

*Meditation on the
Tenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot*

THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

LA ROUE DE FORTUNE

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. . .
What has been is what will be.
And what has been done is what will be done;
And there is nothing new under the sun.
(Ecclesiastes i, 2, 9)

*Qui propter nos homines et propter nostram
salutem descendit de coelis. Et incarnatus est
de Spiritu Sancto ex Maria Virgine, et homo
factus est. . . et ascendit in caelum, sedet ad
dexteram Patris.*

(For us men and for our salvation he came
down from heaven: by the power of the Holy
Spirit he became incarnate from the Virgin
Mary, and was made man. . . he ascended into
heaven and is seated at the right hand of the
Father)

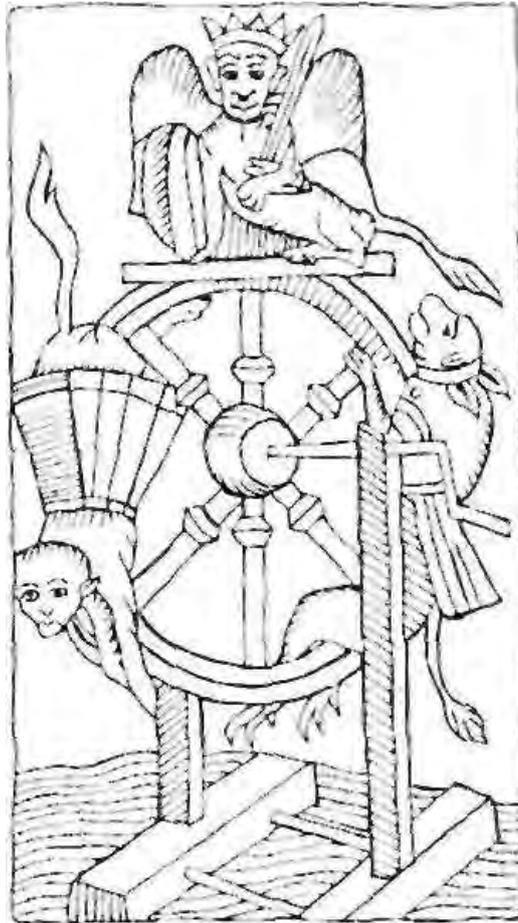
(from the Creed)

And I applied my mind to know wisdom
And to know madness and folly,
I perceived that this also is
but a striving after wind.
For in much wisdom is much vexation.
And he who increases knowledge increases
sorrow.

(Ecclesiastes i, 17-18)

Blessed are those who mourn,
For they shall be comforted.
(Matthew v, 4)

LETTER X



THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

Dear Unknown Friend,

We have before us a wheel which rotates, and three figures in animal form of which two (the monkey and the dog) turn with the wheel, whilst the third (the sphinx) is beyond the movement of the wheel: he is seated on a platform above the wheel. The monkey descends in order to rise again; the dog rises in order to descend again. First one and then the other pass before the sphinx. Simple and natural questions, which arise spontaneously when one looks at the Card, are:

Why do the monkey and the dog turn with the wheel? Why is the sphinx there?

How many times will the monkey and the dog pass before the sphinx? And why are there these meetings with the sphinx?

Once having posed these simple questions, we find ourselves already at the heart of the tenth Arcanum, plunged into the very sphere of notions and ideas which it is called to awaken.

In fact, the wheel alone, without its two passengers and without the sphinx seated above it, evokes only the idea of a circle or, at most, that of circular movement. The wheel with the two animals, the one rising and the other descending — without the sphinx above it — evokes the idea of a vain and absurd game. But the wheel turning with its two passengers *and the* sphinx dominating the whole makes the onlooker ask himself if this is not an *arcantum*, i.e. a key that one has to know in order to be able to orientate oneself, in this case in the domain of problems and phenomena relating to the circular movement of living beings. It is especially the sphinx above the wheel which gives us an intellectual shock and which impels us to seek out the Arcanum of this Card.

Now, there are two categories of ideas concerning the genetic relationship and the general genesis of the four kingdoms of Nature — the mineral realm, the plant realm, the animal realm and the human realm — which have their root in the intellectual life of humanity. The one is based on the idea of the *Fall*, i.e. degeneration and descent from above below. According to this class of ideas, it is not the monkey who is the ancestor of man, but rather, on the contrary, it is man who is the ancestor of the monkey, which latter is a degenerate and degraded descendant. And the three kingdoms of Nature below the human kingdom are, according to this set of ideas, the projected residue or exteriorisation of the comprehensive being of primordial man, or Adam, who is the original prototype and synthesis of all the entities comprising the four kingdoms of Nature.

