

THE
MYSTERY RELIGIONS

CHARLOTTE WOODS

TWO SHILLINGS

THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS

A STUDY IN REGENERATION

Its Experiences and Implications

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*"Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God . . .
Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?"*

THE BLAVATSKY LECTURE

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"Except a man be born from above, he cannot see the Kingdom of God. . . . Art thou a master in Israel and knowest not these things?"

There are many modern "masters in Israel" and elsewhere—men of leadership in spiritual matters—who deserve the reproof administered to Nicodemus. For the mystery of spiritual rebirth is not foremost to-day in the programme of moral reconstruction. Yet it is *the* mystery to which all other mysteries connected with our human nature are subservient. It is implicit in the very processes of life itself. It is also the concealed truth in all the ancient Mystery Religions, the secret meaning behind many of their seemingly uncouth forms. What it is in itself possibly only the Regenerate can reveal. But its nature, qualities and conditions can be studied objectively, and the means of its attainment are not hidden.

Our subject therefore falls under two heads:

- (1) Regeneration, implicit in life itself.
- (2) Regeneration, a universal teaching (a) of the East, (b) of the Mystery Cults, (c) of Christianity.

I. THE CYCLE OF LIFE

The philosophy of Regeneration is based upon the occult philosophy of life. Life is the result of Motion on many levels; on the physical and psychic levels it is sequential, with a before and after in unbroken continuity; its motions form the universal circle of birth, maturity and decay, incessantly repeated. This life-cycle is a truism and inescapable. But many in the West deny its recurrent nature. After decay and death the cycle ends. Not so the East. "Certain is death for the born, certain is birth for the dead," says the Bhagavad Gita, voicing the ancient, occult doctrine of continuity in process.

THE DOCTRINE IN PLATO

Plato in the *Phaedo* employs the same idea in his lengthy argument for immortality. Apart from a certain confusion between sequence and cause, the argument is important enough to quote at length.

"Is it not a universal law," asks Socrates of Cebes, "even though we do not always express it in so many words, that opposites are generated always from one another, and that there is a process of generation from one to the other? . . . Is it the case that everything which has an opposite is generated only from that opposite—the greater from the less, the less from the greater, the weaker from the stronger, the stronger from the weaker, the swifter from the slower; from sleep the state of waking and the state of waking from sleep?" "It is," replied Cebes. "Well," said he, "is there an opposite to life in the same way that sleep is the opposite of being awake?" "Certainly," he answered, "What is it?" . . . "Death," he replied. "Then, if Life and Death are Opposites, they are generated the one from the other?" "Yes." "Then what is that which is generated from the living?" "The dead," he replied. "And what is generated from the dead?" "I must admit, it is the living." "Then living things and living men are generated from the dead, Cebes?" "Clearly," said he. "Then our souls exist after death in the other world."

Critics might object that this argument by which Socrates tries to convince the doubting Cebes is nullified by the fact that neither

life nor death, waking nor sleeping, are true Opposites. Like the sequence of day and night they are successive, not causative. Our life and death are chiefly related to ourselves, the experients, who may be at a given time alive in the physical body and at another time alive apart from that organ. But Plato's real meaning seems to be that these so-called opposites are but phases of one general movement of life, the before and after being bound together in a natural, ordered continuity.

Nevertheless there *is* a sense in which death does something creative and independent with life. For in the death process we observe Shiva, the great natural transformer, at his ceaseless task of reconstruction, in which katabolism, having reached its term, becomes metabolism in a new order of life. "Shiva," says H.P.B., "is the *Regenerator* who destroys things in one form but to recall them to life under another more perfect type."

SURVIVAL IS NOT REGENERATION

Nevertheless, under whatever metaphor we consider the mystery we have not as yet discovered Regeneration in the *Mystic's* understanding of the term. The argument of Socrates demonstrates only the survival of the soul in some other world whence he may or may not return to earth. Myriads die and are reborn knowing nothing of that true birth "from above" which is the beginning of spiritual manhood. Life may be, and probably is, an unbroken flow of duration in which birth and death are periodic alterations in the rhythm of the flow. But this is only half the truth. There is a birth that owes no existence to a generating opposite; which is essentially discontinuous with all that has gone before; of which the natural man is the womb—the soil—and not the parent; whose state is the beginning of an entirely new order of life. Can we regard this state as fundamental to the evolutionary life of man? Is it apart from, or implicit in the natural processes of human development?

REGENERATION: A CHANGE OF DIRECTION

Its analogue in botany and biology

The answer is a paradox: it is both. Within the sweep of human evolution all the essential opposites—the continuous and

the discontinuous, the implicit and the explicit—exist and are reconciled in the unity of a living experience. But in Regeneration the continuous alters its course. Instead of being a mere change within the flow of process it is rather a sharp break with it. Life begins to move in a contrary direction. When this has come about it will have released its most secret spring. Power will have been revealed that has lain unsuspected at its heart since it first began its pilgrimage in the human kingdom. The effect of that power is to break the soul in whom it is active into the most complete antitheses—the New Man and the Old—which can only be resolved when the Regenerate has arrived at maturity.

