the particular form of the Egyptian symbol of the "eyelet of Horus"; in which case the P bears a particularly clear resemblance to certain "prehistoric" needles which, as Coomaraswamy has pointed out, instead of being perforated, as they were later, simply had one end curved, forming a kind of eyelet through which the thread passed (cf. "Le 'trou de l'aiguille'" [here, chap. LV: "The 'eye of the needle'"]).

This makes its replacement by the "four of figures" even less surprising, which, in short, is nothing more than another variant⁷⁹⁷. All this becomes clear, moreover, when one observes that the vertical line, both in the chrisms and in the "four of figures", is in reality a figure of the "Axis of the World"; at its upper end, the eyelet of the P is, like the "eye" of the needle, a symbol of the "narrow gate"; and, as far as the "four of figure" is concerned, it suffices to recall its relationship with the cross and the equally "axial" character of the latter, and to consider, moreover, that the addition of the oblique line that completes the figure by joining the ends of two of the arms of the cross and thus closing one of its angles ingeniously combines with the quaternary significance, which does not exist in the case of the chrisms, the identical symbolism of the "narrow gate"; and it will be recognised that there is something perfectly appropriate in this for a mark of the degree of master.

⁷⁹⁷Regarding the "Chrisms of Constantine", we will point out that the combination of the three initials of the accompanying inscription *In hoc signo vinces* gives IHSV, that is, the name of Jesus; this fact seems to go generally unnoticed, but it is expressly indicated in the symbolism of the "Order of the Red Cross of Rome and Constantine", which is a *side-degree*, that is, an "annex" to the high degrees of English Freemasonry.

LXVIII

*LIGATURES AND KNOTS*⁷⁹⁸

We have already discussed on several occasions the symbolism of the thread, which has multiple aspects, but whose essential and strictly metaphysical meaning is always the representation of *sûtrâtmâ*, which, from both the 'macrocosmic' and 'microcosmic' points of view, links all states of existence to each other and to their Principle. It matters little, moreover, whether the different figurations to which this symbolism gives rise are a thread proper, a rope or a chain, or a graphic design, such as those we have pointed out above⁷⁹⁹, or even a path created by architectural means, as in the case of labyrinths⁸⁰⁰, a path that one is obliged to follow from one end to the other in order to reach its end; the essential thing in all cases is that it is always a line without interruption. The tracing of this line can also be more or less complicated, which usually corresponds to more particular modalities or applications of its general symbolism: thus, the thread or its equivalent can fold back on itself, forming intertwining or knots; and, in the structure of the whole, each of these knots represents the point at which the forces that determine the condensation and cohesion of an "aggregate" corresponding to this or that state of manifestation, so that, one might say, that knot keeps the being in the state in question and its 'unravelling' or the act of tying it immediately entails the death of that state: this is expressed very clearly by a term such as 'vital knot'. Naturally, the fact that the knots referring to different states all appear at once and permanently in the symbolic layout should not be considered an objection to what we have just said, since, apart from the fact that it is obviously imposed by the technical conditions of the figuration itself, it actually corresponds to the point of view from which all states are considered simultaneously, a point of view that is always more fundamental than that of succession. We would note in this regard that in the symbolism of weaving, which we have studied elsewhere⁸⁰¹, the points where the warp and weft threads cross, forming the entire fabric, also have a meaning.

⁷⁹⁸ [Published in *É. T.*, March 1950].

⁷⁹⁹ See "Encadrements et Labyrinthes" [here, chap. LXVI: "Frames and Labyrinths"].

⁸⁰⁰ See "La Caverne et le Labyrinthe" [here, chap. XXIX "The Cave and the Labyrinth"].

⁸⁰¹ See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XIV.

similar, these threads being, in a way, the "lines of force" that define the structure of the cosmos.

In a recent article⁸⁰², Mircea Eliade discussed the "ambivalence" of the symbolism of ligatures and knots, and this is a point that deserves careful consideration; naturally, this can be seen as a particular case of the double meaning generally inherent in symbols, but we must also realise what justifies the existence of this double meaning in relation to the symbols we are discussing here⁸⁰³. Firstly, it should be noted in this regard that a bond can be considered as something that chains or something that unites, and even in ordinary language the word generally has both meanings; in the symbolism of bonds, this corresponds to two points of view that could be said to be mutually inverse, and if the more immediately apparent of the two is that which makes the bond a hindrance, this is because that point of view is, in short, that of the being manifested as such, insofar as it sees itself as 'bound' to certain special conditions of existence and as enclosed by them within the limits of its contingent state. From this same point of view, the meaning of the knot is like a reinforcement of that of the bond in general, for, as we said before, the knot more properly represents what fixes the being in this or that state; and the portion of the bondage by which the knot is formed is, one might say, the only part of it that the being can see while it is unable to escape the limits of that state, thus necessarily missing the connection that this bondage establishes with the remaining states. The other point of view can be described as truly universal, as it encompasses all states, and to understand it, one need only refer to the notion of *sūtrātmā*: the bond, considered in its total extension⁸⁰⁴, is what unites them, not only among themselves, but also, let us repeat, with their very Principle, so that, far from remaining an obstacle, it becomes, on the contrary, the means by which the being can effectively reach its Principle, and the very path that leads it to that goal. In that case, the

⁸⁰² "Le 'Dieu lieu' et le symbolisme des noeuds", in *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions*, July-December 1948 issue (see our review in *É. T.*, July-August 1949).

⁸⁰³We will point out, incidentally, that in ritual and especially "magical" applications, this double meaning corresponds to a "beneficial" or "malefic" use, depending on the case, of ligatures and knots; but what interests us here is the principle of this ambivalence, apart from any particular application, which is never more than a simple derivation. M. Eliade, moreover, has rightly insisted on the inadequacy of 'magical' interpretations, to which some wish to limit themselves due to a complete ignorance of the deeper meaning of symbols, which, as in the case of 'sociological' interpretations, entails a kind of reversal of the relationship between the principle and its contingent applications.

⁸⁰⁴It should be clear that this extension must be considered indefinite, even though in reality it can never be so in any configuration.

The thread or rope has a properly "axial" value, and climbing a vertically stretched rope, like climbing a tree or a mast, can represent the process of returning to the Principle⁸⁰⁵. On the other hand, the connection with the Principle through the *sûtrâmâ* is illustrated in a particularly remarkable way by puppet theatre⁸⁰⁶: here, a puppet represents an individual being, and the operator who moves it by means of a string is the "Self"; without that string, the puppet would remain inert, just as, without the *sûtrâmâ*, all existence would be nothing but pure nothingness, and, according to an extreme Eastern formula, "all beings would be empty".

Even in the first of the two points of view we have just mentioned, there is also an ambiguity, albeit of a different kind, referring to the difference in the ways in which a being, according to its spiritual degree, can appreciate the state in which it finds itself, an ambiguity that language translates quite well through the meanings it gives to the word 'attachment' or 'bonding' (*attachement*). Indeed, if one experiences attachment to someone or something, if one is "bound" to it, one naturally considers it a bad thing to be separated from that object, even when separation should in fact bring about liberation from certain limitations in which one finds oneself held by that very attachment. More generally, a being's attachment to its state, while preventing it from freeing itself from the constraints inherent in that state, makes it consider abandoning it as a misfortune, or, in other words, makes it attribute an "evil" character to death in that state, which results from the breaking of the "vital knot" and the dissolution of the aggregate that constitutes individuality⁸⁰⁷. Only the being whose spiritual development allows them to aspire, on the contrary, to overcome the conditions of their state, can recognise (*réaliser*) these as the constraints that they are, and the "detachment" they then experience from them is already, at least virtually, a breaking of those constraints, or, if you prefer another, perhaps more accurate way of putting it, since there is never a break in the true sense of the term, a transmutation from "that which chains" to "that which unites", which is ultimately nothing more than the recognition or awareness of the true nature of *the sûtrâmâ*.

⁸⁰⁵Such is, in India, the true meaning of what travellers have called "the rope test" [cf. chap. LXIII, n. 6], whatever one may think of it as a more or less authentically "magical" phenomenon, which is obviously of no importance as far as its symbolic character is concerned, which is the only thing that interests us.

⁸⁰⁶ Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "'Spiritual Paternity' and the 'Puppet-complex'", in *Psychiatry*, August 1945 issue (see our review in *É. T.*, October-November 1947).

⁸⁰⁷It should be noted that death is commonly referred to as the "unravelling" of individual existence; this expression, which is also related to the symbolism of theatre, is literally accurate, although those who use it are undoubtedly unaware of this. [On the symbolism of theatre in general, see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XXVIII].

SYMBOLISM OF THE HEART

LXIX

*THE RADIANT HEART AND THE HEART IN FLAMES*⁸⁰⁸

When referring, in connection with "light and rain"⁸⁰⁹, to representations of the sun with alternately straight and wavy rays, we pointed out that these two types of rays are also found, in a completely similar way, in certain symbolic representations of the heart; one of the most interesting examples of this is the heart depicted in a small black marble bas-relief, which appears to date from the 16th century, comes from the Carthusian monastery of Saint-Denis d'Orques, and has been studied by L. Charbonneau-Lassay⁸¹⁰. This radiant heart is located at the centre of two circles in which the planets and the signs of the zodiac are found, respectively, which expressly characterises it as the "Centre of the World", according to the dual relationship of spatial and temporal symbolism⁸¹¹; this figuration is clearly "solar", but, on the other hand, the fact that the sun, understood in the "physical" sense, is located in the planetary circle, as it should normally be in astrological symbolism, clearly shows that in this case it is properly the "spiritual Sun".

Needless to say, the assimilation of the sun and the heart, insofar as both have an equally 'central' meaning, is common to all traditional doctrines, both in the West and in the East; Thus, for example, Proclus says, addressing the Sun: "Occupying the throne of the middle above the ether, and having as its figure a dazzling circle that is the Heart of the World, you fill everything with a providence capable of awakening intelligence"⁸¹². We quote this particular text in preference to many others because of its formal mention of intelligence; and, as we have often had occasion to explain, the heart is also considered before

⁸⁰⁸ [Published in *É. T.*, June-July 1946. This is a new version of an article with the same title published in *Reg.*, April 1926].

⁸⁰⁹ [See chap. LX].

⁸¹⁰ "Le Marbre astronomique de Saint-Denis d'Orques," in *Reg.*, February 1924 [reprinted in *Le Bestiaire du Christ*, chap. X].

⁸¹¹ There are also, in the same figuration, other details of great interest from a symbolic point of view; in particular, the heart bears a wound, or at least what appears to be a wound, in the shape of a Hebrew *yod*, which refers both to the "Eye of the Heart" and to the avataric "germ" that resides in the "centre", whether this is understood in a macroscopic sense (as is clearly the case here), or in a microcosmic sense (see *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVIII).

⁸¹² *Hymn to the Sun*, French translation by Mario Meunier.

everything, in all traditions, as the seat of intelligence⁸¹³. Moreover, according to Macrobius, "the name of Intelligence of the World given to the Sun corresponds to that of Heart of Heaven⁸¹⁴; source of ethereal light, the Sun is to this fluid what the heart is to animate beings"⁸¹⁵; and Plutarch writes that the Sun, "endowed with the strength of a heart, disperses and diffuses heat and light from itself, as if they were blood and breath"⁸¹⁶. In this last passage, we find, for both the heart and the sun, the indication of heat and light, corresponding to the two kinds of rays we were considering; if the "breath" is referred to light here, it is because it is properly the symbol of the spirit, essentially identical to intelligence; as for blood, it is clearly the vehicle of "life-giving heat", which refers more particularly to the "vital" role of the principle that is the centre of being⁸¹⁷.

In certain cases, the representation of the heart includes only one of these two aspects: light or heat. Light is naturally represented by ordinary radiation, that is, formed solely by straight rays. Heat is usually represented by flames emerging from the heart. On the other hand, it should be noted that the radiation, even when both aspects are present, seems to suggest, in general, a recognised preponderance of the luminous aspect; this interpretation is confirmed by the fact that representations of the radiant heart, whether or not both types of rays are distinguished, are the oldest, since they mostly date from times when intelligence was still traditionally referred to the heart, while representations of the heart in flames spread mainly with modern ideas that reduce the heart to corresponding only to feeling⁸¹⁸. It is well known, in fact, that the heart has come to be given no other

⁸¹³It should be made very clear (and we will return to this point later) that we are referring here to pure intelligence, in the universal sense, and not to reason, which is merely a reflection of the former in the individual order and is related to the brain, which is to the heart in human beings what the moon is to the sun in the world.

⁸¹⁴ This expression "Heart of Heaven" applied to the sun is also found in the ancient traditions of Central America.

⁸¹⁵ *Dream of Scipio*, I, 20.

⁸¹⁶ *On the face seen on the orb of the moon*, 15, 4. This text and the preceding one are quoted in a note by the translator in connection with the passage from Proclus that we have just reproduced.

⁸¹⁷Aristotle equates organic life with heat, in which he agrees with all Eastern doctrines; Descartes himself places a "fire without light" in the heart, but for him this is only the beginning of a physiological theory that is exclusively "mechanistic," like all his physics, which, of course, has nothing in common with the traditional view of the ancients.

⁸¹⁸It is noteworthy in this regard that, in Christian symbolism in particular, the oldest representations of the Sacred Heart all belong to the type of the radiant heart, while those dating from no earlier than the 17th century consistently and almost exclusively depict the heart in

meaning other than that, completely forgetting its relationship with intelligence; the origin of this deviation, moreover, is undoubtedly attributable in large part to rationalism, insofar as it seeks to identify intelligence purely and simply with reason, since the heart is not related to the latter but rather to transcendent intelligence, precisely that which is ignored or even denied by rationalism. It is true, on the other hand, that since the heart is considered the centre of being, all its modalities can in a certain sense be referred to it at least indirectly, including feeling or what psychologists call 'affectivity'; but this does not mean that hierarchical relationships should not be observed, maintaining only the intellect as truly 'central' and considering the other modalities as having only a more or less 'peripheral' character. However, by ignoring intellectual intuition, which resides in the heart ⁸¹⁹, and by usurping reason, which resides in the brain, the 'illuminating' role ⁸²⁰of the former, the heart was left with no other option but to be considered the seat of affectivity ⁸²¹. On the other hand, the modern world also saw the emergence, as a kind of counterpart to rationalism, of what might be called sentimentalism, that is, the tendency to see feeling as the deepest and highest thing in being, and to affirm its supremacy over intelligence; and it is quite evident that such a thing, like everything that is in reality nothing more than an exaltation of the "infra-rational" in one form or another, could only have come about because intelligence had previously been reduced to simple reason.

Now then; if, apart from the modern deviation we have just discussed, we wish to establish within legitimate limits a certain relationship between the heart and affectivity, we must consider that relationship as a direct result of the role of the heart as the 'vital centre' and seat of 'life-giving warmth', since life and affectivity are two things that are very close to each other, and even closely connected, while the relationship with intelligence is clearly of a different order. Moreover, this close relationship between life and affectivity is clearly expressed in symbolism itself, since both are represented equally under the aspect of 'heart' ⁸²²; and by virtue of this same

flames: this is a very significant example of the influence exerted by modern conceptions even in the religious domain.

⁸¹⁹This intellectual intuition is symbolised precisely by the "eye of the heart".

⁸²⁰ Cf. what we have said elsewhere about the rationalist meaning given to the "enlightenment" in the 18th century, especially in Germany, and about the related significance of the name "Bavarian Illuminati" (*Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XX).

⁸²¹ Thus, Pascal, a contemporary of the beginnings of rationalism proper, already understands "heart" in the exclusive sense of "feeling".

⁸²²Naturally, we are referring here to organic life in its most literal sense, and not to the higher sense in which "life" is, on the contrary, related to light, as can be seen particularly in

assimilation, but carried out in a very unconscious manner, in ordinary language we commonly speak of the "warmth" of affection or feeling⁸²³. In this regard, it should also be noted that when

fire is polarised into these two complementary aspects, heat and light, they are, in their manifestation, in a mutually inverse relationship, so to speak; and it is well known that, even from a purely physical point of view, a flame is, in fact, warmer the less it illuminates.

Similarly, feeling is really nothing more than heat without light⁸²⁴, and a flame without heat can also be found in man, that of reason, which is nothing more than a reflected light, cold like the moonlight that symbolises it. In the order of principles, on the contrary, the two aspects, like all complementary aspects, converge and unite: indissolubly, since they are constitutive of the same essential nature; this is the case, then, with regard to pure intelligence, which properly

belongs to that principal order, and this is a new confirmation that, as we indicated a little earlier, symbolic radiation in its dual form can be entirely referred to it. The fire that resides at the centre of being is both light and heat; but if one wishes to translate these two terms as intelligence and love, respectively, even though they are ultimately but two inseparable aspects of a single thing, it will be necessary, in order for such a translation to be acceptable and legitimate, to add that the love in question then differs from the feeling to which the same name

is given, just as pure intelligence differs from reason. It is easy to understand, in fact, that certain terms taken from the realm of affectivity are susceptible, like others, to being transposed analogically to a higher order, since all things have, in addition to their immediate and literal meaning, a symbolic value with respect to deeper realities; and this is manifestly the case, in particular, whenever love is spoken of in traditional doctrines. Even among mystics, despite certain inevitable confusions, affective language appears above all as a mode of symbolic expression, for whatever the undeniable part of feeling in the ordinary sense of the word may be in them, it is nevertheless inadmissible, no matter what modern psychologists may say, that there are only purely human emotions and affections referred as such to a superhuman object.