The other class of ideas comprises the idea of *evolution*, i.e. progress transforming from below above. According to this category of ideas, it is the most primitive entity — from the point of view of consciousness as well as biological structure — which is the origin of all beings in the four kingdoms of Nature and which is their common ancestor.

The Card of the tenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot represents a monkey — i.e. an animal with a face still preserving features that one cannot fail to recognise as human — who is falling. For it is not the monkey who is climbing down, but rather it is the movement of the wheel which carries him along. In descending, the monkey raises his head because he is not descending of his own accord. From where does he descend — this animal with a head bearing human features?

He descends from the place where the sphinx is sitting. The crowned and winged sphinx, with a human head and an animal body, and holding a white sword, represents the plane and the stage of being from which the monkey is moving away and towards which the dog is approaching.

Now, if you had had the task of portraying the idea of the Fall in the sense of degeneration from the comprehensive being — the prototype of all Nature — wouldn't you have shown the sphinx crowned above, as the only possible figure representing the unity of the human and the animal kingdom, the latter in turn

being the synthesis of the plant and mineral kingdoms? And wouldn't you have portrayed one figure descending in the course of animalisation, deprived of the crown, the sword and the wings, but yet still with features bearing witness to its origin, i.e. would you not have chosen the monkey to represent the transition from the prototype state of comprehensive being to the state of reduced and specialised being? Does not the monkey lend itself marvellously to serve as a symbol of the animalisation which is effected at the expense of the Angelic and human elements of the prototype being?

On the other hand, if you had wanted to give visual expression to the nostalgia of fallen and fragmented beings for the lost state of fullness and integration, would you not choose the dog, the animal most passionately drawn and attached to the human element, as a symbol of the aspiration of animals towards union with human nature, i.e. the aspiration towards the *sphinx*, where animal nature is united to human nature?

The Card of the tenth Arcanum therefore teaches, through its actual context, an organism of ideas relating to the problem of the Fall and the Reintegration, according to Hermetic and Biblical tradition. It portrays the *whole* circle, including ascent as well as descent, whilst the "transformism" of modern science is occupied with only *half* of the circle, namely the half of ascent or evolution. The fact is that certain eminent scientists (such as Edgar Daque in Germany and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin in France) advance the postulate of the pre-existence—be it only potentially—of a prototype for all beings, which is the ultimate as well as the effective cause of the whole process of evolution, and this postulate alone tenders evolution intelligible. However, it in no way changes the fact that science *works* on the basis of the fundamental supposition that the minimum is the ancestor of the maximum, the simple is the ancestor of the complicated, and that it is the primitive which produces the more developed organism and consciousness, although for thought (i.e. reason) this is absolutely unintelligible. This basic scientific presupposition renders evolution unintelligible because it disregards half of the circle, namely all that which precedes—be it only *in ordine cognoscenti*—the state of primitivity from which science takes its point of departure. Because one has to renounce thought and reduce it to lethargy in order to be able to sincerely believe that man evolved from the primitive and unconscious particles of a primordial mist which was once our planet, without this mist bearing within itself the seed of all possibilities for future evolution, which is the process of "eclosion", i.e. the process of transition from a potential state to an actual state. Thus Arnold Lunn, editor of the book *Is Evolution Proved?*, writes that he would certainly like to believe in evolution and accept it as proved, if he could surmount four difficulties, including the following:

... for the fact (is) that no evolutionist had produced a plausible *guess*, much less a theory supported by evidence, to suggest how a purely natural process could have evolved, from the

mud, sand, mists and seas of the primeval planet, the brain that conceived Beethoven's Ninth Symphony and the reactions to the beauty of music, of art, and of Nature. (*Is Evolution Proved?* A debate between D. Dewar and H. S. Shelton, ed. Arnold Lunn, London, 1947, p. 333)

It is my painful duty to have to add to the above quotation the reply by William S. Beck, author of *Modern Science and the Nature of Life*, to the difficulty to which Arnold Lunn draws attention. He says:

It seems that the argument against evolution is pure metaphysical brocade, artfully draped so as to obscure the cogent evidence of science. (William S. Beck, *Modern Science and the Nature of Life*, London. 1961, p.133)

Metaphysical brocade or not, it does not matter, the fact of the unintelligibility for human thought of the *theory* (not the facts!) of evolution advanced by science nevertheless remains a fact. It is and always will be unintelligible in so far as it takes consideration of only half of the whole circle of evolution, and refuses to accept the other half of the circle, that of *involution*, or the Fall, which would make it intelligible.