To bring opposite poles together in a right relationship which observes the claims of the natural man and accepts his uses is one of the tests of wise and legitimate sanctity.

Regeneration has its analogues in sub-human nature. The birth of the completely new under the play of the opposites, stability and transformism, is foreshadowed in botany by the hypothesis of mutation in which new species come into being all at once by the simultaneous appearance of several new characteristics, all somewhat different from the previous ones. "When the period of mutability occurs," says Bergson, "unexpected forms spring forth in a great number of different directions.* He presents a further analogy in a statement drawn from biology, in which he says: "*Life does not proceed by association and addition of elements but by dissociation and division.*" (Italics his.) In other words, the simple unity of the cell ceases when life begins its work, and breaking down becomes the means of building up. The opposites are resolved in the mystery of growth.

Few regard these happenings in lower nature as parables of a higher law in the human kingdom. By that law the mutation of a regenerate nature takes place in which, changing the metaphor, a man now travels east and no acrobatic feat will enable him at the same time to travel west. The "Privitti Marga" has brought him to the point at which he enters the "Nivritti," and he follows that arduous road to the end of the Great Return.

* *Creative Evolution*, p.67.

II. REGENERATION, CENTRAL TO ALL THE MYSTERY RELIGIONS OF ANTIQUITY

CHARACTERISTICS OF A MYSTERY RELIGION

The Mystery Religions of the Hellenistic world contained so many common features that some scholars have regarded them as one religion under different aspects, much as Christianity is to-day.

They have stressed their unity while ignoring their differences. But while the features common to all united them under one general title of Mystery-Religion, each had its own specific variants and note of emphasis.

The common feature in each, to which every stage of the Mystery led up, was Regeneration. It was not only the climax of the Mystery—it was the Mystery itself, implicit in the earlier degrees, fully revealed in the final Initiation.

1. The Mystery began with purification and ablution and some method of probation, test and discipline, followed in later degrees by a solemn oath of secrecy. 2. It possessed a founding Deity, to whom its cult was specially devoted and whose presence and protection it evoked. 3. A sacred myth set forth the doings of the Deity, usually in the form of Passion and Loss, which were acted out by the devotees in drama and ritual.

These Passion-Plays constituted the exoteric subject-matter of the Mystery; its inner, esoteric interpretation was given progressively in the ascending Degrees of Initiation; in the last and highest the full meaning stood revealed which was union with the Deity in a new and immortal nature.

In the earlier degrees Vision of Deity was “through a glass darkly;” in the highest “face to face.”

4. Initiation was conducted by Temple rites and the preliminary stages were generally open. Baptism was of immense importance both as Cathartic and as Renunciatory; even the terrible Taurobolium of Attic and Mithra-worship was regarded as the means whereby the candidate was “born again for eternity.” And in the waters of purification he is said to have died to his past.

2.

The higher degrees had sacramental elements and a Mystery repast; in the Eleusinia the Initiates received mystery garments and

mystery names as a prelude to the entrance of such candidates as were duly approved into the final degree which affected the secret consummation of the whole. Every cult observed, in one form or another, representations of a sacred birth, death, resurrection and marriage both of the Deity and his or her initiated devotees.

5. They agreed alike on the view of man as having a divine element from a higher world imprisoned within his human nature which it was the purpose of the Mystery to release and to start upon its upward way. The methods of this release varied greatly, some were orgiastic and crude, others dignified and sacramental. But even the lowest had one supreme aim, absorption in the being of the God and so tending to Deification and the Immortal Life.

INDIA

The doctrine and experience of Regeneration in India demands a volume and has to be stated in a page, not because there is too little to state but because there is too much. It is moreover redundant to speak fully of India to a theosophical audience. One can but refer with reverent brevity to a religion whose highest affirmation is *Tat tuam asè* and whose three Yoga-paths of Jnana, Karma, and Bhakta conduct to the greatest of all realisations. What more can be said of so full a regenerative state? Both Brahminism and Buddhism, in their scriptures, their ritual, their discipline aim at nothing short of this. Yet India sounds one specific note. Regeneration means not only the Brahma Vidya that knows the Self as One, but also that it releases man from the captivity of subjugation to the sense-life. It is *Moksha*, or the ceasing of the distressful wheel of Birth and Death which would ceaselessly turn by its own impetus did not the Yogi, by will and effort, cause that impetus to cease. Towards *Moksha* the whole energy of the saint is directed—towards a lessening of the attractive power of desire for separateness and the clamouring, sentient nature. To be free from this despotism is to know the life which is life indeed.