However, the transposition becomes even more evident when it is verified that the traditional applications of the idea of love are not limited to the exoteric, and above all religious, domain, but extend equally to the domain

beginning of the Gospel of St John (cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVII).

⁸²³ Among moderns, the heart in flames is usually taken as a representation of love, not only in a religious sense but also in a purely human sense; this representation was most common in the 18th century.

⁸²⁴ That is why the ancients represented love as blind.

esoteric and initiatory; this is particularly true of the numerous branches or schools of Islamic esotericism, as well as certain doctrines of the Western Middle Ages, especially the traditions of the Orders of Chivalry⁸²⁵, and also the related initiatory doctrine that found expression in Dante and the "Fideli de Amore" (Faithful of Love). We would add that the distinction between intelligence and love, thus understood, has its counterpart in the Hindu tradition in the distinction between the *Jñānamārga* ['path of knowledge'] and the *Bhakti-mārga* ['path of devotion']; the reference we have just made to the orders of chivalry indicates, on the other hand, that the way of love is more particularly suited to the *kṣatriyas*, while the way of intelligence or knowledge is, naturally, the one that suits the Brahmins best; but, ultimately, this is only a difference that refers to the way of approaching the Principle, in accordance with the difference in individual natures, and does not in any way affect the indivisible unity of the Principle itself.

⁸²⁵It is well known that the main basis for these traditions was the Gospel of St. John: "God is Love," says St. John, which undoubtedly cannot be understood except through the transposition we are discussing here; and the battle cry of the Templars was: "Long live Holy Love."

LXX

*HEART AND BRAIN*⁸²⁶

We have read in the magazine *Vers l'Unité* (July-August and September-October 1926) a study by Mrs. Th. Darel, which contains some considerations that are very similar in certain respects to those we have had occasion to express ourselves. Perhaps some reservations should be made about certain expressions, which do not seem to us to be as precise as they could be, but that does not make us any less interested in reproducing various passages from the study.

“...If there is one essential movement, it is the one that has made man a vertical being, one of voluntary stability, a being whose impulses of idealism, whose prayers, whose highest and purest feelings rise like incense to the heavens. From that being, the Supreme Being has made a temple in the Temple, and for this purpose He endowed him with a *heart*, that is, an immutable point of support, a centre of movement that makes man adequate to his origins, similar to his First Cause. At the same time, it is true that man was provided with a *brain*; but this brain, whose innervation is characteristic of the entire animal kingdom, is in *fact* subject to a secondary order of movement (with respect to the initial movement). The brain, an instrument of thought enclosed in the world, and a transformer, for the use of man and the world, of that *latent thought*, makes it realisable through itself. But only the heart, through a secret inhalation and exhalation, allows man, while remaining united to his God, to be living *thought*. Thus, thanks to this regal pulsation, man preserves his word of divinity and operates under the aegis of his Creator, observant of his Law, happy with a joy that belongs to him alone, of rapturing himself, departing from the secret path that leads from his heart to the universal Heart, to the divine Heart... Fallen to the level of animality, however superior he may have the right to call himself, man now has to make use only of his brain and its appendages. Acting in this way, he lives on his own transformative possibilities alone; he lives on the latent thought expanded in the world; but it is no longer in his power to be living thought. However, religions, saints, and even monuments erected under the sign of a vanished spiritual order speak to man of his origin and his privileges. However little he may want it, his attention, directed exclusively to the needs inherent in his relative state, can be devoted to restoring balance within him, to regaining happiness... The excess of his missteps leads man to recognise their futility. Breathless, he instinctively withdraws into himself, takes refuge in his own heart, and timidly tries to descend into his silent crypt. There, the vain noises of the world are silenced. If they still remain, it means that the silent depths have not been

⁸²⁶ [Published in *Reg.*, January 1927].

not yet reached, that the august threshold has not yet been crossed... The world and man are *one*. And the Heart of man, the Heart of the world, are *one* Heart.

Our readers will easily notice in this text the idea of the heart as the centre of being, an idea which, as we have explained (and will return to), is common to all ancient traditions, originating from that primordial tradition whose traces can still be found everywhere for those who know how to see them. They will also notice the idea of the fall that rejects man far from his original centre and interrupts his direct communication with the "Heart of the World", as it was normally and permanently established in the Edenic state⁸²⁷. Finally, with regard to the central role of the heart, you will notice the indication of the double centripetal and centrifugal movement, comparable to the two phases of breathing⁸²⁸; it is true that, in the passage we will quote below, the duality of these movements refers to that of the heart and the brain, which at first glance seems to introduce some confusion, even though this is also tenable from a somewhat different point of view, in which the heart and the brain are seen as constituting, in a certain way, two poles in the human being.

In man, the centrifugal force has the *brain* as its organ, and the centripetal force has the *heart*. The heart, seat and preserver of the initial movement, is represented in the corporeal organism by the movement of diastole and systole, which continuously returns the blood that generates physical life to its propeller and rejects it to irrigate the field of its action. But the heart is also something else. Like the sun, which, while spreading the effluvia of life, keeps the secret of its mystical royalty, the heart has subtle functions, not discernible to those who have not inclined towards deep life and have not concentrated their attention on the inner realm of which it is the Tabernacle... The Heart is, in our opinion, the seat and preserver of cosmic life. The religions knew this when they made the Heart a sacred symbol, as did the builders of cathedrals who erected the holy place in the heart of the Temple. Those who, in the most ancient traditions and most secret rites, abstracted themselves from discursive intelligence and imposed silence on their brains in order to enter the Sanctuary and rise beyond their relative being to the Being of being, also knew this. This parallelism between the Temple and the Heart leads us back to the double mode of movement, which, on the one hand (vertical mode), elevates man beyond himself and detaches him from the process of manifestation, and on the other hand (horizontal or circular mode), makes him participate in that integral manifestation.

⁸²⁷ See "Le Sacré-Coeur et la légende du Saint Graal" [here, chap. III: "The Sacred Heart and the Legend of the Holy Grail"].

⁸²⁸ See "L'Idée du Centre dans les traditions antiques" [here, chap. VIII: "The Idea of the Centre in Ancient Traditions"].

The comparison between the Heart and the Temple, to which reference is made here, is found more particularly, as we have pointed out elsewhere⁸²⁹, in the Hebrew Kabbalah, and, as we indicated, it can be linked to the expressions of certain medieval theologians who assimilate the Heart of Christ to the Tabernacle or the Ark of the Covenant⁸³⁰. On the other hand, with regard to the consideration of vertical and horizontal movements, there is a reference to an aspect of the symbolism of the cross, especially developed in certain schools of Muslim esotericism, about which we may speak at some point⁸³¹; in fact, this symbolism is discussed in the continuation of the same study, from which we will extract a final quotation whose beginning can be related to what we have said, on the occasion of the symbols of the centre, about the cross in the circle and about the *swastika*⁸³².

The Cross is the cosmic sign par excellence. As far back as we can trace in history, the Cross represents what unites the vertical and the horizontal in its dual meaning; it participates in the movement that is proper to them, from a single centre, from the same generator... How can we not give a metaphysical meaning to a sign capable of responding so completely to the nature of things? Having become the almost exclusive symbol of divine crucifixion, the Cross has only accentuated its sacred significance. Indeed, if from the beginning this sign was representative of the relationship between the world and man with God, it was impossible not to identify Redemption with the Cross, not to nail to the Cross the Man whose Heart is in the highest degree representative of the divine in a world that has forgotten this mystery. If we were to engage in exegesis here, it would be easy to show the extent to which the Gospels and their profound symbolism are significant in this regard. Christ is more than a fact, more than the great Event of two thousand years ago. His figure belongs to all ages. He rises from the tomb where relative man descends, to be resurrected incorruptible in the divine Man, in the Man redeemed by the universal Heart that beats in the heart of Man, and whose blood is shed for the salvation of man and the world.

The last observation, although formulated in somewhat obscure terms, basically coincides with what we were saying about the symbolic value that, apart from their own reality (and, let it be understood, without this being in any way affected by it), the

⁸²⁹ "Le Coeur du Monde dans la Kabbale hébraïque" [topic revisited in *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. III, and *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chaps. IV and VII].

⁸³⁰ "À propos des signes corporatifs et de leur sens original" [taken up again in "Some Aspects of the Symbolism of Janus," which forms chapter XVIII here].

⁸³¹ [Cf. *The Symbolism of the Cross*, chap. III].

⁸³² "L'idée du Centre dans les traditions antiques" [here, chap. VIII: "The idea of the Centre in ancient traditions"].

historical events, and above all the events of sacred history⁸³³; but we do not intend to dwell on these considerations now. Our purpose is to return, taking advantage of the opportunity thus offered to us, to the subject of the relationship between the heart and the brain, or between the faculties represented by these two organs; we have already given certain indications in this regard⁸³⁴, but we believe that it will not be useless to provide further developments.

We have just seen that, in a certain sense, the heart and the brain can be considered as two poles, that is, as two complementary elements; this view of complementarity effectively corresponds to a reality in a certain order, at a certain level, if one may say so; and it is even less external and superficial than the view of pure and simple opposition, which nevertheless also contains a part of the truth, even if only in terms of the most immediate appearances. With the consideration of complementarity, the opposition is already reconciled and resolved, at least to a certain extent, since its two terms are balanced in a certain way by each other. However, this point of view is still insufficient, due to the very fact that it allows a duality to remain: that there are two poles or two centres in man, between which, moreover, there may be antagonism or harmony depending on the case, which is true when viewed in a certain state; but is this not a state that could be described as 'disunited' or 'off-centre', and which, as such, characterises only fallen man, that is, man separated from his original centre, as we recalled a little earlier? At the very moment of the Fall, Adam acquires 'the knowledge of good and evil' (*Genesis*, III, 22), that is, he begins to consider all things from the perspective of duality; the dual nature of the 'Tree of Knowledge' appears to him when he finds himself expelled from the place of first unity, which corresponds to the 'Tree of Life'⁸³⁵.

Be that as it may, the truth is that if duality does indeed exist in being, it can only be from a contingent and relative point of view; from another, deeper and more essential point of view, or when facing being in the state that corresponds to that point of view, the unity of that being must be restored⁸³⁶. Then, the relationship between the two elements, which at first appeared as opposites and then

⁸³³ "Les Arbres du Paradis", in *Reg.*, March 1926, p. 295 [article reprinted in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chaps. IX and XXV; but the point concerning the symbolism of the story is found in the preface to that book].

⁸³⁴ "Le Coeur rayonnant et le Coeur enflammé", in *Reg.*, March 1926 [cf. here, chap. LXIX].

⁸³⁵ See "Les Arbres du Paradis" [cf. here, n. 8]. From certain comparisons that can be made between biblical and apocalyptic symbolism and Hindu symbolism, it is very clear that the essence of the "Tree of Life" is properly the "Indivisible" (in Sanskrit, *Aditi*); but to develop this would take us too far from our subject.

⁸³⁶ It is worth recalling here the scholastic adage: "*Esse et unum convertuntur*"

as complementary, it is transformed into another: it is a relationship, no longer of correlation or coordination, but of subordination. The two terms of this relationship cannot, in fact, be placed on the same level, as if there were a kind of equivalence between them; on the contrary, one depends on the other as having its principle in it; and such is the case for what the brain and the heart respectively represent.

To make this clear, we will return to the symbolism already mentioned ⁸³⁷, according to which the heart is likened to the sun and the brain to the moon. Now, the sun and the moon, or rather the cosmic principles represented by these two celestial bodies, are often depicted as complementary, and indeed they are so from a certain point of view; a kind of parallelism or symmetry is thus established between them, examples of which are easy to find in all traditions. Thus, Hermeticism makes the sun and the moon (or their alchemical equivalents, gold and silver) the image of the two principles, active and passive, or masculine and feminine according to another mode of expression, which certainly constitute the two terms of a true complementarity⁸³⁸. On the other hand, if we consider the appearances of our world, as is legitimate to do, the sun and the moon do indeed have comparable and symmetrical roles, being, according to the biblical expression, "the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day and the lesser light to rule the night" (*Genesis* 1:16); and some Far Eastern languages (Chinese, Annamite, Malay) designate them with terms that are, analogously, symmetrical, as they mean "eye of the day" and "eye of the night" respectively. However, if we look beyond appearances, it is no longer possible to maintain this kind of equivalence, since the sun is itself a source of light, while the moon merely reflects the light it receives from it ⁸³⁹. Moonlight is in reality nothing more than a reflection of sunlight; it could therefore be said that the moon, as a "luminary", exists only because of the sun.

What is true of the sun and the moon is also true of the heart and the brain, or, to put it better, of the faculties corresponding to those two organs, which are

⁸³⁷ "Le Coeur rayonnant et le Coeur enflammé" [cf. here, chap. LXIX].

⁸³⁸ On the other hand, it should be noted that, in a certain respect, each of the two terms can in turn be polarised into active and passive, hence the figurations of the sun and moon as androgynous; thus, Janus, in one of his aspects, is *Lunus-Moon*, as we have pointed out previously ["À propos de quelques symboles hermético-religieux", in *Reg.*, December 1925, the subject of which was taken up again in the article that forms chapter XVIII here: "Some aspects of the symbolism of Janus"]. It can be understood, by analogous considerations, that centrifugal and centripetal forces refer respectively, from a certain point of view, to the brain and the heart, and that, from another point of view, they both refer to the heart, as corresponding to two complementary phases of its central function.

⁸³⁹ This could be generalised: "receptivity" always and everywhere characterises the passive principle, so that there is no true equivalence between it and the active principle, although, in another sense, they are mutually necessary, neither being active and the other passive except in their mutual relationship.

symbolised by them, that is, intuitive intelligence and discursive or rational intelligence. The brain, as an organ or instrument of the latter, truly plays only the role of a 'transmitter' or, if you will, a 'transformer'; and it is not without reason that the word 'reflection' is applied to rational thought, by which things are seen only as in a mirror, *quasi per speculum*, as St Paul says. It is also not without reason that the same root, man- or men-, has been used in various languages to form the numerous words that designate, on the one hand, the moon (Greek *menê*, English *moon*, German *Mond*)⁸⁴⁰ and, on the other, the rational faculty or the 'mental' (Sanskrit *manas*, Latin *mens*, English *mind*)⁸⁴¹, and also, consequently, to man considered more especially according to the rational nature by which he is specifically defined (Sanskrit *mānava*, English *man*, German *Mann* and *Mensch*)⁸⁴². Reason, in fact, which is nothing more than a faculty of mediate knowledge, is the properly human mode of intelligence; intellectual intuition can be called superhuman, since it is a direct participation in universal intelligence, which, residing in the heart, that is, in the very centre of being, where its point of contact with the Divine is, penetrates that being from within and illuminates it with its radiance.

Light is the most common symbol of knowledge; it is therefore natural to represent direct, intuitive knowledge, which is that of pure intellect, by means of sunlight, and reflective, discursive knowledge, which is that of reason, by means of moonlight. Just as the moon cannot give its light unless it is itself illuminated by the sun, so reason cannot function validly, in the order of reality that is its proper domain, except under the guarantee of principles that illuminate and direct it, and which it receives from the higher intellect. There is a misunderstanding in this regard that needs to be dispelled: modern philosophers⁸⁴³ are strangely mistaken when they speak, as they do, of "principles

⁸⁴⁰ Hence also the name of the "month" (Latin *mensis*, English *month*, German *Monat*), which is properly the "lunation". The same root also gives us the idea of "measure" (Latin *mensura*) and of division or distribution; but this would take us too far afield.

⁸⁴¹Memory is also designated by similar words (Greek *mnésis*, *mnēmosynē*); in fact, it is also nothing more than a "reflective" faculty, and the moon, in a certain aspect of its symbolism, is considered to represent "cosmic memory".

⁸⁴² This is also the origin of the name *Minerva* (or *Menerva*) used by the Etruscans and Latins; it should be noted that the Greek *Athena*, who is assimilated to her, is considered to have been born from the brain of Zeus and has the owl as her attribute, which, as a nocturnal bird, also refers to lunar symbolism; in this respect, the owl is opposed to the eagle, which, being able to look directly at the sun, often represents intuitive intelligence or the direct contemplation of intelligible light.