Now, the tenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot represents a *circle*, a wheel comprising both the descent or departure from the comprehensive prototype being and the ascent towards this being.

The doctrine of the circle of involution and evolution is generally a platitude in occult literature, but it is not so when it is a matter of involution understood as the *Fall* and evolution understood as *salvation*. There is a world of difference between the orientalist doctrine concerning the semi-automatic "process" of involution and evolution, and the Hermetic, Biblical and Christian doctrine concerning the Fall and salvation. The former sees in the circle of involution-evolution only a purely natural process, similar to the process of respiration in a living organism — animal or human. The Hermetic, Biblical and Christian tradition, in contrast, sees here a cosmic tragedy and drama full of the supreme dangers and risks that the traditional terms "perdition" and "salvation" imply.

Fall, perdition, redemption, salvation are words which, truth to tell, are devoid of meaning, both for a spiritually-orientated evolutionist and for an evolutionist who is scientifically orientated. The former sees in cosmic evolution the eternal circular movement of exteriorisation and interiorisation — the exhalation and inhalation of divine cosmic respiration. What Fall, then? What risk, what perdition!? What redemption, and of what!? What salvation!? The whole inventory of fundamental Judaeo-Christian ideas is inapplicable in a naturally (i.e. *inevitably*) evolving world.

Who is right? Those for whom evolution is an organically determined process in which descent and ascent are only two successive phases of a single cosmic vibration? Or those who see in evolution a cosmic tragedy and drama whose essence and *leitmotiv* correspond to the parable of the prodigal son?

What is it to be right? Are the passengers on a boat who have tickets for the voyage mistaken in considering the boat and its crew together as their means of navigation—transporting them following a determined route to the place of destination? For the travellers, the sea voyage is a "natural process", something which happens by itself, provided that the ticket for the passage is paid.

But can the captain, officers and other members of the crew consider the passage over the sea in the same way as the passengers? Evidently not. For those who are responsible for the voyage, the passage signifies work, watches, manoeuvring and orientation in order to follow the route and bear the load of responsibility for everything. For the crew, therefore, the voyage is in no way a kind of "natural process", something which happens quite by itself. On the contrary, for them it is effort, struggle and risk.

It is the same with evolution. One sees it as a "natural process" when one looks at it through the eyes of the passengers, and one sees it as a "tragedy and drama" when one looks at it through the eyes of members of the crew. All determinism and fatalism—including naturalism and pantheism—places the responsibility somewhere beyond the moral human being: in Nature, in God, in the stars. . This is because all determinism or fatalism is a manifestation of the mentality and psychology of a passenger.

Evolution seen through the eyes of a passenger, i.e. seen as something which works by itself, is nevertheless not an illusion. That is, one can indeed find and prove the existence of a "process of evolution" or a "progressive process" which, on a phenomenological level, takes place by itself. But what effort, what sacrifices, what errors and what transgressions hide behind the phenomenological facade of the "process of evolution" and "universal progress"—established and yet to be established. Here we have arrived at the heart of the "exotericism—esotericism" problem. Exotericism lives in "processes", esotericism in tragedies and dramas. The ancient mysteries were tragedies and dramas— it is here where their esoteric character lies. Exotericism corresponds to the mentality and psychology of a passenger, esotericism to that of a member of the crew.

But I repeat: exotericism is not purely and simply an illusion. For if ten righteous men had been found in Sodom and Gomorrah, God would have spared these cities. And their inhabitants would have continued the "process of evolution" of their civilisation and its customs. It is true that they would not have surmised Abraham's prayer nor the role that the ten righteous men would have played in the possibility for them to continue the "process of their evolution", but they would have continued this process in fact.

It is similar for the whole of evolution. For there is natural selection and there

isspiritual selection—or election. The inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had sinned against Nature and had been rejected by natural selection, but they would have been able to survive if ten righteous men had been found amongst them. Then spiritual selection would have spared them, owing to the ten righteous men. The fact of having evolved and of having given shelter to ten righteous men amongst them would have been sufficient to justify the continuance of their existence, although their customs were contrary to Nature. "Spiritual selection" would have prevailed, therefore, over "natural selection" or, in other words, esotericism would have determined and saved the exoteric life.