For the Indian mystic Regeneration destroys the fetters of Rebirth. It fulfils all Karmic requirements and leads the soul to that peak of human ideals summed up in the great word Liberation. On it is based the whole philosophy of spiritual attainment. Its

keynote is the development of creative will. Regeneration is Masterhood or the path thereto. In it is seen the compelling effect of the will, selflessly directed, that breaks the binding sequence of cause and effect and establishes that essential freedom of the Self which for educational purposes it had temporarily renounced. In all our subsequent studies of the state we shall find nothing greater than this.

EGYPT: EGYPTIAN INITIATIONS

In ancient Egypt Regeneration was its dominant idea. From the yearly rebirth of the Nile which was the counterpart of the Celestial River of Life in Aalu, the land of the holy dead, to the most important festival of the year, the birth of Osiris, which corresponded with the rising of the river and the renewal of natural fertility, the conception of rebirth was ever prominent in the Egyptian consciousness.

It was also prominent for every candidate that sought initiation. The neophyte was born anew during and by virtue of careful and arduous preparation in the Temples; at Initiation he entered consciously into the regenerate state and thenceforth advanced to increasing heights of illumination until he was granted a place in the immortal circle of the gods. Possibly but few who undertook the discipline actually attained that goal. It was nevertheless regarded as the crown of human possibility. The neophyte had to devote his whole will and purpose to the service of Osiris. Then he was given his tests and if successful was sent from the body in trance to meet the God face to face. On his return to his carefully guarded physical vehicle he was proclaimed a member of the great band of Initiates, for only one worthy of the honour could have survived so great an experience.

If he were an Egyptian, he remained henceforth an official of the Temple; if a stranger, he was permitted to return to the world, bearing in his heart the most awful of all mysteries, the union of Man and God.

Let us remember that it was a new, divinely born nature which alone was capable of attempting and attaining. The trials undergone in the process, the secrets revealed, are symbolically set forth in that great Ritual of the Soul on the way to newness of life, the "Book of the Dead."

(Note from the "Secret Doctrine," Vol. 2, p.589.)

"Let the reader turn to some most suggestive bas reliefs. One especially from the temple of Philae represents a scene of initiation. Two God-Hierophants, one with the head of a hawk (the sun), the other ibis-headed Thoth (the God of Wisdom and Secret Learning), are standing over the body of a candidate just initiated. They are in the act of pouring a double stream of water (the water of life and of new birth), the stream being interlaced in the shape of a cross, and full of small ansated crosses. This is allegorical of the awakening of the candidate who is now an initiate, when the beams of the morning sun, Osiris, strike the crown of his head, his entranced body being placed on its wooden Tau so as to receive the rays. Then appeared the Hierophant-Initiators, and the sacramental words were pronounced, ostensibly to the Sun-Osiris, in reality to the Spirit-Sun within, enlightening the newly-born man."

While describing the experiences of the justified soul after death, it also conveys hints of the Initiation process of the candidate still in the flesh, for both the pre- and post-mortem experiences dealt with the same thing.

Regeneration was by a two-fold process. First, the liberation of the real, inner, divine man from the attacks of evil powers, and his restoration to his original "type" or image of the Divine. He who had hitherto but dimly illumined his partner, the natural man, is henceforth to become its radiant guide and saviour. By processes of Ordeal he is cleansed from the inevitable defilements of nature, and regains, on his birth into new yet original life, the creative beauty of his essential state. Says H.P.B.: "The passage-entrance and the Sarcophagus in the King's Chamber meant regeneration. It was the most solemn symbol, a Holy of Holies, indeed, wherein were created Immortal Hierophants and "Sons of God." (*S.D.* 2, p.493.)

Regeneration, too, takes place in the natural man. The symbolism of the "Book of the Dead" (or as it should be called, The Book of the Master) represents a temporary separation by diverse processes of the two aspects of the soul, and then a reunion. There is a beautiful description of the postulant watching the initiation and enthronement of his soul from the depths of the Well of Truth, and awaiting in an ecstasy of yearning the moment when the radiant half of his being, shading the too great effulgence of its regenerative life by the Khaibit, or ethereal envelope of its aura, comes down from its seat of power, and passing through various symbolic transformations, descends the ladder of the Well of Truth and unites with its partner for ever. "My soul is from the

beginning," cries the postulant, "The Eye of Horus has made for me my soul, preparing its substance."

The symbolism shows regeneration to be a state of clear and higher vision in which the natural man sees for the first time the essential divinity of his soul and is able to become identified with it in a fulness of union which is henceforth unbroken. The manhood has been taken into God.

But not before the natural man has endured his ordeal and eliminated his stains. Initiation in Egypt was no light thing; its stages may have been indefinitely prolonged.

One clear feature emerges from the complex of mystic symbology of which the key is not in our hands, the characteristic Egyptian feature of Light, a radiant overwhelming glory in which the whole man participates. What Liberation is for the regenerate Indian, Light was for the regenerate Egyptian, the light of Osiris-Ra made visible to his inner vision.