⁸⁴³ To be precise, we should point out that by this expression we do not mean those who represent the modern mentality, as we have often had occasion to define it (see especially our communication published in the June 1926 issue [here chap. I]); the very viewpoint of modern philosophy and its special way of posing questions are incompatible with true

rational', as if such principles belonged properly to reason, as if they were in some way its work, when, on the contrary, in order to govern it, it is necessary that they necessarily impose themselves on it, and therefore proceed from a higher order; this is an example of the rationalist error, and with it one can realise the essential difference between rationalism and true intellectualism. It suffices to reflect for a moment to understand that a principle, in the true sense of the term, by the very fact that it cannot be derived or deduced from anything else, can only be grasped immediately, that is, intuitively, and cannot be the object of discursive knowledge, such as that which characterises reason; to use scholastic terminology here, pure intellect is *habitus principiorum* ['habit (or 'possession') of principles], while reason is only *habitus conclusionum*. Another consequence also arises from the respective fundamental characteristics of the intellect and reason: intuitive knowledge, being immediate, is necessarily infallible in itself⁸⁴⁴; on the contrary, error can always be introduced into any knowledge that is indirect or mediate, such as rational knowledge; and we can see how wrong Descartes was in wanting to attribute infallibility to reason. This is what Aristotle expresses it in these terms ⁸⁴⁵:

Among the assets of intelligence ⁸⁴⁶, by virtue of which we attain truth, there are some that are always true and others that can lead to error. Reasoning belongs to the latter category, but the intellect is always in accordance with the truth, and there is nothing more true than the intellect. Now, since principles are more obvious than demonstration, and since all science is accompanied by reasoning, knowledge of principles is not a science (but rather a mode of knowledge, superior to scientific or rational knowledge, which properly constitutes metaphysical knowledge). On the other hand, only the intellect is truer than science (or than the reason that builds science); therefore, principles belong to the intellect. And, to better affirm the intuitive nature of metaphysics.

⁸⁴⁴ St. Thomas warns, however (*S. T.*: I, q. 58, a. 5 and q. 85, a. 6), that the intellect can err in the simple perception of its own object; but that this error occurs only *per accidens*, because of an intervention of discursive reasoning; it is therefore no longer truly a matter of pure intellect. On the other hand, it should be clear that infallibility applies only to the grasping of intuitive truths themselves and not to their formulation or translation into discursive mode.

⁸⁴⁵ *Second Analytics* [II, 19, 100 b].

⁸⁴⁶ The Greek word *hêxis*, which is almost untranslatable into our language, is usually translated as "having", but corresponds more accurately to the Latin *habitus*, with the meaning of 'nature', 'disposition', 'state', 'way of being' at the same time. [The Aristotelian text has been translated here from the French version given by R. Guénon (to whom the parentheses in the first quotation belong); in Spanish, it can be compared with the translation by F. de P. Samaranch, *Obras de Aristóteles*, ed. Aguilar, 1964 (*Translator's note*)].

intellect, Aristotle adds: "Principles are not demonstrated, but their truth is perceived directly"⁸⁴⁷.

This direct perception of truth, this intellectual and supra-rational intuition, of which moderns seem to have lost even the simplest notion, is truly the "knowledge of the heart," according to an expression frequently used in Eastern doctrines. Such knowledge, moreover, is in itself incommunicable; one must have "realised" it, at least to some extent, in order to know what it truly is; and anything that can be said about it gives only a more or less approximate idea, which is always inadequate. Above all, it would be a mistake to believe that one can effectively understand this kind of knowledge by merely approaching it "philosophically", that is, from the outside, for it must never be forgotten that philosophy is nothing more than purely human or rational knowledge, like all "profane knowledge". On the contrary, "sacred science", in the sense in which we use this expression in our writings⁸⁴⁸, is essentially based on supra-rational knowledge; and everything we have said about the use of symbolism and the teaching contained therein refers to the means that traditional doctrines make available to man to enable him to attain that knowledge par excellence, of which all other knowledge, insofar as it also has some reality, is but a more or less distant participation, a more or less indirect reflection, just as the light of the moon is but a pale reflection of that of the sun. The "knowledge of the heart" is the direct perception of the intelligible light, that Light of the Word of which St John speaks at the beginning of his Gospel, the radiant Light of the "spiritual Sun" which is the true "Heart of the World".

ADDENDUM

It is worth mentioning here the review by René Guénon, in *V. I.*, October 1932, of a book by Mrs. Th. Darel, *L'Experience Mystique et le Règne de l'Esprit* (Éditions de la Revue Mondiale, Paris), which includes the aforementioned article by Mrs. Darel as one of its chapters.

⁸⁴⁷Let us also recall the definitions of St. Thomas Aquinas: "*Ratio discursum quendam designat, quo ex uno in aliud cognoscendum anima humana pervenit; intellectus vero simplicem et absolutam, cognitionem (sine aliquo motu vel discursu, statim, in prima et subita acceptione) designare videtur.*" [*'Reason designates a process by which the human soul comes to know one thing from another; but intellect seems to designate simple and absolute knowledge (immediately, in a first and sudden grasp, without any movement or discourse)'*] (*De Veritate*, q. XV, a. 1).

⁸⁴⁸[See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*. Avant-propos; and also *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XVIII].

Despite the undeniable interest of some of the considerations it includes, this work leaves a somewhat mixed impression overall: This may be due, to some extent, to the rather annoying use of the word 'introspection', a lay psychological term that in this case can only lead to misunderstanding; but above all, one constantly wonders what exactly the author means by the word 'mysticism', and even whether, at heart, it really is mysticism. In fact, it seems to be more about 'asceticism', as it presents an attempt at methodical effort that is difficult to reconcile with mysticism proper; but, on the other hand, the specific nature of this asceticism is not very clearly defined; in any case, it cannot be considered initiatory, as it does not imply any connection with tradition, whereas such a connection is an essential condition of all initiation, as we explain in the article that will have been read elsewhere⁸⁴⁹. Added to this ambiguity, which causes a certain unease, is a lack of rigour in the terminology, which clearly shows the author's independence from traditional doctrines, which is perhaps what she has most unquestionably in common with mystics of all kinds. Apart from these defects, which we could not overlook, the most notable thing in this book are the considerations regarding the respective roles of the "heart" and the "brain", or what they represent, as well as the "vertical sense" and the "horizontal sense" in the inner development of the being, considerations that coincide with traditional symbolism, as we have explained in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*; moreover, a few years ago, we had pointed out this interesting concordance in one of our articles in *Regnabit*, as the chapter in question had then appeared separately in the magazine *Vers l'Unité*⁸⁵⁰. The author has added, as appendices to her work, the reproduction of two long-standing pamphlets; one of them contains an essay on the "rationalisation" of the miracle, interpreted "biologically"; it is certainly not one of those things to which we would readily give our assent.

⁸⁴⁹ [The author was referring to the article "Des Conditions de l'initiation", published in the same issue of *V. I.* and later reprinted in a new form in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. IV].

⁸⁵⁰It is useful to establish a point of literary history here, to avoid any confusion regarding a matter of traditional source. Mrs. Th. Darel, which appeared in the magazine *Vers l'Unité* in 1926 and set out ideas very similar to those that René Guénon would later expound in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, published in 1931, was in fact inspired by a study of the same title that appeared in *La Gnose* in 1911, signed by *Palingénus*, Guénon's pseudonym. Guénon himself later explained this point in his correspondence with Paul Chacornac (letter of 2 August 1931), specifying that at that time he had personally known the lady in question, who was a subscriber to *La Gnose*.

LXXI

*THE EMBLEM OF THE SACRED HEART
IN AN AMERICAN SECRET SOCIETY* ⁸⁵¹

It is well known that North America is the land of choice for secret and semi-secret societies, which abound as much as religious or pseudo-religious sects of all kinds, which, moreover, often take pleasure in adopting that form. Should this need for mystery, whose manifestations are often quite strange, be seen as a kind of counterbalance to the excessive development of the practical spirit, which, on the other hand, is generally and rightly considered one of the main characteristics of the American mentality? We believe so, and we see, in fact, in these two singularly associated extremes, two products of a single imbalance, which has reached its highest degree in that country but which, it must be said, currently threatens to spread throughout the Western world.

Having made these general observations, it must be recognised that many distinctions should be made among the numerous American secret societies; it would be a serious mistake to imagine that they all have the same character and tend towards the same goal. There are some that declare themselves specifically Catholic, such as the Knights of Columbus; there are also Jewish ones, but above all Protestant ones; and even in those that are neutral from a religious point of view, the influence of Protestantism is often predominant. This is a reason for mistrust: Protestant propaganda is extremely insinuating and takes all forms to adapt to the various media it wants to penetrate; it is not surprising, then, if it is exercised in a more or less disguised manner, under the cover of associations such as those mentioned above.

It should also be noted that some of these organisations are frivolous, even childish; their supposed secrets are entirely non-existent, and their sole purpose is to arouse curiosity and attract followers. In short, the only danger posed by organisations of this type is that they exploit and develop the mental imbalance we referred to at the beginning. Thus, we see simple mutual aid societies making use of a supposedly symbolic ritual, more or less imitated from Masonic forms but eminently fanciful, which reveals the complete ignorance of its authors about the most basic facts of true symbolism.

Alongside these simply "fraternal" associations, as the Americans say, which seem to be the most widespread, there are others that have pretensions

⁸⁵¹ [Published in *Reg.*, March 1927].

initiatory or esoteric, but which, for the most part, do not deserve to be taken any more seriously than the previous ones, even though they may be more dangerous because of these very pretensions, which are designed to deceive and mislead the naive or ill-informed. The title "Rosicrucian," for example, seems to exert a particular seduction and has been adopted by a number of organisations whose leaders have no idea what the true Rosicrucians were; And what can be said about groups with Eastern labels, or those that claim to be linked to ancient traditions, but in reality only expound the most Western and modern ideas?

Among old notes concerning some of these organisations, we have rediscovered one that caught our attention and which, because of one of the phrases it contains, we felt deserved to be reproduced here, even though the terms are very unclear and leave doubt as to the precise meaning that should be attributed to them. Here is the note in question, reproduced exactly, referring to a society called *the Order of Chylena*, about which we have no further information⁸⁵²:

This order was founded by Albert Staley in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in 1879. Its manual is entitled *The Standard United States Guide*. The order has five points of fellowship, derived from the true point *E Pluribus Unum* (the motto of the United States). Its banner bears the words *Evangel* and *Evangeline*, inscribed in six-pointed stars. The *philosophy of universal life* seems to be its fundamental study, and the lost word of the Temple is an element of it. *Ethiopia*, She, is the Bride; *Chylena*, He, is the Redeemer. The "I Am" seems to be (here a sign formed by two concentric circles). "You see this Sacred Heart; the outline shows you that I ⁸⁵³called Chylena".

At first glance, it seems difficult to discover anything clear or even intelligible in this: there are, of course, some expressions taken from Masonic language, such as the "five points of fellowship" and the "lost word of the Temple"; there is also a well-known and widely used symbol, the six-pointed star or "seal of Solomon", which we have had occasion to discuss here⁸⁵⁴; the intention to give the organisation a distinctly American character is also recognisable; but what can all the rest mean? Above all, what does the last sentence mean? And should it be seen as an indication of some counterfeit of the Sacred

⁸⁵² This is the translation of a piece of news taken from a pamphlet entitled *Arcane Associations*, published by the "Societas Rosicruciana" of North America (Manchester, N. H., 1905).

⁸⁵³ The English text reads: "You see this Sacred Heart; the outline shows you that I".

⁸⁵⁴ "Le Chrisme et le Coeur dans les anciennes marques corporatives" [cf. chap. L: "The symbols of analogy"].

Heart, like those about which L. Charbonneau-Lassay has previously informed *Regnabit* readers?⁸⁵⁵

We must confess that we have not yet been able to discover what the name *Chylena* means, nor how it can be used to designate the 'Redeemer', nor even in what sense, religious or otherwise, that word should be understood. It seems, however, that in the phrase referring to the 'Bride' and the 'Redeemer' there is a biblical allusion, probably inspired by the *Song of Songs*; and it is very strange that this same 'Redeemer' shows us his Sacred Heart (is it really his heart?) as if he were truly Christ himself; but, once again, why the name *Chylena*? On the other hand, one wonders what the name *Evangeline*, the heroine of Longfellow's famous poem, has to do with all this; but it seems to be taken as a feminine form of *Evangel*, alongside which it is placed; is it the affirmation of an "evangelical" spirit in the somewhat special sense in which it is understood by Protestant sects, which so often adorn themselves with that title? Finally, if the name *Ethiopia* is applied to the black race, as is the most natural interpretation, perhaps it should be concluded that the more or less 'evangelical' (i.e. Protestant) 'redemption' of the latter is one of the objectives proposed by the members of the association. If so, the motto *E Pluribus Unum* could logically be interpreted as an attempt at rapprochement, if not fusion, between the diverse races that make up the population of the United States, whose natural antagonism has always separated them so deeply. This is only a hypothesis, but at least it is not implausible.

If it is a Protestant-inspired organisation, this is not sufficient reason to assume that the emblem of the Sacred Heart is taken out of its true meaning; some Protestants, in fact, have a sincere and genuine devotion to the Sacred Heart⁸⁵⁷. However, in the present case, the mixture of heterogeneous ideas attested to by the lines we have reproduced incites us to mistrust; we wonder what this *Philosophy of Universal Life*, which seems to centre on the principle of 'I Am', might be. All this could undoubtedly be understood in a very legitimate sense, and even linked in some way to the conception of the heart as the centre of being; but, given the tendencies of the modern spirit, of which the American mentality is the most complete expression, there is much to fear that this

⁸⁵⁵ "Les Représentations blasphématoires du Coeur de Jésus" (Blasphemous Representations of the Heart of Jesus), August-September 1924.

⁸⁵⁶ The "*Nigra sum, sed formosa*" from the *Song of Songs* might justify the fact that this appellation is applied to the 'Bride'.

⁸⁵⁷ We have already cited the example of Cromwell's chaplain, Thomas Goodwin, who devoted a book to devotion to the Heart of Jesus ("Le Christe et le Coeur dans les anciennes marques corporatives," in *Reg.*, November 1925, p. 402, n. 1).

It should be taken only in the completely individual (or 'individualistic', if you prefer) and purely human sense. We would like to draw attention to this in order to conclude our examination of this kind of enigma.

The modern trend, as we see it asserting itself in Protestantism, is first and foremost a trend towards individualism, which is clearly manifested in "free inquiry," the rejection of all legitimate and traditional spiritual authority. This individualism, from a philosophical point of view, is equally affirmed in rationalism, which is the denial of any faculty of knowledge superior to reason, that is, to the individual and purely human mode of intelligence; and this rationalism, in all its forms, has emanated more or less directly from Cartesianism, which, quite naturally, reminds us of that "I Am" and takes the thinking subject and nothing else as the sole starting point of all reality. Individualism, thus understood in the intellectual order, has as an almost inevitable consequence what might be called a 'humanisation' of religion, which ends up degenerating into 'religiousness', that is, into nothing more than a simple matter of feeling, a set of vague aspirations without any definite object; sentimentalism, moreover, is, so to speak, complementary to rationalism⁸⁵⁸. Even without mentioning concepts such as William James' "religious experience", it would be easy to find examples of this more or less pronounced deviation in most of the many varieties of Protestantism, and especially in Anglo-Saxon Protestantism, whose dogma dissolves in a certain way and fades away, leaving only that "humanitarian moralism" whose more or less noisy manifestations are one of the characteristic features of our time. From this 'moralism', which is the logical culmination of Protestantism, to purely secular and 'irreligious' (not to say anti-religious) 'moralism', there is but one step, and some take it with great ease; in short, it is only a matter of different degrees in the development of the same tendency.

Under such conditions, it is not surprising that terminology and symbolism of religious origin are sometimes used, but stripped of their religious character and diverted from their original meaning, easily misleading those who are unaware of this distortion. Whether this deception is intentional or not, the result is the same. Thus, the figure of the Sacred Heart has been distorted to represent the "Heart of Humanity" (understood, moreover, in an exclusively collective and social sense), as pointed out by L. Charbonneau-Lassay in the article mentioned above, in which he quoted a text that speaks of "the Heart of Mary symbolising the maternal heart of

⁸⁵⁸ See "Le Coeur rayonnant et le Coeur enflammé" [here, chap. LXIX: "The Radiant Heart and the Heart on Fire"].