Esotericism is therefore not a life and activity which seeks secrecy. It is based on the mentality and psychology of the crew, and its "secrets" are secrets only in so far as the mentality and psychology of the passengers is such as to refuse to participate in responsibility. At the same time there is no more serious error than that of wanting to "organise" a community or fraternity which would be called to play either the role of an instrument of spiritual selection or election, or even the role of a spiritual elite. No one can neither assume the function of election nor consider oneself as elect. It would be morally monstrous if a group of people were to say: "We shall choose ten righteous men for our time", or "we are the righteous of our time". *Because one does not elect; one is elected.* Knowledge of the fact of "spiritual selection", or election, and of the role that it plays in the history of mankind and in evolution in general can therefore certainly give rise to the birth of a false esotericism, i.e. to the formation of groups, communities of fraternities which believe themselves authorised to elect, or believe themselves to be elect. "False prophets" and "false elects (Christs)"—of which the Gospel speaks—are, and will be, produced by false esotericism cultivated by those who assume the right of election or "spiritual selection". It may be added that no Christian saint has ever considered himself otherwise than as a great sinner, and that there was no righteous man or prophet of the Old Testament who was not called of chosen from above.

But let us return to the subject of evolution.

Evolution, as understood exoterically, is a cosmic process—biological or spiritual, this is not important—whilst esoterically understood it is a drama or "mystery" in the sense of the ancient mysteries. And it is only for evolution thus understood that the ideas of the Fall, perdition, redemption and salvation become not only applicable but also necessary.

First let us take the ideas "perdition" and "salvation", and try to understand them on the level of cosmic evolution—or cosmic drama.

Do not be shocked, dear Unknown Friend, and do forgive me, for I am going to relate a myth—a cosmic myth from the gnosis—not ancient or modern, but from the eternal gnosis; because the cosmic drama is in reality a myth made flesh, and it must first be seen as such before one draws principal intellectual lessons from it. Therefore I am going to relate the myth in order to draw from it some ideas, which are related to the Arcanum of the Tarot with which we are occupied.

When the Father had accomplished his work on the seventh day of creation, that he had made through his Word, he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had made. And the Father blessed the seventh day, and he sanctified it, because on this day he rested from all his work that he had created.

Thus the seventh day is blessed and sanctified, because it is the day not of the world and the movement of the world, but rather of the Father himself alone. It is the seventh part of the circle of movement of the world, when he withdraws and becomes immobile and silent.

Thus it was that the circle of movement of the world was not closed, but remained open. And the seventh day was sanctified and blessed as the open part of the circle of movement of the world, in such a way that the beings of the world had access to the Father and the Father had access to them.

Bui the serpent said: There is no freedom for the world, in so far as the circle of the world is not closed. Because freedom is to be in oneself, without interference from outside, especially from above, on the part of the Father. The world will always follow the will of the Father, and not its own, in so far as there is an opening in the circle of the world, in so far as the sabbath exists.

And the serpent took his tail in his mouth and thus formed a closed circle. He turned himself with great force and thus created in the world the great swirl which caught hold of Adam and Eve. And the other beings, upon whom Adam had impressed the names that he gave them, followed them.

And the serpent said to the beings of the world moving on this side of the closed circle, that he formed by taking his tail in his mouth and setting himself in rotation: Here is your way — you will commence by my tail and you will arrive at my head. Then you will have traversed the length of the circle of my being and you will have within you the entire closed circle, and thus you will be free as I am free.

But woman guarded the memory of the world opened towards the Father and the holy sabbath. And she offered herself for the rending of the closed circle in herself in order to give birth to children issuing from the world beyond it, from the world where there is the sabbath. Thus originated the suffering of her pregnancy, and thus originated sorrow on this side of the world of the serpent.

And hostility came between woman and the serpent, between the generations of woman, giving birth with pain, and the generations of the serpent, giving birth with pleasure. The former will crush the head of the serpent and the serpent will wound the heel of the woman. For woman moves in a contrary

sense to the movement of the serpent, and her head reaches to the tail of the serpent, and her heels touch the head of the serpent. This is because in the world (which is the current of the serpent) suffering is its counter-movement. It was through the counter-movement of suffering that there originated the counter-current (of the sons of woman) which is the thought born from suffering and from memory of the world of the sabbath.