THE OSIRIS MYTH AND WORSHIP

In the times of the Pharaohs the worship of Osiris and Isis held a unique position. The cult of the two deities remained more or less constant through succeeding ages. It was based upon the tragic legend of the death and resurrection of Osiris, the Sun God, a deified figure who may have had in distant ages a dim historical background. This myth, as basis of mystic ceremonial and teaching, was not made public till a period of great danger to the land when an Asiatic invasion, led by the Hyksos, or Shepherd Kings, compelled the priestly custodians of the Mysteries to withdraw into their sanctuaries and protect the esoteric truth by the triple veil of myth, increased moral tests and the strengthening of the oath of secrecy and silence. At this time they spread among the people the great legend which was to form the basis of the popular worship and the drama of their principal mystery. Plutarch, writing in the later "Demotic" times of the 2nd century A.D., set forth the myth without imperilling its ancient outlines. It was a perfect example of a Mystery Drama, the details of which were shaped and adapted to convey, esoterically, the great secret of the temples.

Osiris, incarcerated in a chest by his dark brother, Typhon, was wave-tossed out to the Byblos country amid the papyrus

swamps of the Delta. Isis and her sister Nephtys seek and find the coffin and their lamentations on opening it bring to their help her son Horus and the gods Thoth and Anubis who assist her to perform certain magical rites which restore Osiris to life. Later on, he is again overcome and slain by Typhon who cuts his body into fourteen pieces and scatters them through the fourteen nomes of Egypt. Isis again searches till she finds the scattered remains, over each of which she builds a temple and performs funeral rites. Osiris, now transplanted to the Underworld, becomes Lord and Rewarder of the dead.

The Passion rites based on this great myth were so mystical and sacred that even those privileged persons who were permitted to share them were reticent about giving precise information concerning them. An Osirian initiation might scarcely be regarded as the entrance to a secret fraternity; nevertheless there was a difference between the public and the private rites, and in ancient Egypt both were included in the Mystery.

On a stela of the 12th Dynasty, dated about 1875 B.C., a State official recounted how he prepared the various details of the drama; first a procession of the followers of Osiris and an attack by his enemies; secondly, the death of the god; thirdly, his resurrection and final triumph, and finally the joyful return of the "Lord of Abydos" to his palace, i.e., the return of his image to its temple. (c.f. Willoughby, *Pagan Regeneration*, p.173.)

Bas reliefs and various ritual remains give some further details of the methods of the great Restoration to Life. The corpse was treated by certain magical processes. The "adze of Anubis" opened its eyes, mouth and ears; its other members were set in motion; and each organ was recalled to life separately. The priest representing Anubis concealed himself under the skin of a specially sacrificed animal, and coming out from the skin typified Osiris reborn. Then came a crowning and adoration of the image, now Osiris completely restored. These details were daily enacted and ensured ritual regeneration of the god through the image.

These dramas it will be observed were performed for the benefit of Osiris himself. In what way, if at all, could they affect his worshippers?

The real esoteric value of the ceremonies lay in the fact that for the Egyptians Osiris was humanity.* He stood for the divine principle in every Egyptian, confined and imprisoned in the body and tossed on the waves of material life, revived by the love-power of the soul and though temporarily overcome by evil, never losing its essential immortality. His dismemberment meant the breaking of the One into the Many. It stood also for the fact that the regenerate soul is the distributed soul; its separateness is gone; it is found wherever the world has need of it. The gathering together of his limbs represents the ultimate destiny of man, the restoration to wholeness of the now broken fragments of his spiritual being, the return of the Many to the One.

The belief in the identity of the God with humanity in the spirit is borne out by the title given to the departed who had passed his tests, the "Osirified one." He is given the name Osiris and addressed by it. For one who had shared the Osirian rites it was said: "As truly as Osiris lives he also shall live; as truly as Osiris is not dead, shall he not die; as truly as Osiris is not annihilated, shall he be not annihilated." "Because I live ye shall live also," said the Osiris of Galilee, many centuries later. (Eрман, *Die Aegyptische Religion*, pp.96-7. Quoted by Willoughby, *Pagan Regeneration*, p.175.)

We can thus affirm the Osirian characteristics of Regeneration to be unity and universality. True, it is the consciousness of the God that is set forth in the Osirian ritual, but since Osiris stands for the highest principle in man, the disciple initiated into the Mystery will one day attain this consciousness. Initiation put him on the path to that attainment, the fulness of which was post rather than ante-mortem, either in the Aalu, the "fields of bliss" of the justified dead, or in an earthly rebirth, in which the Egyptians held a rather vague belief.

The question has sometimes been asked: Was Regeneration ever attained in the present life? We are convinced that it was a possibility, less from the efficacy of the rites of Initiation than from the earnest, arduous and long-pursued previous discipline in the Temples.