Human homeland, feminine heart, and the Heart of Jesus symbolising the paternal heart of Humanity, masculine heart; heart of man, heart of woman, both divine in their spiritual and natural principle ⁸⁵⁹. We do not know exactly why this text has come irresistibly to mind in the presence of the document relating to American society that we have just discussed; without being able to say anything definitive on the matter, we have the impression that we are dealing with something of the same kind. Be that as it may, this way of disguising the Sacred Heart as the "Heart of Humanity" constitutes, strictly speaking, a form of "naturalism" and risks degenerating very quickly into gross idolatry; the "religion of Humanity" is not, in the contemporary era, the exclusive monopoly of Auguste Comte and some of his positivist disciples, who must at least be credited with having frankly expressed what others wrap up in perfidiously ambiguous formulas. We have already pointed out the deviations that some people commonly impose on the very term "religion" in our day, applying it to purely human things ⁸⁶⁰; this abuse, often unconscious, is it not the result of a perfectly conscious and deliberate action, an action exercised by those, whoever they may be, who have taken on the task of systematically deforming the Western mentality since the beginning of modern times? One is sometimes tempted to believe so, especially when one sees, as has been the case since the last war, a kind of secular and "civic" cult being established everywhere, a pseudo-religion from which all idea of the Divine is absent; we do not wish to dwell on this further for the moment, but we know that we are not the only ones who see this as a disturbing symptom. What we will say to conclude this time is that all this depends on the same central idea, which is the deification of the human, not in the sense that Christianity allows us to approach it in a certain way, but in the sense of a substitution of God by humanity; this being the case, it is easy to understand why the propagators of such an idea seek to seize upon the emblem of the Sacred Heart in order to make this deification of humanity a parody of the union of the two natures, divine and human, in the person of Christ.

⁸⁵⁹ Quoted from *L'Écho de l'Invisible* (1917), in "Les Représentations blasphématoires du Coeur de Jésus," *Reg.*, August-September 1924, pp. 192-93.

⁸⁶⁰ See our communication "Sur la réforme de la mentalité moderne" [here, chap. I].

⁸⁶¹ [Let us remember that this article was published in 1927].

LXXII

"THE EYE THAT SEES EVERYTHING" ⁸⁶²

One of the symbols common to Christianity and Freemasonry is the triangle in which the Hebrew Tetragrammaton is inscribed⁸⁶³, or sometimes only a *yod*, the first letter of the Tetragrammaton, which can be considered in this case as an abbreviation of it⁸⁶⁴, which, moreover, by virtue of its principal meaning⁸⁶⁵, constitutes in itself a divine name, and even the first of all according to certain traditions⁸⁶⁶. Sometimes, the *yod* itself is replaced by an eye, generally referred to as "*the All-Seeing Eye*"; the similarity in shape between the *yod* and the eye can, in fact, lend itself to an assimilation, which, moreover, has numerous meanings, about which, without attempting to develop them fully here, it may be interesting to give at least some indications.

Firstly, it should be noted that the triangle in question always occupies a central position⁸⁶⁷ and that, in Freemasonry, it is expressly located between the sun and the moon. It follows from this that the eye contained in the triangle should not be represented in the form of an ordinary eye, right or left, since in reality the sun and the moon correspond respectively to the right and left eyes of the 'Universal Man' insofar as he is identical to the 'macrocosm'⁸⁶⁸. For the symbolism to be entirely correct, that eye must be a "frontal" or "central" eye, that is, a "third eye", whose resemblance to the *yod* is even more striking; and, in fact, that "third eye" is

⁸⁶² [Published in *É. T.*, April-May 1948].

⁸⁶³ In Freemasonry, this triangle is often referred to as *a delta*, because the Greek letter of the same name is indeed triangular in shape; but we do not believe that this should be seen as an indication of the origins of the symbol in question; on the other hand, it is clear that the meaning of the symbol is essentially ternary, while the Greek *delta*, despite its shape, corresponds to 4 because of its place in the alphabet and its numerical value.

⁸⁶⁴ In Hebrew, the tetragrammaton is sometimes abbreviated to three *yods*, which clearly relate to the triangle itself; when arranged in a triangle, they correspond precisely to the three points of the *Compagnonnage* and Freemasonry.

⁸⁶⁵ The *yod* is considered the first element from which all the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are formed.

⁸⁶⁶ See *La Grande Triade*, chap. XXV, on this subject.

⁸⁶⁷ In Christian churches where it appears, this triangle is normally located above the altar; as the altar is also presided over by the cross, the combination of the cross and the triangle curiously reproduces the alchemical symbol for sulphur.

⁸⁶⁸ See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. XII. In this regard, and more specifically in connection with Masonic symbolism, it should be noted that the eyes are precisely the "lights" that illuminate the microcosm.

the one who "sees everything" in the perfect simultaneity of the eternal present⁸⁶⁹. In this regard, there is, therefore, an inaccuracy in ordinary representations, which introduces an unjustifiable asymmetry, undoubtedly due to the fact that the representation of the "third eye" seems rather unusual in Western iconography; but anyone who understands this symbolism well can easily rectify it.

The right triangle [that is, with an upper vertex] refers properly to the Principle; but when it is inverted by reflection in manifestation, the gaze of the eye contained within it appears in a certain way as directed "downwards"⁸⁷⁰, that is, towards the Principle of manifestation itself, and, in addition to its general meaning of "omnipresence", it then takes on more clearly the special meaning of "Providence". On the other hand, if we consider this reflection more particularly in human beings, it should be noted that the shape of the inverted triangle is nothing other than the geometric outline of the heart⁸⁷¹; the eye at its centre is then, properly speaking, the "eye of the heart" (*aynu-l-qalb* in Islamic esotericism), with all the meanings that this implies. Furthermore, it should be added that this is why, according to another well-known expression, it is referred to as the "open" heart (*el-qalbu-l-maftüh*); this opening, eye or *yod*, can be symbolically represented as a "wound", and in this regard we recall the radiant heart of Saint-Denis d'Orques, which we have already discussed previously⁸⁷², and one of whose most notable features is precisely that the wound, or what outwardly appears to be a wound, is visibly shaped like a *yod*.

Furthermore, while it represents the 'eye of the heart', as we have just said, the *yod*, according to another of its hieroglyphic meanings, also represents a 'seed' contained in the heart, symbolically assimilated to a fruit; and this, moreover, can be understood in both a 'macrocosmic' and 'microcosmic' sense⁸⁷³. In its application to human beings, this last observation must be linked to the relationship between the "third eye" and the *lüz*⁸⁷⁴, of which the "frontal eye" and the "eye of the heart"

⁸⁶⁹ From the point of view of "triple time", the moon and the left eye correspond to the past; the sun and the right eye to the future; and the "third eye" to the present, that is, to the indivisible "instant" which, between the past and the future, is like a reflection of eternity in time.

⁸⁷⁰ A connection can be made between this and the meaning of the name *Avalokitesvara* [the Mahayana Bodhisattva sometimes called 'Lord of Compassion'], which is usually interpreted as 'the Lord who looks down'.

⁸⁷¹ In Arabic, 'heart' is *qalb*, and 'inverted' is *maqlüb*, a word derived from the same root.

⁸⁷² See 'Le Coeur rayonnant et le Coeur enflammé' [here, chap. LXIX: 'The Radiant Heart and the Burning Heart'].

⁸⁷³ See *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVIII. From the macrocosmic point of view, the assimilation in question is equivalent to that of the heart and the 'World Egg'; in the Hindu tradition, the 'germ' contained in the latter is the *Hiranyagarbha*.

⁸⁷⁴ *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. VII.

represent, in short, two different locations, and which is also the "core" or "seed of immortality"⁸⁷⁵. It is also very significant in this regard that the Arabic expression *'aynu-l-juld* has the double meaning of "eye of immortality" and "source of immortality"; and this brings us back to the idea of "wound" that we pointed out earlier, since, in Christian symbolism, the double stream of blood and water flowing from the opening in Christ's heart also refers to the "source of immortality"⁸⁷⁶. This is the 'liquid of immortality' which, according to legend, was collected in the Grail by Joseph of Arimathea; and we will recall in this regard, finally, that the cup itself is a symbolic equivalent of the heart⁸⁷⁷, and that, like the heart, it is also one of the symbols traditionally depicted in the form of an inverted triangle.

⁸⁷⁵ Regarding symbols related to *lūz*, we note that the shape of the *mandorla* ('almond', 'seed', which is also the meaning of the word *lūz*) or *vesica piscis* ['fish bladder'] of the Middle Ages (cf. *La Grande Triade*, chap. II) also evokes the shape of the 'third eye'; the figure of the glorious Christ, inside it, thus appears to be identifiable with the *'Purusha* in the eye' of the Hindu tradition; the expression *insānu-l-'ayn* ['the man of the eye'] used in Arabic to designate the 'apple of the eye' also refers to this symbolism.

⁸⁷⁶ Blood and water are complementary here; using the language of Far Eastern tradition, one could say that blood is *yang* and water is *yin* in their mutual relationship (on the fiery nature of blood, cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. XIII).

⁸⁷⁷ Furthermore, the legend of the emerald that fell from Lucifer's forehead also places the Grail in direct relation to the 'third eye' (cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. V). On the 'stone that fell from the heavens', see also *Lapsit exillis*, [here, chap. XLIV].

LXXIII

*THE MUSTARD SEED*⁸⁷⁸

Given the symbolism of the Hebrew letter *yod* depicted inside the heart⁸⁷⁹, we have pointed out that, in the radiant heart of the astronomical marble of Saint-Denis d'Orques⁸⁸⁰, the wound is shaped like a *yod*, and this resemblance is too striking and significant not to be intentional. Furthermore, in an engraving designed and engraved by Callot for a thesis defended in 1625, we see that the heart of Christ contains three *yods*. This letter, the first of the tetragrammatic name and the one from which all the other letters of the Hebrew alphabet are formed, whether alone to represent the divine Unity⁸⁸¹ or repeated three times with "trinitarian" significance⁸⁸², is always essentially the image of the Principle. The *yod* in the heart is therefore the Principle residing in the centre, whether from the 'macrocosmic' point of view, in the 'Centre of the World' which is the 'Holy Palace' of Kabbalah⁸⁸³, or, from the "microcosmic" point of view and at least virtually, in the centre of every being, a centre always symbolised by the heart in the different traditional doctrines⁸⁸⁴ and which constitutes the innermost point, the point of contact with the Divine. According to Kabbalah, the *Shekhinah* or "Divine Presence", which is identified with the "Light of the Messiah"⁸⁸⁵, dwells (*shachan*) both in the tabernacle, called *mishkan* for that reason, and in

⁸⁷⁸ [Published in *É. T.*, January-February 1949]. This article, which had been written some time ago for the journal *Regnabit* but could not be published there because of the hostility of certain 'neo-scholastic' circles forced us to suspend our collaboration, is situated more particularly in the 'perspective' of the Christian tradition with the intention of showing its perfect agreement with other forms of universal tradition; It completes the brief indications we have given on the same point in *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. III. We have made only a few modifications, to clarify certain points and, above all, to add references to our various works when we felt this would be useful to readers.

⁸⁷⁹ Cf. "L'Oeil qui voit tout" [here, chap. LXXII: "The Eye that Sees Everything"].

⁸⁸⁰ [See beginning of chap. LXIX].

⁸⁸¹ Cf. *La Grande Triade*, pp. 169-171.

⁸⁸² This meaning certainly exists at least when the figuration of the three *yods* is due to Christian authors, as in the case of the print we have just mentioned; more generally (since it should not be forgotten that the three *yods* are also found as an abbreviated form of the tetragrammaton in the Jewish tradition itself), this representation is linked to the universal symbolism of the triangle, whose relationship to the heart, moreover, we have also pointed out.

⁸⁸³ Cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IV.

⁸⁸⁴ Cf. *Man and His Becoming According to the Vedānta*, chap. III.

⁸⁸⁵ Cf. *The King of the World*, chap. III.

the hearts of the faithful⁸⁸⁶; and there is a very close relationship between this doctrine and the meaning of the name Emmanuel, applied to the Messiah and interpreted as "God in us". But there are also many other considerations to be developed in this regard, starting above all from the fact that the *yod*, while meaning "beginning", also means "seed": the *yod* in the heart is, therefore, in a certain sense, the seed enclosed in the fruit; there is an indication here of an identity, at least in a certain respect, between the symbolism of the heart and that of the "Egg of the World", and it can thus be understood that the name "seed" is applied to the Messiah in various passages of the Bible⁸⁸⁷. Above all, the idea of the seed in the heart should hold our attention here; and it deserves it all the more because it is directly related to the profound meaning of one of the most famous parables in the Gospel, that of the mustard seed.

To understand this relationship properly, we must first refer to the Hindu doctrine that gives the heart, as the centre of being, the name "Divine City" (*Brahma-pura*) and which —most notably— applies to this "Divine City" expressions identical to some of those used in the *Apocalypse* to describe the "heavenly Jerusalem"⁸⁸⁸. The divine Principle, insofar as it resides at the centre of being, is often symbolically designated as the "Ether in the heart", naturally taking, to represent the Principle, the primordial element from which all others proceed; and this "Ether" (*Ākāṣa*) is the same thing as the Hebrew *'Avîr*, from whose mystery springs the light (*'ôr*) that realises extension by its external radiation⁸⁸⁹, "making something out of nothing (*tohû*) and what was not what it is"⁸⁹⁰, while, through a concentration correlative to this luminous expansion, it remains within the heart as the *yod*, that is, "the hidden point made manifest", one in three and three in one⁸⁹¹. But we will now leave this cosmogonic point of view to refer instead to the point of view concerning a particular being, such as the human being, while taking care to point out that between the two points of view, "macrocosmic" and "microcosmic", there is a

⁸⁸⁶Cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. VII. The residence of *es-Sakinah* in the hearts of the faithful is also affirmed by Islamic tradition.

⁸⁸⁷*Isaiah*, IV, 2; *Jeremiah*, XXIII, 5; *Zechariah*, III, 8, and VI, 12. Cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chaps. XLVII and XLVIII, and also our study, already cited, on "L'Oeil qui voit tout" [here, chap. LXXII: "The Eye that Sees Everything"].

⁸⁸⁸ Cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. III.

⁸⁸⁹ Cf. *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. III.

⁸⁹⁰ It is the *Fiat Lux (Yehi 'or)* of *Genesis*, the first affirmation of the divine Word in the work of Creation; the initial vibration that opens the way to the development of the possibilities contained potentially, in a "formless and void" state (*tohû va- bohû*), in the original chaos (cf. *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVI).

⁸⁹¹ Cf. *Le Symbolisme de La Croix*, chap. IV.

analogical correspondence by virtue of which a transposition from one to the other is always possible.

In the sacred texts of India we find the following: "This *Âtmâ* (the divine Spirit), which resides in the heart, is smaller than a grain of rice, smaller than a grain of barley, smaller than a grain of mustard, smaller than a grain of millet, smaller than the germ in a grain of millet; this *Âtmâ*, which resides in the heart, is also greater than the earth, greater than the atmosphere, greater than the sky, greater than all the worlds combined"⁸⁹². It is impossible not to notice the similarity between the terms in this passage and those in the Gospel parable referred to: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field; which is the smallest of all seeds, but when it has grown it is greater than the vegetables and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the sky come and nest in its branches"⁸⁹³.

To this parallel, which seems to impose itself, only one objection could be made: is it truly possible to assimilate "the *Âtmâ* that resides in the heart" to what the Gospel designates as the "Kingdom of Heaven" or "the Kingdom of God"? The Gospel itself answers this question, and in a clearly affirmative sense; in fact, to the Pharisees who asked when the 'Kingdom of God' would come, understanding it in an external and temporal sense, Christ addresses these words: "The Kingdom of God does not come ostensibly.

Nor can it be said: Behold, there it is, behold, here it is, for the Kingdom of God is within you (*Regnum Dei intra vos est*)."⁸⁹⁴ Divine action is always exercised from within⁸⁹⁵, and therefore it is not ostensible, since the gaze is necessarily turned to external things; for this reason, Hindu doctrine gives the Principle the name of "internal organiser (*ântar-yâmi*)"⁸⁹⁶, since its operation is accomplished from the inside out, from the centre to the circumference, from the unmanifest to the manifest, so that its starting point escapes all the faculties belonging to the sensible order or

⁸⁹² *Chhandogya-Upânishad*, Prapâthaka 3, Khandâ 14, çruti 3.

⁸⁹³ *St Matthew*, XIII, 31-32; cf. *St Mark*, IV, 30, 32; *St Luke*, XIII, 18-19.

⁸⁹⁴ *Saint Luke*, XVII, 21. Let us recall in this regard the following Taoist text already quoted more fully in *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*. chap. X): 'Do not ask whether the Principle is in this or that. It is in all beings. That is why it is given the names of great, supreme, whole, universal, total... It is in all beings, as a termination of norm (the central point or the 'unchanging middle'), but it is not identical to beings, for it is neither diversified (in multiplicity) nor limited" (Chuang-tsë, chap. XXII [§6=F (ed. Wiegier)]).

⁸⁹⁵ "At the centre of all things, and superior to all, is the productive action of the Supreme Principle" (Chuang-tsë, chap. XI [§ 6 = F (ed. Wiegier)]).

⁸⁹⁶ Cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, chap. XV.

coming more or less directly or indirectly from it⁸⁹⁷. The "Kingdom of God", like the "house of God" (*Beyt-el*)⁸⁹⁸, is naturally identified with the centre, that is, with what is most interior, whether with respect to the whole of all beings or with respect to each of them in particular.