Thus the sons of woman set up altars to the Father, this side of the world of the serpent. And Enosh, son of Seth, not only worshipped the Father, but even came to know his Name. He began to invoke the Name of the Father. But Enoch, a descendant of Seth, went still further: he "walked with god" (Genesis v, 22). He did not pass through the bitterness of death which, for living beings on this side of the circle of the serpent, is the way out of the closed circle of the serpent, for he was "taken up" by the Father (Genesis v, 24). For about that time thought aspiring to the Father succeeded in piercing the circle of the serpent and in accomplishing an opening in the closed circle.

Thus initiation and prophecy could be established on this side of the world of the serpent. Initiation kept living the memory of the world of the sabbath, and prophecy nourished the hope of deliverance from the circle of the serpent and the future re-establishment of the world of the sabbath.

Buddhas taught the way of going out from the world of the serpent and of arriving at the repose of the sabbath.

But the prophets proclaimed the transformation of the world of the serpent from within it by the coming of the Word which will live in the world of the serpent and will re-establish within the world of the serpent not only the sabbath but also the other six days of creation such as they were before a third of the beings from each of them were uprooted and swept down by the closed whirlwind of the serpent (cf Revelation xii, 4).

This came to be. The Woman-Virgin who is the soul of the counter-movement to the serpent, and of suffering since the beginning of the world of the serpent, received, conceived and gave birth to the Word of the Father. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt amongst men in the world of the serpent, full of grace and truth" (cf. John i, 14).

This is the cosmic myth, the esoteric drama which underlies the exoteric "process of evolution". It sets forth, in the first place, the idea of the *open circle* and the *closed circle*. The open circle—or the spiral—is the world before the Fall of the six days of creation crowned by the seventh day, the cosmic sabbath, which corresponds to what one designates in mathematics as the "step of the spiral". It suggests the idea of unlimited growth and advancement, being through its form

only the introduction or antechamber to eternity. It promises unlimited progress.

The closed circle, in contrast, is in principle only a *prison*, whatever its extent may be. It is a wheel which turns on itself and therefore suggests no advancement beyond its circle. The idea that the closed circle—or wheel—suggests, is that of *eternal repetition*.

Three historical personalities have vividly portrayed the idea of the cosmic wheel, although each of them did so in a different way. These are: Gautama Buddha, Solomon and Friedrich Nietzsche.

The first told of the "wheel of incarnations", where birth, sickness, old age and death repeat themselves endlessly. The illumination that the Buddha had under the Bodhi-tree revealed three truths to him: that the world is a wheel of births and deaths, that its movement is fundamentally nothing other than suffering, and that there is a way towards the centre of the wheel, which is at rest.

King Solomon had experience of the wheel—not as that of incarnations, as with Buddha—but rather as inexorable fate, rendering all human hope and endeavour in vain:

Vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains for ever. The sun rises and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises anew. The wind blows to the south, and goes round to the north; round and round goes the wind, and repeats the same circuits. All streams run to the sea, but the sea is never full; the streams continue to flow, to the place where they flow again. . . What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done; and there is nothing new under the sun. (Ecclesiastes i, 2-7, 9)

I have seen everything that is done under the sun; and behold, all is vanity and a striving after the wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered . . . I have applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. (Ecclesiastes i, 14-15, 17-18)

This is the wheel of existence under the sun of which Solomon, the wise and sorrowful king of Jerusalem, had a vision. And what practical advice does he give for posterity? That of supreme despair, as follows:

There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. . .
Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things

God will bring you into judgement. Remove vexation from your mind, and put away pain from your body; for youth and the dawn of life are vanity. (Ecclesiastes ii. 24; xi, 9-10)

It is Solomon's despair which made him into an Old Testament prophet and gave his work a place between the psalms and the books of the prophets. For Solomon portrays the emptiness—which he calls "vanity"—of the world of the serpent and thus sets in relief the dilemma: either suicide, or salvation on the part of God. For above the turning wheel of vanity there is GOD.

Solomon's despair certainly belongs to the Holy Scripture. He portrays the world without Christ—which, moreover, the Buddha did also. Solomon's sadness is the sighing of creation for deliverance, having become conscious in him.

Thus Buddha rightly diagnosed the world of the serpent before Christ: Solomon wept over it; but Nietzsche—how monstrous!—sang of it. Yes, Nietzsche saw and understood the wheel, the closed circle with no outlet, of the world of the serpent, and he said "Yes" to it. He had the vision of eternal repetition, the "eternal return" (*"ewige Wiederkunft"*)—and he identified it with eternity, although it is the very opposite of eternity:

— Oh! how should I not burn for Eternity, and for the marriage ring of rings—the Ring of Recurrence? Never yet found I the woman by whom I would have children, save it be by this Woman that I love: for I love thee, O Eternity!