* Or at least the humanity of their own land.

Says Willoughby: "Notwithstanding the clear suggestions of post-mortem regeneration to be found in the Egyptian cult of Osiris, it is to a modification and further development of this ancient religion that one must turn to find clear examples of the spiritual rebirth of the individual during his lifetime."

Instances of this occur after Ptolemy Soter had Hellenised Osiris and set up his worship at Alexandria under the name of Serapis. This move, largely political on the part of the Macedonian ruler, led also to the pure and popular worship of Isis, whose cult thenceforth remained a power in the Eastern Mediterranean world to the last days of the old religions. The most ample and striking record we have of Regeneration here and now is the account of the individual experience of Apuleius Lucius, which he relates in his work *Metamorphoses, or the Golden Ass*.

HELLENISATION OF OSIRIS UNDER THE WORSHIP OF SERAPIS AND ISIS

Regeneration of Apuleius Lucius

This writer was initiated at the Isiac Centre at Chencrea, near Corinth, as the result of a dream in which Isis appeared to him and liberated him from an Ass's form in which he believed himself to be incarcerated. In response to his gratitude for this release, the goddess invited him to become a member of her cult, promising her special protection and grace. Though distrustful of his ability to endure the austerity of her discipline, he yet agreed to enter a novitiate under priestly guidance and to receive Cathartic baptism, which was the necessary preliminary of Isiac initiation and regarded as a regenerative rite. The discipline successfully accomplished, he was led by the Hierophant to the most secret and sacred place in the temple where the Initiation Ceremonies were carried out. Here the curtain falls. But Lucius, without violating secrets, drops a few figurative words: "I approached the bounds of death, I trod the threshold of Proserpine, and after that I was ravished through all the elements, I returned to my proper place; about midnight I saw the sun brightly shining; I saw likewise the gods celestial and the gods infernal, before whom I presented myself and worshipped them."

This may be a veiled representation of the rites of mystic death and rebirth that were performed for the resurrection of

Osiris and now practised upon the initiate himself, that he might become the "new Osiris" whom Isis by her power exalted to the same immortal regeneration." (Loisy, *Les Mysteres Paiens*, quoted by Willoughby, op. cit., p.190.)

The methods may have been by deep hypnotic trance in which, like the Egyptian on his wooden Tau, he was sent out into the worlds beyond the physical, where reigned the Spouse of his goddess.

Following Initiation, there took place in the course of a day, the rites of deification. Lucius, clothed in gorgeous apparel and wearing the precious "Olympian" cope embroidered with symbolic figures, and the rayed crown of the Sun-God, took his stand on a pedestal before the statue of the goddess and was proclaimed as no longer man but one with Osiris, the Regenerate. A sumptuous banquet celebrated his complete deification. Isis initiations were the figure and the means of this stupendous change and the cult formula of her devotees was "the men who have been reborn."

HERMETICISM

We cannot omit a brief mention of the teaching in that semi-Egyptian, semi-Hellenistic complex, the *Corpus Hermeticum*. Nowhere in antiquity is the doctrine of Regeneration so fully and elaborately stated as in the tractate, *The Secret Sermon on the Mountains*—a discourse between Hermes and his disciple, Tat, on the whole process of Hellenistic Rebirth. We are in another element here. Ritual, Ceremonial, Passion-Drama, formal Initiation into unrevealed Mysteries give place to subjective processes which the candidate evokes from his own soul. The disciple questions the Master on the meaning of Rebirth; like Nicodemus he is confused by taking it in literalistic fashion. He is told that God is the parent, true good the seed, and silence the womb that nurtures it.

Tat, still incredulous, inquires further, His Master answers: "What can I say to you, my son. I can but tell you this. When I see the simple vision, brought to birth by God's mercy, I have passed through myself into a body that shall never die. And now I am not what I was before, but I am born in Mind. The way to

do this is not taught and it cannot be seen by the compounded element by means of which thou seest. . . . Thou seest me with eyes, my son, but what I am thou dost not understand even with fullest strain of body and of sight."

Tat, in utter bewilderment, exclaims that he can no longer see his own familiar self, to which the very pregnant reply is given: "I would, my son, that thou hadst e'en *passed through thyself*, as they who dream in sleep yet sleepless."

Tat is then encouraged to go into the silence and await the mercy of God, or "the birth from above." He suddenly becomes ecstatic and enters the cosmic consciousness. "By God made steadfast I no longer look on anything with the sight my eyes afford. In heaven I am, in water, air, in animals and plants. I'm everywhere. Father, I see the All, I see myself in Mind."

A new and important note is sounded here. For the first time we find Regeneration made dependent on the loss of the personal self. The "compounded vision," in which are mingled strains from levels high and low, cannot see the dazzling simplicity of the Divine. To "pass through" the mortal self is to exchange it for a self that cannot die.

But the ancient temple disciplines were probably less hard than this.