That said, it is clear that the antithesis contained in the Gospel text—the image of the mustard seed, which is 'the smallest of seeds' but becomes 'greater than the vegetables'—corresponds exactly to the double gradation, descending and ascending, which in the Hindu text expresses the idea of extreme smallness and extreme greatness. Moreover, there are other passages in the Gospel where the mustard seed is also taken as a representation of the smallest possible thing: "If you had faith like a mustard seed..."⁸⁹⁹; and this is not unrelated to what precedes, for faith, by which things of the supersensible order are grasped in a certain way, is usually referred to the heart⁹⁰⁰. But what does this opposition mean, according to which the "Kingdom of God" or "the *Ātmā* that resides in the heart" is both the smallest and the greatest? It is clear that this must be understood in two different relationships; but,

What are these relationships? To understand this, it suffices to know that when moving analogically from the lower to the higher, from the external to the internal, from the material to the spiritual, such an analogy, to be correctly applied, must be taken in the opposite sense: just as the image of an object in a mirror appears inverted with respect to that object, what is first or greatest in the principal order is, at least in appearance, the last and least in the manifested order⁹⁰¹. This application of the reverse meaning is also indicated in general by other words of the Gospel, at least in one of the meanings they contain: "The last shall be first, and the first last"⁹⁰²; "He who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted"⁹⁰³; "Whoever humbles himself to become like a child... he will be the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven"⁹⁰⁴; "If anyone wants to be first, let him be last

⁸⁹⁷ The 'ordering' action that brings the world out of chaos (it is well known that *kósmos* means both 'order' and 'world' in Greek) is essentially identified with the initial vibration we mentioned earlier.

⁸⁹⁸ Cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. IX.

⁸⁹⁹ *St Luke*, XVII, 6.

⁹⁰⁰ In this regard, a certain relationship with the symbolism of the 'eye of the heart' could even be found here, more particularly.

⁹⁰¹ Cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. III.

⁹⁰² *St Matthew*, XX, 16; cf. *ibid.*, XIX, 30; *St Mark*, X, 31.

⁹⁰³ *Saint Luke*, XVIII, 14.

⁹⁰⁴ *St Matthew*, XVIII, 4.

of all and the servant of all"⁹⁰⁵; "The least among you will be the greatest"⁹⁰⁶.

To limit ourselves to the case that interests us here in particular and to make things easier to understand, we can use terms of comparison in the mathematical order, using both geometric and arithmetic symbolism, which are in perfect agreement in this regard. Thus, the geometric point is quantitatively zero⁹⁰⁷ and occupies no space, although it is the principle by which the entire space is produced, which is nothing more than the development of the virtualities proper to it, since the 'effectuation' of space results from the irradiation of the point according to the 'six directions'⁹⁰⁸. Similarly, the arithmetic unit is the smallest of numbers if it is viewed as situated in multiplicity, but it is the largest in principle, since it virtually contains them all and produces their entire series by the mere indefinite repetition of itself. And in the same way, to return to the symbolism we were discussing at the beginning, the *yod* is the smallest of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and yet all the other forms are derived from it⁹⁰⁹. This double relationship is also referred to in the double hieroglyphic meaning of *the yod*, as "principle" and as "germ": in the upper world, it is the principle, which contains all things; in the lower world, it is the germ, which is contained in all things; they are the points of view of transcendence and immanence, reconciled in the unique synthesis of total harmony⁹¹⁰. The point is both the principle and the germ of extensions; unity is both the principle and the germ of numbers; likewise, the divine Word, whether considered as eternally subsistent in itself or as becoming the "Centre of the World"⁹¹¹, is both the principle and the germ of all beings⁹¹².

⁹⁰⁵ *Saint Mark*, IX, 35.

⁹⁰⁶ *Saint Luke*, IX, 48.

⁹⁰⁷ This nullity corresponds to what Taoism calls "formless nothingness".

⁹⁰⁸ On the relationship between the point and extension, cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XVI.

⁹⁰⁹ Hence these words: 'For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one *jot* (*iota*, that is, a single *yod*) or one tittle (part of a letter, an elementary form assimilated to *the yod*) shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled' (*St Matthew*, V, 18).

⁹¹⁰ The essential identity of both aspects is also represented by the numerical equivalence of the names '*el-Elyôn*', 'the Most High God', and '*Immanû'el*', 'God in us' (cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. VI). [The sum of the consonants in each name is 197, with the double *m* counting as a single *m* according to the rules of Hebrew spelling. (*Translator's note*)]

⁹¹¹ In Hindu tradition, the first of these two aspects of the Word is *Svayambhû* ['He who subsists by himself'], and the second is *Hiranyagarbha* [the 'Golden Embryo'].

⁹¹² From another point of view, this consideration of the opposite direction could also be applied to the two complementary phases of universal manifestation: unfolding and folding (*développement et*

The divine Principle that resides at the centre of being is represented by Hindu doctrine as a grain or seed (*dhātu*), as a germ (*bhija*)⁹¹³, because, in a certain sense, it is only virtually present in that being until the 'Union' has been effectively realised⁹¹⁴. On the other hand, that same being, and the entire manifestation to which it belongs, are only by the principle, they have no positive reality except by participation in its essence, and to the very extent of this participation. The divine Spirit (*Ātmā*), being the sole Principle of all things, vastly surpasses or transcends all existence⁹¹⁵; that is why it is described as greater than each of the "three worlds", terrestrial, intermediate and celestial (the three terms of *Tribhūvana*), which are the different modes of universal manifestation, and also greater than these "three worlds" as a whole, since it is beyond all manifestation, being the immutable, eternal, absolute and unconditioned Principle⁹¹⁶.

In the parable of the mustard seed, there is still one point that requires explanation in relation to the preceding⁹¹⁷: it is said that the seed, as it develops, becomes a tree; and it is well known that the tree is one of the main symbols of the 'Axis of the World' in all traditions⁹¹⁸. This meaning fits perfectly: the seed is the centre; the tree that sprouts from it is the axis, coming directly from that centre, and extending its branches throughout all worlds, on which the 'birds of the sky' come to rest, which, as in certain Hindu texts, represent the higher states of being. This unchanging axis is, in effect, the "divine support" of all existence; it is, as Far Eastern doctrines teach, the direction in which

enveloppement), exhalation and inhalation, expansion and concentration, "solution" and "coagulation" (cf. *La*

Grande Triade, chap. VI).

⁹¹³ In this regard, note the similarity between the Latin words *gramen*, 'grain', and *germen*, 'germ'. In Sanskrit, the word *drātu* also serves to designate the verbal 'root', like a 'seed' whose development gives birth to the whole language (cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. XI). ⁹¹⁴ We say 'virtually' rather than 'potentially', because there can be nothing potential in the divine order; only from the point of view of the individual being and with respect to it could one speak here of potentiality. But potentiality is the absolute undifferentiation of 'raw material' in the Aristotelian sense, identical to the indistinctness of primordial chaos.

⁹¹⁵We take the word 'existence' in its strict etymological sense: 'existere' is *ex-stare*, to have one's being from another than oneself, to be dependent on a higher principle; existence thus understood is, therefore, properly speaking, contingent, relative, conditioned being, the mode of being of that which does not have its sufficient reason in itself.

⁹¹⁶The "three worlds" are not mentioned in the parable of the mustard seed, but they are represented by the three measures of flour in the parable of the leaven, which immediately follows it (*Matthew*, XIII, 33; *Luke*, XIII, 20-21).

⁹¹⁷ Let us also note that the "field" (*kshetra*) is, in Hindu terminology, the symbolic designation of the domain in which the possibilities of a being unfold.

⁹¹⁸Cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IX.

"Activity of Heaven," the place where the "Will of Heaven" is manifested⁹¹⁹. Is this not one of the reasons why, in the Lord's Prayer, immediately after this plea: "Thy kingdom come" (and certainly this refers to the "Kingdom of God"), the following one follows: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven", an expression of the "axial" union of all worlds with each other and with the divine Principle, of the full realisation of that total harmony to which we alluded, which cannot be achieved unless all beings agree on their aspirations according to a single direction, that of the axis itself?⁹²⁰ "May they all be one; as You, Father, are in me and I am in You, may they also be one in us... That they may be one as we are one; I in them and You in me, that they may be perfected in unity."⁽⁹²¹⁾This perfect union is the true advent of the "Kingdom of God," which comes from within and expands outward, in the fullness of the universal order, the consummation of the entire manifestation and restoration of the integrity of the "primordial state." It is the coming of the "Heavenly Jerusalem at the end of time"⁹²²: "Behold, the Tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them"⁹²³. And he will wipe away the tears from their eyes, and death shall be no more..."⁽⁹²⁴⁾"There shall be no more curse, and the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it [in the City], and his servants shall serve him, and they shall see his face, and his name shall be on their foreheads"⁹²⁵. There shall be no more night⁹²⁶ nor shall they have

⁹¹⁹Cf. *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XXIII. Here we would rather use the expression "metaphysical place" by analogy with "geometric place," which gives the most accurate symbol possible of what is being discussed.

⁹²⁰ It should be noted that the word "concord" literally means "union of hearts" (*cum-cordia*); in this case, the heart is taken mainly as a representation of the will.

⁹²¹ *St John*, XVII, 21-23.

⁹²² To link this more closely with what we have just said about the symbolism of the tree, we will also recall that the "Tree of Life" is located in the centre of "heavenly Jerusalem" (cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. XI, and *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IX).

⁹²³Naturally, it is worth referring here to what we said earlier about the *Shechinah* and about 'Immanu'el.

⁹²⁴ *Revelation*, XXI, 3-4. The "heavenly Jerusalem", as the "Centre of the World", is effectively identified with the "abode of immortality" (cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. VII).

⁹²⁵ This can be seen as an allusion to the "third eye", which has the shape of a *yod*, as we explained in our study on "L'Oeil qui voit tout" (here, chap. LXXII: "The Eye that sees everything"): when they are restored to their "primal state", they will effectively possess, and for that very reason, the "sense of eternity".

⁹²⁶Night here naturally takes on its lower meaning, in that it is assimilated to chaos, and it is evident that the perfection of the "cosmos" is in opposition to it (one might say, at the other extreme of manifestation), so that this perfection can be considered as a perpetual "day".

need for torchlight or sunlight, because the Lord God will give them light, and they will reign for ever and ever"⁹²⁷.

⁽⁹²⁷⁾ *Revelation*, XXII, 3-5. Cf. also *ibid.*, XXI, 23 "And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God illuminates it, and its torch is the Lamb." The "glory of God" is also a designation of the *Shekinah*, whose manifestation is always represented as "Light" (cf. *Le Roi du Monde*, chap. III).

LXXIV

*THE ETHER IN THE HEART*⁹²⁸

When referring earlier to what Hindu doctrine symbolically calls "the Ether in the heart," we indicated that what is thus designated is in reality the divine Principle that resides, at least virtually, in the centre of every being. The heart, here as in all traditional doctrines, is in fact considered to be the representation of the vital centre of the being⁹²⁹, and this in the fullest sense conceivable, for it is not only a question of the bodily organ and its physiological role, but this notion also applies, by analogical transposition, to all points of view and in all domains to which the possibilities of the being considered extend, for example, the human being, since his case, being precisely our own, is obviously the one that interests us most directly. More strictly still, the vital centre is considered to correspond to the lesser ventricle of the heart; and it is clear that this ventricle (to which we find, moreover, the same idea of "smallness" that we referred to in connection with the mustard seed) takes on a completely symbolic meaning when it is transposed beyond the corporeal domain; but it must be made very clear that, like all true and authentically traditional symbolism, this is based on reality, on an effective relationship between the centre taken in a higher or spiritual sense and the specific point in the organism that serves as its representation.

To return to "Ether in the Heart," here is one of the fundamental texts on the subject: "In that residence of *Brahma* (that is, in the vital centre we are discussing) there is a small lotus, a dwelling place in which there is a small cavity (*dâhara*) occupied by Ether (*Âkâça*); one must seek what is in that place, and it will be known"⁹³⁰. What thus resides in this centre of being is not simply the ethereal element, the principle of the other four sensible elements; only those who cling to the most external meaning, that is, the one that refers solely to the corporeal world, in which this element certainly plays the role of principle, could believe this, since from it, by

⁹²⁸ [Published in *É. T.*, April-May 1949]. Like our article on "Le grain de sénévé" [here, chap. LXXIII: "The Mustard Seed"], this one, which was to follow it, was originally written for *Regnabit*; it therefore gives rise to the same observations, and although most of the considerations it contains are undoubtedly not entirely new to readers of *Études Traditionnelles*, we believed that it might be of interest to them to find them presented here from a slightly different angle.

⁹²⁹ See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védânta*, chapter III.

⁹³⁰ *Chândogya-Upânishad*, Prapâthaka 8, Khanda 1, çruti 2.

differentiation of complementary qualities (apparently converted into opposites in their external manifestation) and by the rupture of the primordial equilibrium in which they were contained in an "indistinct" state, all things in this world have been produced and developed⁹³¹. But in that case, it is only a relative principle, just as this world itself is relative, being nothing more than a special mode of universal manifestation; although that does not detract from the fact that such a role of the Ether, as the first of the elements, is what makes possible the transposition that needs to be carried out; every relative principle, precisely because it remains truly a principle in its order, is a natural image, albeit more distant, and like a reflection of the absolute and supreme Principle. Moreover, the Ether is designated in this text solely as a "support" for this transposition, as the end of the text expressly indicates, for if it were only a matter of what the words used express literally and immediately, there would obviously be nothing to seek; what must be sought is the spiritual reality that corresponds analogically to the Ether, and of which the latter is, so to speak, the expression with respect to the sensible world. The result of this search is what is properly called "knowledge of the heart" (*hârda-vidyâ*), and this is at the same time the "knowledge of the cavity" (*dâhârda-vidyâ*), an equivalence that is manifested in Sanskrit by the fact that the respective words (*hârda* and *dâhara* [where â=a+a]) are formed by the same letters arranged in a different order; it is, in other words, the knowledge of the deepest and innermost part of the being⁹³².

Just like the designation of the Ether, terms such as "lotus" or "cavity" that we have encountered must also be taken, of course, in a symbolic sense; since the sensible order is transcended, it can no longer be a question of location in the proper sense of the word, for what is at stake is no longer subject to spatial conditions. Expressions referring to space or time then take on the value of pure symbols; and this kind of symbolism is, moreover, natural and inevitable since it is necessary to use a mode of expression adapted to the individual and terrestrial human condition, a language that is that of living beings currently in space and time. Thus, these two forms, spatial and temporal, which in a certain way are mutually complementary in certain respects, are very general and almost constant in their use, either because they occur together in the same representation, or to give two different representations of the same reality⁹³³, which, in itself, is

⁹³¹ See our study on "La Théorie hindoue des cinq éléments" (*É.T.*, August-September 1935).

⁹³² With regard to the cavity or "cavern" of the heart, considered more particularly as the "place" where the birth of the *Avatâra* takes place, see also *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XLVIII.

⁹³³ For example, the geometric representation of the multiple states of being and their representation in the form of a series of successive "cycles".

beyond time and space. For example, when it is said that intelligence resides in the heart, it goes without saying that this does not in any way mean locating intelligence, assigning it 'dimensions' and a specific position in space; it was left to modern and purely secular philosophy, with Descartes, to raise the question, contradictory in its very terms, of a 'seat of the soul', and to attempt to locate it literally in a specific area of the brain; The ancient traditional doctrines, of course, have never given rise to such confusion, and their authoritative interpreters have always known perfectly well what to expect in terms of what should be understood symbolically, matching the various orders of realities without mixing them and strictly observing their hierarchical distribution according to the degrees of universal Existence. All these considerations, moreover, seem so obvious to us that we would be tempted to apologise for insisting on them so much; if we do so, it is because we know only too well what Orientalists, in their ignorance of the most elementary facts of symbolism, have done to the doctrines they study from the outside, without ever seeking to acquire direct knowledge of them, and how, taking everything in the crudest material sense, they distort these doctrines to the point of sometimes presenting a veritable caricature of them; and because we also know that the attitude of these Orientalists is not exceptional, but rather stems from a mentality that is characteristic, at least in the West, of the vast majority of our contemporaries, a mentality that is, in essence, specifically modern.

The lotus has multiple symbolic meanings, some of which we have already referred to on other occasions⁹³⁴; in one of them, alluded to in the above-quoted text, it is used to represent the various centres, including secondary ones, of the human being, whether physiological centres (especially nerve plexuses) or, above all, psychic centres (corresponding to those same plexuses by virtue of the link between the corporeal state and the subtle state in the composite that constitutes human individuality proper). In the Hindu tradition, these centres are usually called "lotuses" (*padma* or *kāmala*) and are depicted with different numbers of petals, numbers that also have symbolic meaning, as do the colours associated with them (apart from certain sounds with which they are also associated, which are the mantras belonging to various vibratory modalities, in harmony with the special faculties respectively governed by such centres and proceeding, in a certain way, from their radiation, represented by the opening of the petals)⁹³⁵; they are also called "wheels" (*chakra*), which, let us point out

⁹³⁴ See in particular "Les fleurs symboliques" [here, chap. IX: "The Symbolic Flowers"].