For I love thee, O Eternity!

(Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*)*

—so he sings of the wheel that Buddha diagnosed as the great misfortune and that Solomon estimated as the vanity of vanities.

Poetical lyricism? It is more than this! Nietzsche certainly gave a poetic form to what he took to be his illumination. But this was only a summary of the last consequences drawn from modern science—not as method, but rather as mode of world-outlook. In fact, according to the positivistic science of the end of the nineteenth century, the world is the sum-total of innumerable combinations of simple particles, atoms. The combinations change endlessly, but at some time the number of possible combinations of atoms must necessarily reach its limit and the number of new combinations must be exhausted. Then the previous combinations must repeat themselves. Therefore there will be sometime in the future a day which will be the exact repetition of today. This is the scientific basis of the "eternal return".

Belief in the eternal return has a basis not only in the calculation of possible atomic combinations but also in the scientific dogma of the quantitative constancy

*Trsl. A. Title, rev. M. M. Bozman, Everyman Library. 1958, p. 204.

of matter and energy in the world. Nothing disappears, nothing appears in the world. The sum-total of matter and energy in the world is constant. It is impossible for it to be either augmented or diminished. One can add nothing to it, nor take anything from it. The world is a closed circle from which nothing escapes and into which nothing enters.

Now, given that the world is a determined quantity, it is calculable. In the last analysis, it is only a determined number of particles and/or units of energy. Therefore the number of combinations of these particles is no longer unlimited. The limit must be reached sometime. And then past combinations will be repeated. . .The "eternal return" of everything is therefore an inevitable conclusion in a world understood as a closed circle.

In a world which is a closed circle, whose matter and energy are a constant quantity, there are no miracles. Because the cosmic notion of a "miracle" entails inconstancy of the quantity of matter and energy in the world. A miracle takes place when the energy of the world undergoes either an increase or a diminution. This presupposes an *opening* in the circle of the world. For a miracle to be possible, the world must be an open circle, the world must be a spiral, i.e. it must have an "uncreated" sphere or a "sabbath", according to the cosmic myth narrated above.

Now religion—all advanced religion—teaches that the world is an open circle. For this reason it insists upon the reality of miracles. Miracles ("the supernatural") are a reality of action from beyond the circle of Nature, which appears to be closed. This is the reality of the cosmic sabbath.

The "good news" of religion is that the world is not a closed circle, that it is not an eternal prison, that it has an exit and an entrance. There is an entrance, which is why Christmas is a joyous festival. There is an exit, which is why Ascension is a festival. And that the world can be transformed, such as it is, into such as it was before the Fall—this is the "good news" of the festival of festivals, the festival of the Resurrection or Easter.

The world as a closed circle, the world of the eternal return, the world where "there is nothing new under the sun"—what is this in reality?

It is nothing other than *cosmic hell*. For the idea of hell can be understood as eternal existence in a closed circle. The closed circle of egoism would then be subjective and individual hell; the closed circle of a world of constant energy would then be objective and cosmic hell.

Now we have the cosmic meaning of the terms "salvation" and "perdition". "Perdition" is to be caught up in the eternal circulation of the world of the closed circle, the world without a sabbath; "salvation" is life in the world of the open circle, or spiral, where there is both exit and entrance. "Perdition" is existence in the closed circle of the "eternal return"; "salvation" is life under the open sky, where each day is new and unique—a miracle in the infinite chain of miracles. . . For God is not unknowable, but rather, knowable—through inexhaustible and infinite knowledge. The infinite "revelationability" and "knowability" of God: this is the essence of the eternal sabbath, the seventh day of creation. The seventh day

of creation is that of eternal life and the source of miracles. For it is laden with possibilities of new things, and from it "energies" can be added to the so-called "constant" quantity of the phenomenal world, just as energies of this world can disappear into it.

The two other terms in the cosmic drama of evolution are "the Fall" and "redemption". It is now easier to understand them after having drawn out to a certain extent the cosmic meaning of the terms "salvation" and "perdition". For "the Fall" is a cosmic event, a whirlwind set in motion by the closed circle of the serpent "biting" his tail and "sweeping down part of the created world" (cf. Revelation xii, 4). And "redemption", to say it directly, is the cosmic act of the Reintegration of the fallen world, first in creating an *opening* in its closed circle (religion, initiation, prophecy), then in instituting a *path of exit* (Buddhas) and entrance (Avatars) through this door, and lastly in transforming the fallen world from within by the radiation of the incarnated Word (Jesus Christ).