Tat, encouraged by his Master to believe that he has now become a god and "Son of the One, even as I have," attains the Ogdoad or Spiritual World where he is taught by Hermes the "Hymn of Rebirth," which is the secret ode, imparted only to those who have experienced Regeneration.

BACCHIC AND DIONYSIAC MYSTERIES

To amplify descriptions of Regenerative rites in other Mystery systems of the Hellenistic or even earlier periods is redundant, for they are all built upon the same plan and were created for the same end. A few words concerning the more important cults will suffice to bring out the specific emphasis of each. The crude and orgiastic rites of Bacchus and Dionysus represented Sacramentalism at its

lowest. In wild orgies on the Thracian hills the Maenads tore and ate wild bulls and fawns whom they regarded as incarnating the god Dionysus. By the wine-potions of Bacchus and the bleeding flesh of the torn bull they believed they absorbed the being of the god. "Bacchoi," in later and more developed Greece, was the name given to those in whom the life of Dionysus was actually reborn. That the state was now super-orgiastic is shown by the saying: "The Thyrsus-bearers are many, but the Bacchoi are few."

The note sounded in these rites—the details of which are doubtful, since wild bulls were not likely to allow themselves to be caught by frenzied women—is the possibility of regenerate communion with Divinity by partaking of his essence. "He that eateth me, the same shall live by me," is a later refinement of the same idea.

The Dionysus myth in which the Mystery God is born first abortively from his human mother, and then divinely from the thigh of his father Zeus, has profound suggestions concerning the second birth of the Initiate whom Dionysus not only initiates but also represents. For he, too, is one with his votaries.

THE ORPHIC MYSTERIES

The Orphic reformation, said to have been established by Orpheus as a counter-blast to Bacchic excesses sounds, for the first time in Greek religion, the note of sin. No mediaeval Catholic could have exceeded the rigours of Orphic purity, repentance and aspiration. The moral life is here emphasised as in no other ancient cult except, perhaps, the Mysteries of Isis. The Orphic Initiate had his one sacramental meal of bleeding flesh, the reception of which made him a recipient of the nature of the god; after that no flesh-food passed his lips, no wine gladdened his heart. To "lead the Orphic life" was the word for moral austerity. This was the note sounded by the cult. It had others, too. The Campagna tablets found in an Orphica in S. Italy gives both its future hope and its present realisation. "I am a child of Earth and of Starry Heaven but my Race is Divine," "I have come off the sorrowful wheel," i.e., I have broken with the tyranny of time-conditions. The wheel may revolve but it no longer holds me on its moving circumference.

This is India in aspiration, India, too, in realisation. The initiate, "like a kid has fallen into the milk," i.e., he has descended through the "Spheres of Necessity," symbolised by the Milky Way, and now aspires to ascend to his true home in the Ogdoad, or Eighth Sphere above the "distressful wheel." To borrow a Gnostic expression, "Jordan now flows upward."

THE ELEUSINIAN MYSTERIES

We must now try to discover the note of Regeneration in the Eleusinian Mysteries. The most widely known of all the Western Mystery Religions, it follows closely the Osirian and Serapian procedure. Its greater Mysteries were celebrated at Eleusis on a grand scale every autumn, following the celebration of the lesser Mysteries in the spring at Agra, a suburb of Athens, which were open to all. Even women and slaves could enter the earlier stages of the Eleusinia after undergoing drastic methods of purification.

The Passion Play was an enactment of the sorrows of the Goddess Demeter, in search of her lost daughter, Persephone. The participants in the rites do not, as in many other Mystery systems, die and rise again with the cult deity; they mourn, they seek, they find, they rejoice; the fifth night of the ceremonies was given up to processions with torches representing the wanderings of the goddess.

The second, or *Mysta*, Degree was preparatory to the third and highest, the sacred *Epopteia*, which was not conferred until the following year and for which stringent preparations had to be made. Candidates were gathered in the Great Hall or *Telesterion* and witnessed lighted representations of the story of the goddesses with instructions by the Hierophant on its mystic meaning. But the Holy of Holies, the *Anacteron* or Chapel of Demeter was veiled in mystery and there silence reigned. Only the Hierophant might enter. It was the home of certain mysterious and sacred objects—the *Hiera*—which at a certain moment were shown to the awed gaze of the Initiates. What they were has never been revealed, but it is reasonable to suppose that they included statues of the goddesses, of great antiquity and sanctity, and also the six mystic "playthings" of the young Dionysus which were escorted from Athens to Eleusis on the sixth day of the Celebrations.

The final and most holy of the rites was that of the "Sacred Marriage." It was the culminating regenerate Mystery.

The priest and priestess descended into a cave or deep recess from which the priest presently emerged and proclaimed to the solemn throng above, who had awaited his reappearance, their torches extinguished: "The divine Brimo has given birth to the divine Brimos. The strong has brought forth strength," meaning, says Hippolytus, "the spiritual begetting, which is heavenly, from above." With this announcement the Hierophant holds up a plucked green wheat-ear.