⁹³⁵ On all this, see "Kundalini-Yoga" (*É. T.*, October and November 1933).

incidentally, corroborates once again the very close relationship that, as we have indicated elsewhere, generally exists between the symbolism of the wheel and that of flowers such as the lotus and the rose.

One further observation must be made before proceeding any further: in this case, as in all others of the same kind, it would be a grave mistake to believe that consideration of the higher meanings is opposed to acceptance of the literal meaning, that it nullifies the latter or renders it false in some way: the superimposition of a plurality of meanings which, far from excluding each other, harmonise and complement each other, is, as we have often explained, an entirely general characteristic of true symbolism. If we limit ourselves to the corporeal world, the Ether, as the first of the sensible elements, truly and genuinely plays the 'central' role that must be recognised in everything that is a principle in any order: its state of homogeneity and perfect equilibrium can be represented by the primordial neutral point, prior to all distinctions and all oppositions, from which they depart and to which they finally return to be resolved in it, in the double alternative movement of expansion and contraction, expiration and aspiration, diastole and systole, which essentially constitute the two complementary phases of every process of manifestation. This is found with complete accuracy, moreover, in the ancient cosmological conceptions of the West, where the four differentiated elements have been represented as arranged at the ends of the four arms of a cross, thus opposing each other in pairs: fire and water, air and earth, according to their respective participation in the fundamental qualities that are equally opposed in pairs: hot and cold, dry and wet, in accordance with Aristotelian theory⁹³⁶; and, in some of these figurations, what the alchemists called the "quintessence" (*quinta essentia*), that is, the fifth element, which is none other than Ether (first in the order of development of manifestation, but last in the inverse order of reabsorption or return to primordial homogeneity), appears at the centre of the cross in the form of a five-petalled rose, which clearly recalls, as a symbolic flower, the lotus of Eastern traditions (the centre of the cross then corresponds to the "cavity" of the heart, whether the symbolism is applied from a 'macrocosmic' or 'microcosmic' point of view), while, on the other hand, the geometric pattern according to which the rose is drawn is none other than the Pythagorean pentagram or *pentalpha*⁹³⁷. This is a particular application of symbolism.

⁹³⁶ For further details on this subject, we refer the reader to our recently mentioned study on "La Théorie hindoue des cinq éléments"

⁹³⁷ We recall that this figure, which is distinctly Hermetic and Rosicrucian in nature and is properly that of the *Rota Mundi*, was placed by Leibniz at the head of his treatise *De Arte Combinatoria* (see *Les Principes du Calcul infinitésimal*, Avant-propos).

of the cross and its centre, perfectly in accordance with its general meaning as we have explained elsewhere⁹³⁸ ; and at the same time, these considerations relating to the Ether must naturally also be connected with the cosmogonic theory of the Hebrew Kabbalah concerning the '*Avîr*', a theory we have mentioned before⁹³⁹ .

However, in traditional doctrines, a physical theory (in the old sense of the word) can never be considered self-sufficient; it is only a starting point, a "support" that allows, through analogical correspondences, to rise to the knowledge of higher orders; and this, moreover, as is well known, constitutes one of the essential differences between the point of view of sacred or traditional science and that of profane science as conceived by moderns. What resides in the heart is not, therefore, only the Ether in the proper sense of the term: since the heart is the centre of the human being considered in its entirety, and not only in its corporeal form, what is at its centre is the "living soul" (*jīvâtma*), which contains in principle all the possibilities that develop in the course of individual existence, just as the Ether contains in principle all the possibilities of corporeal or sensible manifestation. It is very remarkable, in relation to the concordances between Eastern and Western traditions, that Dante also speaks of the 'spirit of life, which dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart'⁹⁴⁰, that is, precisely in that same "cavity" referred to in the Hindu tradition; and, perhaps even more remarkable, the expression he uses, "*spirito della vita*", is as rigorous a literal translation as possible of the Sanskrit term *jīvâtma*, of which, however, it is highly unlikely that he could have had any knowledge whatsoever.

There is more: what concerns the "living soul" as residing in the heart does not directly concern, at least, but rather an intermediate domain, which constitutes what can properly be called the psychic order (in the original sense of the Greek word *psykhè*) and which does not go beyond the consideration of the human individual as such; it is therefore necessary to rise to a higher sense, the purely spiritual or metaphysical; and it goes without saying that the superimposition of the three senses corresponds exactly to the hierarchy of "the three worlds". Thus, what resides in the heart, from a first point of view, is the ethereal element, but not only that; from a second point of view, it is the 'living soul', but it is not only that either, for what is represented by the heart is essentially the point of contact of the individual with

⁹³⁸ See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. VII.

⁹³⁹ See 'Le grain de sénevé' [here, chap. LXXIII: 'The Mustard Seed'].

⁹⁴⁰ "*At that point I truly say that the spirit of life, which dwells in the most secret chamber of the heart...*" (*Vita Nova*, 2).

the universal or, in other words, the human with the Divine, a point of contact that is naturally identified with the very centre of individuality. Consequently, a third point of view must be brought into play here, which can be called 'supra-individual', since, in expressing the relationship between human beings and the Principle, it goes beyond the limits of the individual condition, and from this point of view it is said, finally, that what resides in the heart is *Brahma* itself, the divine Principle from which all existence proceeds and depends entirely, and which, from within, penetrates, sustains and illuminates all things. The Ether, too, in the corporeal world, can be considered as that which produces and penetrates everything, and that is why all the sacred texts of India and their authoritative commentaries present it as a symbol of *Brahma*⁹⁴¹; what is designated as "the Ether in the heart", in the highest sense, is therefore *Brahma* himself and, consequently, "knowledge of the heart" when it reaches its deepest degree, is truly identified with "divine knowledge" (*Brahma-vidyā*)⁹⁴².

The divine Principle, on the other hand, is also considered to reside, in a certain sense, at the centre of every being, which is in accordance with what St John says when he speaks of 'the true Light that enlightens every man who comes into this world'; but this 'divine presence', comparable to the Hebrew *Shechinah*, can only be virtual, in the sense that the being may not be currently aware of it; that presence does not become fully effective for that being until it has become aware of it and has 'realised' it through 'Union', understood in the Sanskrit sense of *Yoga*. Then that being knows, through the most real and immediate of knowledge, that "the *Ātmā* that resides in the heart" is not simply *jivātmā*, the individual and human soul, but is also the absolute and unconditioned *Ātmā*, the universal and divine Spirit, and that both, at that central point, are in indissoluble and, moreover, inexpressible contact, for in truth they are but one, as, in the words of Christ, "my Father and I are one". Whoever has effectively attained this knowledge has truly reached the centre, and not only his own but also, for that very reason, the centre of all things; he has realised the union of his heart with the "spiritual Sun" which is the true "Heart of the World". The heart thus considered is, according to the teachings of the Hindu tradition, the "Divine City" (*Brahma-pura*); and this is

⁹⁴¹ "*Brahma* is like the Ether, which is everywhere and simultaneously penetrates the exterior and interior of things" (Çankarāchārya, *Ātma-Bodha*).

⁽⁹⁴²⁾ This divine knowledge itself can be of two kinds, "non-supreme" (*āpara*) or "supreme" (*para*),

corresponding respectively to the celestial world and to that which is beyond the "three worlds"; but that distinction, despite its extreme importance from the point of view of pure metaphysics, has no bearing on the considerations we are now presenting, nor does that of the two different degrees in which, correlatively, the "Union" itself can also be approached.

describes, as we have already indicated above, in terms similar to those used in the *Apocalypse* to refer to the "Heavenly Jerusalem", which is also, in effect, one of the representations of the "Heart of the World".

LXXV

THE DIVINE CITY⁹⁴³

We have already spoken on several occasions about the symbolism of the "Divine City" (*Brahma-pura* in the Hindu tradition)⁹⁴⁴: it is well known that what is thus designated is properly the centre of being, represented by the heart, which indeed corresponds to it in the corporeal organism, and that this centre is the residence of *Purusha*, identified with the divine Principle (*Brahma*) insofar as the latter is the "internal organiser" (*ántar-yâmī*) who governs all the faculties of that being through the "non-acting" activity that is the immediate consequence of his mere presence. The name *Purusha* is interpreted for this reason as *puri-çaya*, that is, 'he who resides or rests (*çaya*) in the being as in a city (*pura*)'; this interpretation clearly belongs to *the Nirukta* [discipline of symbolic exegesis], but A. K. Coomaraswamy has pointed out that, although this is not the case in most instances, in this one it could represent both a true etymological derivation⁹⁴⁵ and this point, because of all the connections it allows us to establish, deserves our attention with a little more space.

First of all, it should be noted that the Greek *pólis* and the Latin *civitas*, which designate 'city', correspond respectively, by their roots, to the two elements that make up the word *purusha*, although, due to certain phonetic changes from one language to another, this may not be evident at first glance. In fact, the Sanskrit root *pr-* or *pur-* corresponds in European languages to *peL*⁹⁴⁶, so that *pura* and *polis* are strictly equivalent; this root expresses, from a qualitative point of view, the idea of 'fullness' (Sanskrit *puru* and *pūrna*, Greek *pléos*, Latin *plenus*, English *full*), and, from a quantitative point of view, that of 'plurality' (Greek *polys*, Latin *plus*, German *viel*). A city obviously exists only because of the gathering of a plurality of individuals who inhabit it and constitute its 'population' (the word *populus* is of the same origin), which could already justify the use of terms such as those in question to designate it; but this is only the most external aspect, and the most important one, when

⁹⁴³ [Published in *É.T.*, September 1950].

⁹⁴⁴See *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. III; cf. also our studies on "Le grain de sénévé" and "L'Éther dans le coeur" (here, respectively, chap. LXXIII: "The Mustard Seed," and LXXIV: "The Ether in the Heart").

⁹⁴⁵ "What is civilisation?" (*Albert Schweitzer Festschrift*); we take from this study part of the considerations that follow, particularly with regard to the linguistic point of view.

⁹⁴⁶It is well known that the sounds *r* and *l* are phonetically very close to each other and easily change into one another.

If one wishes to get to the bottom of things, one must consider the idea of fullness. In this regard, it is well known that fullness and emptiness, considered as correlatives, are one of the traditional symbolic representations of the complementarity of the active and passive principles. In the present case, it can be said that *Purusha* fills the "Divine City" with his presence in all its extensions and dependencies, that is, the entirety of being, which without that presence would be nothing but an empty field (*kshetra*), or, in other words, pure potentiality devoid of any actualised existence. *Purusha*, according to the Upanishadic texts, also illuminates "that whole" (*sārvam idam*) by his radiance, an image of his "non-acting" activity by which all manifestation is realised, according to the "measure" itself determined by the effective extension of that radiance⁹⁴⁷, just as, in the apocalyptic symbolism of the Christian tradition, the "Heavenly Jerusalem" is entirely illuminated by the light of the Lamb who rests in its centre "as immolated", that is, in a state of "non-acting"⁹⁴⁸. We may add in this regard that the immolation of the Lamb "from the beginning of the world" is in reality the same thing as the Vedic sacrifice of *Purusha*, by which he is apparently divided at the origin of manifestation in order to reside at once in all beings and in all worlds⁹⁴⁹, so that, while always being essentially one and containing everything principally in its very unity, it appears outwardly as multiple, which also corresponds exactly to the two ideas of fullness and plurality to which we referred a little earlier; and that is also why it is said that "there are two *Purushas* in the world, one destructible and the other indestructible: the first is distributed among all beings; the second is the immutable one"⁹⁵⁰.

On the other hand, the Latin *civitas* derives from a root *kei-* which, in Western languages, is equivalent to the Sanskrit root *çî-* (from which *çaya*); its precise meaning is 'rest' (Greek *kéisthai*, 'to lie down', 'to recline'), from which the meaning of 'residence' or stable dwelling, such as those in a city, is ultimately nothing more than a direct consequence. *Purusha*, who rests in the 'divine city', can be said to be its only 'citizen' (*civis*)⁹⁵¹, since the multitude of inhabitants who 'populate' it do not truly exist except for him, being produced entirely by his own light and animated by his own breath (*prāna*), where, moreover, rays of light and vital breath are not, in fact,

⁹⁴⁷ See *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, chap. III.

⁹⁴⁸ We will also recall that the manifestation of the *Shekinah* or "Divine Presence" is always represented as a light.

⁹⁴⁹ See "Rassembler ce qui est épars" [here, chap. XLVI: "Gathering what is scattered"].

⁹⁵⁰ *Bhagavad-Gīta*, XV, 16; according to the continuation of this text, *Purushottama*, who is identical to *Paramātmā*, is beyond these two aspects, for he is the supreme Principle, transcendent with respect to all manifestation: he is not "in the world," but, on the contrary, all worlds are in him.

⁹⁵¹ The equivalent Greek expression, *mónos politês*, has been applied to God by Philo.

but two aspects of *sūtrātmā*. If we consider the "Divine City" (or "the Kingdom of God" that "is within us" according to the words of the Gospel) in its strictest sense, as solely the very centre of being, it goes without saying that only *Purusha* actually resides there; but the extension of this term to the whole being, with all its faculties and all its constituent elements, is equally legitimate for the reasons we have just explained, and does not introduce any change in this respect, since all this depends entirely on *Purusha* and receives from him even existence itself. The vital functions and faculties of being are often compared, in their relation to *Purusha*, to the subjects or servants of a king, and there is among them a hierarchy similar to that of the various castes in human society⁹⁵²; the palace where the king resides and from where he directs everything is the centre or heart of the city⁹⁵³; its essential part, of which all the rest constitute only prolongations or "extensions" (a meaning also contained in the root *kei-*); but, of course, the subjects are never in a state of absolute dependence on the king as we have discussed, because, although the royal function is unique in the city and the situation of the "ruler" is essentially different from that of the "ruled"⁹⁵⁴, the king himself is nevertheless a human being like his subjects, and not a principle of another order. Another, more accurate image is provided by puppet theatre, since puppets are animated only by the will of a man who moves them at will (and the string by which he moves them is, naturally, another symbol of the *sūtrātmā*); and in this regard, there is a particularly notable 'myth' in the *Kathā-Sārit-Sāgara*⁹⁵⁵. It tells of a city entirely populated by wooden automatons, which behave in every way like living beings, except that they cannot speak; in the centre there is a palace where a man resides who is the "sole consciousness" (*ēkakam chētanam*) of the city and the cause of all the movements of these automatons, which he himself has made; and it should be noted that this man is a carpenter, which assimilates him to *Viçvakarma*, that is, to the divine Principle as the builder and organiser of the Universe⁹⁵⁶.

⁹⁵² This point of view has been particularly developed by Plato in *The Republic*.

⁹⁵³ Originally, this palace was also a temple; this dual character is also sometimes found in "historical" periods, and we recall in particular the example of the *Ming-Tang* in China (see *The Great Triad*, chap. XVI).

⁹⁵⁴ In their mutual relationship, the "ruler" is "in act" and the "ruled" are "in potency" according to Aristotelian and scholastic language; therefore, in the traditional conception, the king and his kingdom are in a relationship of active principle and passive principle respectively; but, on the other hand, the king, insofar as he exercises temporal power, becomes at the same time a passive principle with respect to spiritual authority (cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Theory of Indian Government*).

⁹⁵⁵ Cf. A. K. Coomaraswamy, "'Spiritual Paternity' and the 'Puppet Complex'", in *Psychiatry*, August 1945 issue.

⁹⁵⁶ See "Maçons et Charpentiers", in *É. T.*, December 1946.

This last observation leads us to specify that the symbolism of the "Divine City" admits both a "macrocosmic" and a "microcosmic" application, although in all that has preceded we have considered almost exclusively the latter; one could even speak of various "macrocosmic" applications at different levels, depending on whether we are dealing with a particular world, that is, a specific state of existence (and this is precisely what the symbolism of the "Heavenly Jerusalem" mentioned above refers to), or the whole of universal manifestation. In all cases, whether we consider the centre of a world, or the centre of all worlds, there is a divine Principle in that centre (the *Purusha* residing in the Sun, or *Spiritus Mundi* of Western traditions) which performs, for everything manifested in the corresponding domain, the same function of "internal organiser" as the *Purusha* residing in the heart of each being for everything included in the possibilities of that being. Then, it suffices to transpose, without further modification, to apply it to the multitude of manifested beings, what in the "microcosmic" application is said of the different faculties of a particular being; the symbolism of the sun as the "Heart of the World"⁹⁵⁷ explains, moreover, why the *sūtrātrnā* that unites each being with the central *Purusha* is represented by the "solar ray" called *sushumna*⁹⁵⁸. The various representations of the *sūtrātrnā* also show that the apparent division of *Purusha*, in the 'macrocosmic' order as in the 'microcosmic' order, should not be conceived as a fragmentation, which would be in contradiction with its essential unity, but as an 'extension' comparable to that of rays from the centre; and at the same time, as the *sūtrātrnā* is assimilated to a thread (*sūtra*) by its very designation, this symbolism is also closely related to that of the fabric⁹⁵⁹.