This is the meaning of these two terms on a level of generalisation carried to a high degree. Let us now look at the meaning of these two terms more closely, so that the essential details can stand out from the totality.

Firstly, the Fall. . . here we are confronted with the Biblical account of paradise and the six days of creation; with the impressive tableau of natural evolution that science advances; with the contours of a majestic outline by the genius of ancient India of *kalpas*, *manvantaras* and *yugas* — a world of periodicity and rhythm, a world dreamt periodically by cosmic consciousness; with the exposition (following the "Stanzas of Dzyan") of cosmogony and anthropogony according to the Indo-Tibetan tradition, given by H. P. Blavatsky in the three volumes of her *Secret Doctrine*; with the grandiose tableau of the spiritual evolution of the world through seven so-called "planetary" phases that Rudolf Steiner has bequeathed to the dumbfounded intellectuality of our century; lastly, with the cosmogonies and eschatologies — explicit or implicit — of Hermes Trismegistus, Plato, the *Zohar* and diverse gnostic schools of the first centuries of our era.

May I be permitted to say straight away that, although I have had actual experience of comparing the whole range of these ideas and documents for more than forty years, I cannot make use of them here in the sense of the treatment which they merit, i.e. to classify them, to extract the essential points of similarity or contrast, to make relevant quotations, etc. If I were to do so, I would drown the essential theme in a sea of secondary elements (secondary with regard to the main theme). Therefore I have to proceed in the following way: the *spirit* of all the various ideas and documents enumerated above will be present as a general background, but it will be necessary to refrain from any explicit use of the material which they comprise. Having said this, let us return to the problem of the cosmic Fall.

Firstly, one can ask: What is this problem? How does it arise?

Let us look at the totality of our experience of the world — personal, historical, biological, etc. What does it say to us?

Leibnitz, the philosopher of optimism, said that the given world is the most perfect of possible worlds. Schopenhauer, the philosopher of pessimism, said that in the given world the sum of suffering outweighs that of joy, and that the world of our experience is therefore not only imperfect but also, in the last analysis, evil. Both Leibnitz and Schopenhauer looked at the totality of experience of the world, as we are now seeking to, and what a difference in what they saw!

From the point of view of *pure thought*, which is that of Leibnitz, the totality of the world shows up without any doubt a perfect arrangement of equilibrium, a harmonious functioning of its essential parts and —despite what may take place in its more obscure nooks and crannies — the totality of the world taken in its great outlines, in its *essential* outlines, is harmony itself.

From the point of view of *pure will*, which is that of Schopenhauer, the experience of each individual being in the world confirms the diagnosis of the world given by Gautama Buddha, which diagnosis is therefore to be accepted as true.

And from the point of view of the *heart*, which is that of Hermeticism and the Judaeo-Christian tradition, what can one say about the world?

The heart says to us: the cosmos, this marvel of wisdom, beauty and goodness, suffers. It is ailing. This great organism which *cannot* have been born out of sickness, whose birth *must* have been due to perfect health, i.e. to perfect wisdom, beauty and goodness, the totality of which was its cradle —this great organism is ailing. The continents —and the planets —grow ever-more hard, petrifying: this is the "sclerosis" of the cosmos. And on the surface of its land-masses in the process of petrification, and in the deeps of the seas, and in the air, there reigns the struggle for existence —this is the fever of inflammation in the world.

But sick as it is, the world still retains —everywhere and always —characteristics of its primordial health, and shows the working of forces of its new health, its convalescence. Because alongside the struggle for existence there is cooperation in order to live, and alongside the mineral petrification, there is the succulent and breathing cover of the plant kingdom. The world can therefore be lauded and wept for at the same time.

This is the origin of the problem of the Fall: that the world is worthy of being sung for and wept for at the same time.

The world is not what it should be. There is a contradiction between the totality and the details. For whilst the starry heavens represent a harmony of equilibrium and perfect cooperation, animals and insects devour one another and innumerable legions of infectious microbes bear sickness and death to men, animals and plants.