Demeter, or Ceres, being the Goddess of Agriculture, this symbol was natural to her Mysteries. But it had an esoteric meaning not hard for prepared initiates to unravel. They knew that it symbolized themselves. That wheat-ear had been sown in the silent earth and was on its way to future ripeness. It represented the new nature sown in the dark soil of the natural man and reaching perfection in the heavenly life awaiting them after death—a mystery truly and only to be revealed to the Eoptae in the darkened Telesterion where the silence alone spoke.

The note of the Eleusinia was thus process. Regeneration was not complete in the magic moment of union with the cult Deity; it began as a green wheat-ear; its ultimate ripeness was a great promise and a great hope.

CHRISTIANITY: THE MYSTERY ELEMENT IN ITS TEACHING OF REGENERATION

The great fact of the divinising of man did not die with the closing of the Temples. It had already passed into the new and conquering faith. Mithraism was a serious rival in this respect, for in spite of the secrecy of its ritual the doctrine was known to be central, and Mithraism, at the rise of Christianity, had spread over the whole Roman Empire. Since Christianity built itself upon the same doctrine, the bitter rivalry between the fanatics in each religion is easily understood.

The early promise of the Christian Gospel was forgiveness and life here and now which, it was believed, the Resurrection of the

Christ effected and symbolised. The first generation of Christians became reborn by an interior, mystical union with the consciousness of their Master which lifted them, ideally and actually, into participation with His regenerate being. For He was the typical Regenerate and it is one of the marks of the Regenerate to embrace, shelter and unify the younger souls who aspire to that state. What He was actually His disciples were potentially; His work was to reproduce His state in them and so to initiate a new order, that of the Kingdom of God.

For this He lived and died; for this He demonstrated His deathlessness—to ensure that all who willed might enter an immortal life which was at once their birthright and His supreme gift to man. Coming at a critical stage between two world-periods, He enlarged and universalized the regenerative conceptions of previous and contemporary teachers, so that we find a greater richness of the regenerative state, a higher conception of holiness in the first generation of Christians.

When the waters of baptism had closed over the disciple he arose into the new atmosphere of the love and power of the Master. Henceforth he was to live in Him and draw freely from His life-giving forces, with the result that the so-called miraculous came into the common life and men were healed of disease, physical and spiritual, by simple contact with those who were incorporate with Christ.

In the early days of the faith the powers of the new nature—the *Charismata*, or gifts of the Spirit—unfolded harmoniously, life-giving powers of healing, wisdom, prophecy, interpretation, discernment, even in some cases the power to accept with ecstatic joy the tortures of martyrdom; they were the marks of the new nature born from above, and for a time these triumphed.

Then gradually, with the fading of the vision of the Christ love waxed cold and the mystical way gave place to the external. The rise of Institutionalism became a necessity as the religion spread. It is now considered doubtful if Jesus ever intended to found an organized Church; He came to found the Kingdom of God—a very much larger proposition. Says Bishop Lightfoot:

“His conception of the Kingdom of God put an end to institutions, both political and religious. His Kingdom, not being a Kingdom of this world, is not limited by the restrictions which fetter other societies. It is in the

fullest sense free, comprehensive, universal. It has no sacred days or seasons, no special sanctuaries, because every time and every place alike are holy, and above all, it has no sacerdotal system." (Quoted by Canon Richardson in *The Modern Churchman*.)

It was in short an ideal incapable of fulfilment save in a spiritual world. For a time men looked for the arrival of the great consummation. When it did not happen there came about the translation of the ideal into terms of time and space. The corporate organization of the Church, so humble in its beginnings, gradually grew into a grandiose structure, governed by a hierarchy of officials through whom ran the line of spiritual heredity derived from the Apostles. The life of Christ, the Head, flowed through this human-spiritual organism, not directly, by the simple means of faith and love, but by magical actions or things done specifically, ritualistically, and in accordance with fixed and limiting principles. It was, in short, a return to the methods of the much opposed Mystery Religions. That the leaders of the Church should have borrowed what they so consistently opposed is one of the anomalies of religious history. Whether intentionally or not, they reverted to the magical ceremonial of the Mysteries just as they incorporated Greek philosophy into their intellectual system. Says Dean Inge: "Catholicism owes to the Mysteries the notion of secrecy, of symbolism, of mystical brotherhood, of sacramental grace, and above all, of the three stages in the spiritual life: ascetic purification, illumination, and *epopteia* as the crown."* It became, as he says elsewhere, a Mystery Religion. By the end of the fifth century, Mystery terms had passed into ecclesiastical use. Other similarities, too, such as the separation of the baptised from the unbaptised, the lengthy preparation given to catechumens, the formula or *symbolon* entrusted to them on the last days of their catechumenate; the approach to the Holy of Holies by the baptised, clad in white, garlanded and crowned, bearing torches and entering a blaze of lights. The Mass became, in short, the *epopteia* of the Christian Mysteries. It was numinous, awe-inspiring; to its approaches only the specially prepared candidates might come. The original simplicity of the breaking of bread and drinking of wine with thanksgiving had grown out of all recognition. It was now analogous to the rite in certain of the Mysteries in which the candidate underwent a change not only of life *but of substance*.