We still need to briefly mention one point: in order to be legitimate and valid from a traditional point of view, that is, in short, to be truly "normal", the constitution and organisation of every city or human society must take as its model, as far as possible, the "Divine City"; we say as far as possible because, at least in the current conditions of our world, the

⁹⁵⁷ It is clear that this is not "the sun that all men see", but the spiritual sun, "which few know by intellect" (*Atharva-Veda*, X, 8, 14) and which is represented as immutably at the zenith.

⁹⁵⁸ Cf. *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, chap. XX; this "sunbeam" is also the same thing as the "golden cord" mentioned by Plato.

⁹⁵⁹ See *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. XIV: we will recall here more particularly the symbolism of the spider at the centre of its web, an image of the sun, whose rays, which are emanations or "extensions" of itself (just as the spider's web is formed of its own substance), constitute in a certain way the "fabric" of the world, which they actualise as they extend in all directions from their source.

Any imitation of that model (which is properly an "archetype") will always and necessarily be imperfect, as shown by what we said earlier about comparing *Purusha* to a king; but, in any case, only to the extent that this imitation is realised will it be strictly correct to speak of "civilisation". It is quite clear that everything that is called civilisation in the modern world, and which is even claimed to be 'civilisation' par excellence, can only be a caricature and, in many respects, even the opposite of civilisation; not only does such an anti-traditional civilisation not really deserve the name, but in fact, strictly speaking, it is the antithesis of true civilisation.

ANNEX I*

(= Annex III of the original)

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION TO CHAPTER XXXI

The point left unresolved at the end of his study on "The Mountain and the Cave" has been taken up again by René Guénon in his correspondence with us concerning the numerical symbolism of certain Arabic names and terms. To better situate the issue, it is worth recalling that in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix* (1931, chap. III), Guénon had already written that, in Islamic esotericism, "it is taught that the 'Universal Man', as represented by the 'Adam-Eve' pair, has the number of '*Allah*', which is a clear expression of the 'Supreme Identity'." In a footnote, the author specified:

This number, which is 66[†], is given by the sum of the numerical values of the letters that form the names 'Adam wa-Hawâ'. According to the Hebrew *Genesis*, the man "created from the rib of the woman" was named Adam, and the woman was named Hawâ.

that form the names '*Adam wa-Hawâ*'. According to the Hebrew *Genesis*, man "created male and female", that is, in an androgynous state, is 'in the image of God'. As we had pointed out to him some other correspondences (which cannot be referred to in the present context), in his reply he made a first allusion, albeit insufficiently explained, to the point that interests us:

"As for the number 45 of the name '*Adam*', it should be noted that it is not only a multiple of 9 but is actually the 'triangle' of 9, that is, in other words, the sum of the first 9 numbers. On the other hand, the number of *Hawâ* is 15, which is the 'triangle' of 5; the relationship between the two 'triangles' may also give rise to certain curious considerations; moreover, I have long intended to discuss this in an article, but so far I have not had the opportunity." (Letter of 30 March 1940).

In our reply, we noted, among other things, that the relationship between 45 and 15 was particularly interesting in the arrangement of the first 9 numbers in the so-called 'magic square' of 9, where each line, vertical, horizontal or diagonal, totals 15, so that the whole is centred on the number 5, the numerical symbol of the human microcosm (cf. the arrangement of the regenerated man in the Flaming Star). This led us

*Due to its content, it has been decided to place this Annex, which is Annex III in the original, as Annex I, and consequently Annexes I and II of the original have become Annexes II and III respectively in the translation. (Translator's note)

† The number corresponding to '*Allah*' is 66 because the second '*a*', although long, does not actually have an *alif* in writing, so that its consonantal elements, the basis of the calculation, are *llh*, respectively 1+30+30+5 (Translator's note)

provided further clarification on the point in question: "Your observations on the 'magic square' of 9 are accurate ⁹⁶⁰; but, in addition, the relationship between the numbers of *'Adam* and *Hawâ* is also that of the two triangles I referred to in connection with the symbolism of the mountain and the cave. If we consider the sum of the two

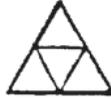


Fig. 18

names without using the conjunction [*wa-*], that is, 60, *Ādam* represents three quarters and *Hawâ* one quarter: this could perhaps be related to certain Hindu formulas (a quarter, in Sanskrit, is called a 'foot', *pāda*), at least insofar as such formulas admit application to universal Man. (Letter dated 21 April 1940).

On this last point, here is what we believe can be established, especially based on references to Hinduism made elsewhere by Guénon himself. The *Māndūkya-Upānishad* (çruti 1 and 2) uses the unit of measurement called *pāda* with reference to the conditions of *Ātmā*: "*Ātmā* (of which all things are but the manifestation) is *Brahma*, and that *Ātmā* (with respect to the various states of being) has four conditions (*pāda*); in truth, all this is *Brahma*." After quoting this text in chapter X of *L'Homme et son devenir selon le Védānta*, Guénon shows in chapters XI, XIV and XVI that, according to the correspondences established by the same *Upānishad* between the constituent elements (*mātra*) of the sacred monosyllable *Aum* (pronounced *Om*) and the conditions (*pāda*) of *Ātmā*, of which that monosyllable is the ideographic symbol, these four conditions are:

1st the waking state (*jāgarita-sthāna*), which is that of the most external manifestation, the corporeal world, represented by the letter *A* of the monosyllable;

2nd, the state of dreaming (*svapna-sthāna*), which is the subtle manifestation, represented by the letter *U*;

3rd the state of deep sleep (*sushupta-sthāna*), the principal degree of being, represented by the letter *M*;

4th, the supreme state, totally and absolutely unconditioned, represented by the monosyllable itself considered in its principal aspect and "unexpressed" by any ideographic character (*amātra*).

⁹⁶⁰The question of the symbolism of this "square" was later taken up again by Guénon himself in *La Grande Triade* (chap. XVI: "Le 'Ming-Tang'"), published in 1946.

But, on the other hand, the *Maitri Upânishad* (Prapâthaka 7, çruti 11) says: "Waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and what lies beyond, such are the four states of *Âtmâ*: the greatest (*mahâtara*) is the Fourth (*Turiya*). In the first three, *Brahma* resides with one of his feet; there are three feet in the last." And Guénon comments: "Thus, the proportions established above from a certain point of view are reversed from a different point of view: of the four 'feet' (*pâda*) of *Âtmâ*, the first three in terms of the distinction of states are but one in terms of metaphysical importance, and the last is three at once according to the same relationship. If *Brahma* were not 'without parts' (*akhanda*), it could be said that only a quarter of Him is in Being (including everything that depends on Being, that is, the universal manifestation of which He is the principle), while His other three quarters are beyond Being. These three quarters can be considered as follows:

1st, the totality of the possibilities of manifestation insofar as they are not manifested, that is, in the absolutely permanent and unconditioned state, like everything that belongs to the 'Fourth' (insofar as they are manifested, they belong to the first two states; insofar as they are 'manifestable', to the third, which is principal with respect to the former);

2nd, the totality of possibilities of non-manifestation (of which, moreover, we speak in the plural only by analogy, since they are obviously beyond multiplicity, and even beyond unity);

3rd, finally, the supreme Principle of both, which is the total, infinite and absolute Universal Possibility.

Naturally, certain correspondences can be glimpsed between the four *pâdas* of *Brahma* and the four smaller triangles into which the larger one is broken down (just as, on the other hand, a new transposition of the monosyllable *Aum* should be possible): in this case, the inverted triangle, applied to the principal order, would symbolise Being as it manifests itself⁹⁶¹; the three right triangles then correspond to the three aspects of *Brahma* beyond Being: the upper triangle, the origin of the figurative whole, naturally serves as a symbol of the Supreme Principle of all possibilities, and the two triangles, on the right and left, respectively to the possibilities of non-manifestation and to the possibilities of manifestation insofar as they do not manifest themselves⁹⁶².

On the other hand, when considering the correspondences with the four *pâdas* of *Âtmâ*, they are as follows: the upper triangle corresponds to the principal *pâda* and non-

⁹⁶¹ The inverted triangle is, in Buddhism, by a more special application, the symbol of mercy of *Avalokiteçvara*, the 'Lord who looks down'.

⁹⁶² Let us specify that this occurs when manifestation is considered in a "negative" sense; but if it is viewed in a "positive" sense, that is, as the fulfilment or perfection of existential possibilities (conformity to *the Fiat*), the symbolism of the "right" and the "left" is reversed.

manifested, and the other three triangles to the three *pāda* of the domain of manifestation, also related to the *mâtṛā* of *Aum*. However, for a precise application, it is also necessary to consider an interpretation according to the symbolism of the centre, the right and the left, that is, to reorder the vertical hierarchy of the degrees of existence (principal, intermediate and corporeal) on a horizontal plane corresponding to the point of view of the 'directions of itinerary' or 'distributive justice'.

Finally, from a more cosmological point of view (close to that of *Sāṃkhya*) but in the terms of the *Çvetâçvatara-Upānishad*, the upper triangle would be the "unique and colourless Being" (interpreted as *Çiva*), and the other three triangles would be the three "unborn": one, of a feminine nature, "the unborn red, white and black", which engenders particular beings and corresponds to Primordial Nature, the principle of the 3 *guna*, or *Shiva's Shakti*, is logically represented by the inverted triangle ⁹⁶³; the other two "unborn" are masculine in nature, but one "remains with her, satisfied, and the other abandons her after enjoying her"; they are, respectively, the uncreated soul, but passive and bound in the first, active and detached in the second (*Çv.-Up.* IV, 1 and 5)⁹⁶⁴. However, this text speaks of four distinct entities and not four parts of the same being. But in truth, these are modes of the same essential reality, which is none other than *Ātmā*, although these modes are here, for didactic reasons, personified in typically characterised hypostases that can affect it not only in the multitude of existing beings but also in the multiplicity of states of the same being ⁹⁶⁵.

⁹⁶³ This identification is in perfect accord with the symbolism proper to the feminine principle; among others, such is the position of the triangle as a symbol of *çakti*.

⁹⁶⁴ The order of mention in the text of the *Upanishad* quoted would thus correspond to the symbolism of the centre, the left and the right.

⁹⁶⁵ Similarly, "the two birds, closely united companions, clinging to the same tree, one eating the fruit, the other motionless but looking at it intently," represent respectively the *jivâtṃā* and the *Ātmā*, that is, the two degrees of the Self. Moreover, in the (*Çvetâçvatara-Upānishad*, the stanza referring to the two birds (IV, 6) immediately follows the passage mentioning the four entities we were discussing.

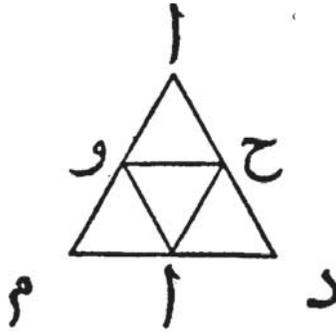


Fig. 19

But let us return to our correspondence with Guénon. Much later, after our letters had touched several times on the question of *the mantra Om* in relation to names and formulas of Islamic *dhikr*, Guénon finally wrote to us: "In connection with what I had said to you, I would ask you to examine carefully the arrangement of the letters on the sides of the attached figure, in which the larger triangle should be considered as equal to 45=*ʿĀdam*, and the smaller, inverted triangle as equal to 15=*Hawāʾ*. This figure is the one I had given, without the letters and without even alluding to it, as I intended to return to the subject later in my article on the mountain and the cave." (Letter of 4 August 1945).

Circumstances did not allow us at that time to do more than thank him for that important communication, so we do not have to quote any assessment on his part regarding the verifications we were able to carry out in that regard, nor any other considerations that he himself would not have failed to add at the time. We hoped that he would finally decide to write the article he had had in mind for some time.

Here is what can be said about this figure.

The letters surrounding it are Arabic, namely: at the top vertex, an *ʿalif*, at the right vertex a *dāl*, at the left vertex a *mīm*, which constitute, for the larger triangle, the set of three letters that make up the name *ʿĀdam* [*ʿdm*]; in the middle of the right side, where one of the vertices of the inverted triangle is located, there is a *hāʾ*; in the middle of the left side, where the vertex of the adjacent angle on the same side is located, there is a *wāw*; and in the middle of the base of the larger triangle, where the inverted vertex of the smaller triangle rests, there is another *ʿalif*, which constitutes for

the smaller triangle is the set of the three letters that make up the name *Hawā* [hw']⁹⁶⁶. The effect produced by this inference of the letters of the two names on each side of the larger triangle is as follows: on the right side, *'alif-hā-dāl*=*'Āhad*, which means 'One'; on the left side, *'alif-wāw-mīm*=*'Awm*, which is the Arabic transcription of the sacred Eastern monosyllable; finally, at the base, following the normal order of Arabic writing, *dāl-'alif-mīm*=*dām*, a verb meaning 'he is permanent', but which should rather be read in the form of the present participle: *Dā'im*, 'Permanent, Eternal', that is, one of the divine names, since the *i* in the transcription of this term corresponds in Arabic writing only to a simple *hamzah* (a vowel sign that is not strictly a letter and therefore has no numerical value). Thus, there are three terms of capital importance in the doctrinal order: the divine name of pure Unity (cf. *Qur'an*, XII, 1); the primordial word which, according to Hindu doctrine, includes the essence of the triple *Veda* and is therefore a symbol of the universal Word; and finally, a term that expresses both the permanence of the single Principle and that of the first Revelation of the Word. However, these three divine aspects, insofar as they appear here in the form of the human Androgyne, are in this case, properly speaking, theophanic aspects of the universal Man.

In this regard, it is noteworthy that the *'alif* at the top, a letter that in itself expresses the ideas of 'beginning' and 'unity' (since its numerical value is 1), or 'polarity' (since the value of the letters that make up the name *'alif* is 111, the number of *Qutb*, the 'Pole'), appears as the initial letter in the constitution of both *'Āhad*=*'One* and *'Awm*=*Aum*, and this also agrees with the principal position that this letter occupies in both the 'numerical' and 'literal' order: this suggests the idea that we are in the presence of a kind of 'seal' of the two sacred sciences, that of Numbers and that of Letters. These sciences are in fact the two constituent elements of the more general science of Names (applicable both in the divine order and in that of creatures), which Allah has taught by privilege to Adam (*Qur'an*, II, 31; *Genesis*, II, 19-20), and the fact that this *'alif* is, above all, in our scheme, the initial letter of the very name of *'Adam*, perfectly illustrates the truth that these two sciences are two complementary and interdependent attributes of universal Man. However, as the primary origin of these sciences is divine, as we have just said, the *'alif* that symbolises their common principle must be considered, originally and essentially, the initial letter of the name of *Allah* itself, 'conferred' on Adam by the primordial Theophany which is constituted, in truth, by the creation of the letter 'according to

⁹⁶⁶ The name *Hawā* [Arabic, 'Eve'] expresses the idea of life (*hayāt*), so that its relationship with the heart, the seat of the 'vital centre', of which the inverted triangle is the geometric symbol, is immediately apparent.

the Form of *Allah*'. That '*alif*' is therefore a symbol of the Principle of that total Form, just as the straight line of this first letter of the sacred alphabet is considered the constitutive principle of all the others, and just as the sound that corresponds to it (as seen in writing when the letter marked with a fathah —the "saturated" sound a— necessarily carries an '*alif*' of prolongation) is the primordial voice, of which all possible sounds are but modifications, and just as, finally, unity, which is the numerical value of that letter, is the principle of all numbers⁹⁶⁷.

That upper *alif*, which is the initial letter in the name '*Ādam*', has a kind of projection in the lower *alif*, which is the final letter of the name *Hawā*. The relationship between the two *alifs* is, strictly speaking, that of the two simultaneous and polar opposites of the same being, just as *Hawā* is nothing more than an intimate part of the primordial and androgynous Adam and, distinctly, his complement produced by a simple inner reflection of the masculine aspect⁹⁶⁸. From a more analytical microcosmic point of view, the place occupied by the *alif* at the apex is that of the ray sent by the spiritual Sun, that is, by the transcendent Self, a ray that first touches the centre of the "thousand-petalled lotus" (*sahāsrara*)⁹⁶⁹, symbolically located at the crown of the head. In turn, the '*alif*' at the base represents, one might say, the lower culmination of the same ray (through the subtle artery *sushumnā*), and its position, which is the point of contact between the inverted apex of the lesser triangle and the base of the greater one, expresses a relative and apparent 'immanence' of the Self at the bottom of the 'cavern of the heart'⁹⁷⁰, while, according to its pure essence, the Self remains unconditioned, just as the original '*alif*', that of '*Allah*', is not assignable, according to its true nature, to any particular position in this scheme.

⁹⁶⁷ We cannot insist here on certain operations by means of which this conception could be "verified" even in the literal and numerical order.

⁹⁶⁸ In our figure, this reflection of being must be considered "triple," since each of the angles of the larger triangle projects its own reflection onto the inverted triangle, and this could be related, in the principal and unmanifested order, among others, to the triple qualitative potentiality of *Prākṛti* (the three *gunas*), and, in the order of productions, for example, to the three sons of the primordial couple named in *Genesis* (Cain, Abel, and Seth), who represent three fundamental types of humanity.

⁹⁶⁹ The fact that the name '*alif*' derives from a root which, vocalised '*alf*', means 'thousand' tends to favour this assimilation in a certain way.

⁹⁷⁰ It is, therefore, an equivalent of *the Avatāra* 'born in the cave', and also of *Çiva* insofar as he intervenes in becoming and is then called 'the one in the nest'. This also recalls, from another perspective on the constitution of the human being, the location at the base of the spine of the serpentine force *Kundalini* in the triangle called *Trāipura*, which is the seat of *çakti*. It is rather superfluous to recall that the Serpent (Arabic: *el-hayyah*) is, both etymologically and mythologically, linked to Eve.

symbolic, whose elements, however, all come from it. From a macrocosmic point of view, the relationship of 'descent' that exists between the two '*alif*' is ultimately an expression of the manifestation of the 'Lordly Command' (*el-Amru-r-Rabbâni*) that descends from Heaven to Earth, reorders the world and returns to Allah⁹⁷¹.

On the other hand, if we establish the reference to the symbolism of the Mountain and the Cave as "dwelling places" of the spiritual Pole, the upper *alif* represents its dominant and manifest position at the beginning of the cycle, and the lower *alif* represents its central and inner residence in the phase of concealment.

To conclude our supplementary considerations, we will say that, insisting a little more, other significant verifications could be established both in the literal and verbal order, but, since our aim is above all to inform about René Guénon's purpose, we will stop here, for the moment, our personal intervention on that point.

What remains, as the most notable fact in this figure, is the appearance of *Aum*, and one may wonder what, ultimately, the significance of the presence of this Vedic word in an Arabic context might be. This question leads us into another field of study, and we will have to wait for another opportunity to examine it; moreover, we will then have to mention some other points from the correspondence with Guénon⁹⁷². (M. V.)

⁹⁷¹ This takes place "on a day whose measure is a thousand years of ordinary reckoning" (Quran, XXXII, 5), which also evokes the meaning of the root from which the name '*alif*' derives.

⁹⁷² We will address this point at a later date, when presenting another posthumous compilation by René Guénon: *Tradition primordiale et formes particulières*.

APPENDIX II

(=Appendix I of the original)

Chronological list of René Guénon's articles published in Regnabit, with indication of their reuse

YEAR	MONTH	TITLE
1. 1925	August-September	"Le Sacré-Coeur et légende du Saint Graal". This article has been reproduced in a provisional volume, which does not will be republished: <i>Apeçus sur l'ésotérisme</i> [Paris, Les Éditions Traditionnelles, 1954], chap. IX, but without any additional text : a final two-page paragraph following the 1925 article. The article and the appendix are reproduced here, chap. III.
2. 1925	November	"Le Chrisme et le Coeur dans les anciennes corporate marks". This text is a <i>postscript</i> to the article from January 1926. The author has revisited the subject in two articles published in <i>É.T.</i> : "Les Symboles de l'analogie," January 1939, and "Le quatre de chiffre", June 1948, which form here, respectively, chapters L and LXVII; cf. Annex III. Consequently, this text has not been reproduced here in its original form, except for a passage quoted by us in note 6 of chapter LXVII.
3. 1925	December	"À propos de quelques symboles hermétiques religieux." (The final paragraph of this article should be considered a supplement to that of August-September 1925). The topics discussed here have been revisited by the author in the study "Quelques aspects du symbolisme de Janus,"

4. 1926 January Appeared in *V. I.*, July 1929, which constitutes here our chap. XVIII: cf. Appendix III. Consequently, this text has not reproduced here in its original form. "Le Verbe et le symbole". Here it forms chap. II. (A one-page *postscript*, of secondary importance, referred to the article of November 1925.)
5. 1926 February "A propos des signes corporatifs et de leur sens originel". The subject matter of this article has
r "Quelques aspects du symbolisme de Janus", which constitutes chapter XVIII here. Consequently, this text has not been reproduced here in its original form.
6. 1926 March "Les Arbres du Paradis". A one-page *postscript* was to be added to the December 1962 article. This theme was revisited with new developments in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, 1931, chapter IX ("L'Arbre du Milieu") and XXV ("L'arbre et le serpent"). Consequently, this text has not reproduced here, except for one passage quoted by us in note 2 of chapter VIII.
7. 1926 April "Le Coeur rayonnant et le Coeur enflammé". This text was referred to in a *postscript* a page to the article of June 1926. Revised in an article of the same title published in *É. T.*, June-July 1946, which constitutes chapter LXIX here; cf. Appendix III. Consequently, this text has not been reproduced here in its original form.
8. 1926 May "The Idea of the of the Centre in the traditions antiques." Theme revisited in several parts of *Le Roi du Monde*, 1927; some points later revisited in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, 1931, and *La Grande Triade*, 1946.

- However, this first text on the idea of the Centre, accompanied by some symbolic drawings, no was exhausted in those reuses, and we have made it our chapter VIII, lightening his notes.
9. 1926 June "La Réforme de la mentalité moderne". Text of a communication made at the study day on 6 May 1926 organised by the "Société du Rayonnement intellectuel du Sacré-Coeur", of which *Regnabit* was the organ. It highlights the current importance of studies on sacred symbolism. This constitutes Chapter I.
10. 1926 June "L'Omphalos, symbole du Centre". (A one-page *postscript* referred to the article from April 1926.) Text incorporated. *Le Roi du Monde*, cap. IX, and consequently not reproduced here, except for a passage quoted in note 5 of chapter X.
11. 1926 July-August "Le Coeur du Monde dans la Kabbale hébraïque". This theme is taken up again in *Le Roi du Monde*, chapter III, as well as in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. IV ("Les directions de l'espace") and VII ("La résolution des oppositions"). Text not reproduced here.
12. 1926 September-October "La Terre Sainte et le Coeur du monde". Some points from this article were taken up again in *Le Roi du Monde* (especially chapters III and IV), but most of it was included in the article "Les Gardiens de la Terre Sainte", published in *V.I.*, August-September 1929, which constitutes chapter XI here; cf. Appendix III. Consequently, this text has not been reproduced here in its original form.
13. November 1926 "Considérations sur le Symbolisme". I: Mythes et symboles". To this study should be

- be added the text of a *postscript* to a page to the March 1927 article. Text taken up again by the author, with new developments, in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XVII ("Myths, Mysteries and Symbols"). consequently, not reproduced here.
14. 1926 December "Considerations on symbolism . II Symbolisme et philosophie". (A *post scriptum* of this article complemented the March 1926 article.) Text revisited by the author, with new developments, in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, chap. XVIII (same title). Therefore, not reproduced here.
15. 1927 January "Heart and Brain". Forms chapter LXX.
16. 1927 February "À propos du Poisson". The *postscript* to this article, which explains the reason for the The author's references to Hindu tradition are cited by us in the *Introduction* to the present compilation. It served as a This text was supplemented by a half-page *postscript* half a page to the article of April 1927. This theme was taken up again in "Quelques aspects du symbolisme du poisson", published in *É. T.*, February 1936, which constitutes chapter XXII; cf. Appendix III. Consequently, this text has not been reproduced here in its original form.
17. 1927 March "L'Emblème du Sacré-Coeur dans une American secret society." This forms chap. LXXI. (A *post scriptum*, from a page, referred to the article from November 1926).
18. 1927 April "Une contrefaçon du catholicisme". It does not deal specifically about symbolism, and has been taken up by the author in the additional notes

19. May 1927

of the second edition of *Théosophisme*, 1930, especially on pp. 212, 226 and 238. Text not reproduced here.

“Le Centre du Monde dans les doctrines extrême-orientales”. Subject revisited by the author in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, chap. VII (“La résolution des oppositions”) and XXIX (“Le Centre et la circonférence”). Text not reproduced here.

APPENDIX III

(=Appendix II of the original)

Chronological list of René Guénon's articles on symbolism published in Le Voile d'Isis-Études Traditionnelles, with indication of their reuse.

YEAR	MONTH	TITLE
1. 1929	May	"Les Pierres de foudre". Here he forms Chapter XXV.
2. 1929	June	"La Triple Enceinte druidique". Formed here Chapter X, with the <i>addition</i> of a review by the author, of an issue of <i>Atlantis</i> dated 21 August 1929; appeared in <i>V. I.</i> , July 1929.
3. 1929	July	"Quelques aspects du symbolisme de Janus". (Revised version, plus developed, from an article from <i>Reg.</i> , December 1925; cf. Appendix I.) Forms Chapter XVIII here.
4. 1929	August-September.	"Les Gardiens de la Terre Sainte". (Resumes r mayor part of article of <i>Reg.</i> , September-October 1926; cf. Annex II.) Forms Chapter XI here.
5. 1930	February	"Le Symbolisme du tissage". Taken up again by the author as Chapter XIV of <i>Le Symbolisme de la Croix</i> , 1931. Not reproduced here.
6. 1930	March	" <i>Ātmā-Gītā</i> ". It will be better placed in another posthumous compilation, with related articles. to craft initiations. Not reproduced here* .
7. 1930	April	"La Grande Guerre sainte". Taken up by the author as Chapter VIII: "La guerre et la paix",

* Texts marked with an asterisk will be included in the posthumous compilation *Tradition primordiale et formes particulières*.

- in *Le Symbolisme de la Croix*, 1931. Not reproduced here.
8. 1930 May "À propos des pèlerinages". It will be better place in another posthumous compilation, with articles relating to initiations initiations handcrafted. Not reproduced here.*
9. 1931 February "La Science des lettres". This forms chapter VI. VI.
10. 1931 March "L'Écorce et le noyau". It will be better in another posthumous compilation, with articles relating to Islamic tradition. Not reproduced here.*
11. 1931 July "Le Hiéroglyphe du Cancer". It forms Chapter XIX.
12. 1931 October "Sheth". Forms chapter XX here.
13. 1931 November "La Langue des oiseaux". Forms chapter VII.
14. 1931 December "Some remarks on the name Adam". It would be better placed in another posthumous compilation with articles relating to the cosmic and traditional cycle. cosmic and traditional cycle. Not reproduced here.*
15. 1932 February "Le Symbolisme du Théâtre". Taken up again by the author in chapter XXVIII of *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*. Not reproduced here.
16. 1934 February-March "Le Saint Graal". Forms chapter IV here.
17. 1935 February "Le Rite et le symbole". Taken up again by the author in Chapter XVI from *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*. Not reproduced here.
18. 1935 October "Myths, Mysteries and Symbols." Taken up by the author in chapter XVII of *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*. Not reproduced here.
19. 1935 November "Symbolism and Philosophy." Taken up by the author in chapter XVIII of *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*. Not reproduced here.
20. 1936 January "La Terre du Soleil." Forms chapter XII here.
21. 1936 February "Quelques aspects de l' du symbolisme du Poisson". (Revises an article from *Reg.*,

- February 1927; cf. Annex II.) Here it forms Chapter XXII.
22. 1936 March "La Double Spirale". Taken up again by the author in Chapter V of *La Grande Triade*, 1946. Not reproduced here.
23. 1936 April "Les Fleurs symboliques". Forms here Chapter IX.
24. 1936 August-September "Le Sanglier et l'Ourse". Forms chapter XXIV.
25. 1936 October "Les Armes symboliques". Forms here chap. chapter XXVI.
26. 1936 November "Le Symbolisme des cornes". Forms here chapter XXVIII.
27. 1937 Jan.-Feb.-March "Remarks on mathematical notation". Revisited by the author in *Les Principes du calcul infinitésimal*, 1946. Not reproduced here.
28. 1937 April "La Tétraktys et le carré de quatre". See here in chapter XIV.
29. 1937 May "A hieroglyph from the Pole". Formed here in chapter XV.
30. 1937 July "The Double Meaning of Symbols". Taken up by the author in *Le Règne de la quantité et les signes des temps*, 1945, as chap. XXX: "Le renversement des symboles". Not reproduced here.
31. 1937 Oct. and Nov. "La Caverne et le Labyrinthe". Forms here chapter XXIX.
32. 1937 December "Le Coeur et la Caverne". Forms chapter XXX.
33. 1938 January "La Montagne et la Caverne". Form here chap. chapter XXXI.
34. 1938 February "Le Coeur et l'Oeuf du Monde". Formed here Chapter XXXII.
35. 1938 March "La Caverne et l'Oeuf du Monde". Form here chap. XXXIII.

36. 1938 April "La Sortie de la caverne". Here it forms Chapter XXXIV.
37. 1938 May "Les Portes solsticiales". Forms here chap. XXXV.
38. 1938 June "Le Symbolisme du Zodiaque chez les Pythagoriciens." Formed here in chap. XXXVI.
39. 1938 July "The Solstice Symbolism of Janus". Chapter here in chapter XXXVII.
40. 1938 August-September "The Mysteries of the Letter *Nūn*". Form here Chapter XXIII.
41. 1938 October "Le Symbolisme du dôme". Forms here chapter XXXIX.
42. 1938 November "Le Dôme et la roue". Here it forms the cap. XL.
43. 1938 December "La Porte étroite". Forms chapter XLI here.
44. 1939 January "Les Symboles de l'analogie". Forms chapter L here. chapter L.
45. 1939 February "L'Arbre du Monde". Forms chapter LI here.
46. 1939 March "L'Arbre et le *vajra*". Forms chapter LII here.
47. 1939 April "L'Arbre de Vie et le breuvage immortalité. This forms chapter LIII.
48. 1939 May "The Symbolism of the Ladder". This forms chapter LIV.
49. 1939 Julie "Le Don des langues". Taken up again by the author in *Aperçus sur l'Initiation*, as chap. XXXVII. Not reproduced here.
50. 1940 January "Le "Trou de l'aiguille"". Forms chap. LV.
51. 1940 February "Le Passage des eaux". Forms the cap here. LVI.
52. 1940 April-May "La Pierre angulaire". Formed here in chap. XLIII.
53. 1940 June "Les Septs Rayons et l'arc-en-ciel". Chapter here chap. LVII.
54. 1945 October-November "The Zodiac and the Cardinal Points". Form Here is Chapter XIII.

55. December 1945 "South the signification of fêtes 'carnavalesques'." This forms chapter XXI.
56. 1946 January-February "*Ianua Caeli*". Forms chapter LVIII here.
57. 1946 March-April "*Kāla-mukha*". Forms chapter LIX here.
58. 1946 May "La lumière et la pluie". Forms chapter LX here. LX.
59. 1946 June-July "The Radiant Heart and the Flaming Heart". Forms chapter LXIX here.
60. 1946 June-July and August "The Chain of Worlds". Formed here in chapter LXI.
61. 1946 August "*Lapsit exillis*". Formed here in chap. XLIV.
62. 1947 January-February "Le Symbolisme du pont". Forms chapter chapter LXIII.
63. 1947 March "Le Pont et l'arc-en-ciel". Forms chapter LXIV.
64. 1947 June "Le Blanc et le noir". Formed here in chap. XLVII.
65. 1947 September "La Chaîne d'union". Forms chapter LXXV.
66. 1947 November "Encadrements et Labyrinthes". Form here chapter LXVI.
67. 1947 December "Pierre noire et Pierre cubique". Form here Chapter XLVIII.
68. 1948 January-February "Les 'Têtes noires'". Formed here in chap. XVI.
69. 1948 April-May "L'Oeil qui voit tout". Forms chapter LXXXII.
70. 1948 June "Le Quatre de chiffre". Formed here in chap. LXVII.
71. 1948 July-December "Parole perdue et mots substitués". It will have better location in another compilation posthumous compilation, with articles on crafts. Not reproduced here.*
72. 1949 January-February "Le grain de sénévé". Here it forms chap. LXXXIII.
73. 1949 April-May "L'Éther dans le coeur". Formed here in chapter LXXXIV.

74. 1949 June "À propos des deux saints Jean". Form here chapter XXXVIII.
75. 1949 July-August "Tradition et 'inconscient' ". Forms here Chapter V.
76. 1949 July-August "L' Octogone". Forms chapter XLII here.
77. 1949 September "Pierre brute et Pierre taillée". Forms chapter XLIX here.
chapter XLIX.
78. 1950 March "Liens et noeuds". Forms here chap. LXVIII.
79. 1950 July-August "Le lettre G et le *svástika*". This forms Chapter XVII.
80. 1950 September "La Cité divine". Forms chapter LXXV here.

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