* *Christian Mysticism*, p.354.

At initiation a higher order of life was thought to infuse his body. It is well to glance in detail at this idea of change of substance as it was carried into the magical process of the Mass. That process falls into three parts through which runs the ancient Mystery-tradition.

I. The breaking of the oblation into fragments; in the Gallic rite the bread was broken into nine parts, arranged as a Cross, each part symbolizing a stage in the life of Christ. This had its Mystery analogue in the dismemberment of Osiris and other Deities, and stood for the separative consciousness of the pre-regenerative state.

II. The *Epiklesis*, or Invocation, of the Holy Spirit to transmute the oblation into spiritual substance and energy (body and blood). This was the magical moment of regeneration when the Christ identified Himself with the changed elements, and changed also the inner substance of the worshipper, including him in the great sacramental declaration, "*Hoc est corpus meum.*"

III. The communicant becomes on reception, by fellowship with his brethren and with the Master, "one body, one bread,"* and the broken fragments of Osiris become unified in the regenerate act.

The Mass is incomplete without the transmutation in some degree of the communicant. He becomes a microcosm of what is essentially the great world-process of the spiritualizing of substance. His accidents do not change—the Regenerate remains also the natural man, though with a changed sense of identification. Initiation into the Christian Mystery will mean for him, as it may have meant for the neophyte of old, the commencement of a deep, inner process which, in the Pauline phrase, shall ultimately "change the vile body" into the body of the Master's glory.

I need not enter into the violent controversies which rend Christendom, even to-day, over the two temperamental differences between the ethical and the mystico-magical ways of approach. Some people are born symbolists and follow temperamentally the line of the Mystery Religions. Others gravitate to the simplicity of Jesus and the Early Church, seeing in repentance,

* 1 Cor. 10, 17.

faith and love a higher means of access to the Master than by methods which, working *ex opere operato*, are dependent upon external and priestly agency. For such, a return to the Mysteries is a return to spiritual childhood.

“Let each man be persuaded in his own mind.” There is truth on both sides.

CONCLUSION

In our study of Mystery-Initiations we have learned much about the nature of the Regenerative state. From India we found it to mean Emancipation from illusion, and the liberated life of the one Spirit. For Egypt it was entrance to the Light of Osiris-Ra, the distributed divine principle that lighteth every man coming into the world. The worshipper of Isis reached it by Deification, after a voluntary death and resurrection into Osirian Life. The Hermetist found Regeneration by a “passing through himself into the unlimited and expanded consciousness of a body that shall never die.” For the Bacchic devotee it was absorption of the essence of the God by eating his flesh and drinking his wine-blood. The Orphic found it to be an escape from the wheel of rebirth by ascetic purgation. For the Eleusian *Epopt* it meant the birth of a new nature which was to mature in season like the ripened corn. Freedom, light, self-abandonment, expanded consciousness, unity, purity, death to the old order and a birth to the new—these traits also marked the Christian conception of Regeneration, with the addition of a test which the long line of stalwart Regenerates would deem harder than any of the semi-physical ordeals undergone in Egyptian Temples or Mithraic Caves. The test is obedience to the two great Commandments. Love cannot be compelled, it is true, and to love God and man with the whole being is possible only to the Regenerate consciousness. But the Imperatives of Christ are generally future tenses; they are promises which look forward. The implications of Regeneration belong actually to the future; to-day it is largely germinal and ideal, above the diaphragm; tomorrow it will have sunk below and become our normal experience, while above the diaphragm will rise a still higher ideal of which now it is impossible to speak.

What says Theosophy? That the *buddhi* of *manas*, which is the limit of our present regenerative aspiration will, in the Sixth Race now forming, become the *manas* of *buddhi*, and the glory of that Rebirth has not yet risen over our spiritual horizon.

But no advance is possible without our co-operation. We are not corks tossed irresponsibly on the crest of an evolutionary wave. We can refuse to advance. The truth that Regeneration is a "gift from above" does not preclude the paradox that it is also a gift to be striven for. Greatly as Christianity has in the past exaggerated the doctrine of original sin, it yet enshrines a truth of experience. There is in all of us a bias towards the comfortable *status quo* of the natural man. We shrink from the pain of rebirth even after glimpsing its glories. Theosophy, like a kind and understanding teacher, helps to remove this bias by pointing out the terrible wreckage of failure, and the happiness of making an heroic advance into newness of life on all the levels of our being.

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