It is this contradiction which the term "the Fall" alludes to. In the first place, it designates a state of affairs in the world which gives the impression that the world is composed of two independent, if not opposed, worlds, as if in the organism of the great world of the "harmony of the spheres" there is interpolated another world with its own laws and evolution — as if a cancerous outgrowth has taken place in the otherwise healthy organism of the great world.

Science takes the two worlds together and considers them as inseparably united,

and names this totality "Nature"—Nature with two faces: Nature, benign and cruel, at one and the same time; Nature both stubborn and astonishingly cooperative; wise and blind Nature; Nature, the loving mother and the cruel stepmother, full of malice. With all due respect to science, it is necessary to draw attention to a quite simple error of thought that it commits. Notably, it commits the same error that a doctor would commit if he were to consider a state of sickness (e.g. cancer) as normal or "natural", and if he were to declare that the cancerous process as well as the circulation of the blood were two aspects of the *nature* of the organism of the sick person. This would be something monstrous, if the doctor refused to distinguish between nature and *counter-nature* (sickness) in the organism of the patient—yet this is precisely what science does with regard to the world-organism. It refuses to distinguish between Nature and counter-Nature, health and sickness, natural evolution and evolution contrary to Nature.

The ancients always knew that there is an anomaly in the state of the world. Whether they attributed it to the principle of ignorance ("*avidya*") as in ancient India, or to the principle of darkness (Ahriman) as in ancient Persia, or again to the principle of evil (Satan) as the ancient Semites did, is not important; it is always a matter of distinction between the natural world and the unnatural world, between the natural and the perverse, between health and sickness.

It goes without saying that Hermeticism, in accordance with the Judaeo-Christian tradition, regards the "Nature" of science not as the world created by God, but rather as the *field* where the created world meets with the world of the serpent.

The world of the serpent: this is the "world within the World" which gave rise to the dualism of Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and certain gnostic schools. These kinds of dualism fall under the title of "heresy", i.e. they sin against the essential truths of salvation, because they commit the same error as modern science, but in an inverse sense. Just as science refuses to distinguish in "Nature" between the Nature of orthogenesis and cooperation on the one hand, and the Nature producing genetic impasses and parasites on the other hand, so did the Manichaeans, Cathars, Albigenses, etc., refuse to distinguish between virginal Nature and fallen Nature. But whilst science considers its "Nature"—although Nature is a contradiction in herself—as the sovereign queen of evolution, who has managed to lead evolution from the albuminous cell to the developed brain of *homo sapiens*, the radical dualists considered their "Nature" as being evil through and through. In other words, science considers Nature, in the last analysis, good; the Manichaeans regarded Nature as evil. Science refuses to see Satan there; the radical dualists wanted to see nothing but Satan there.

But let us return to the world of the serpent. The most general characteristic feature of this world is *enfoldment*, whilst, the most general characteristic feature of the created world is *unfoldment*, blossoming and *radiation*. Thus the brain and intestines in the animal kingdom are due to enfoldment; foliage, branches and flowers are expressions of the contrary tendency in the plant kingdom. Thus,

for example, foliage is the "lung" of the plant, unfolded and open to the Air whilst the animal or human lung is enfolded foliage. Or another example: the sun is in a state of radiation, whilst the planets are in a state of condensation, i.e. enfoldment.

These two tendencies have their traditional designations. They are "light" and "darkness", i.e. radiation and enfoldment, respectively. This is why the Gospel according to John, in describing the cosmic drama, says: "Light shineth in the darkness, and the darkness apprehendeth it not" (John i, 5) — (*kai to phos en te skotia phainei, kai he skotia auto ou katelaben; et lux in tenebris lucet, et tenebrae earn non comprehenderunt*). *Ou katelaben. . . non comprehenderunt*— this expresses that the light was not caught up in the whirlwind of enfoldment and is not obscured by it, but *shines in the darkness*. This is the quintessence of the Gospel, the "good news".

Thus the sun and the stars are to the planets (including the earth) as light is to darkness. And in the microcosm, the system of "lotus flowers" is to the system of endocrine glands as light is to darkness. For the "lotus flowers" are, fundamentally, blossoming glands, whilst the glands are enfolded "lotus flowers". The endocrinal glands are *precipitates* of the "lotus flowers" in the microcosm, just as the planets are precipitates of the "planetary spheres" in the macrocosm or planetary system.

Now, the world of the serpent is that of enfoldment. The serpent biting his tail and thus forming a closed circle is its symbol. Completely successful enfoldment would be hell or the state of complete isolation.

But complete enfoldment or accomplished isolation has in no way succeeded in the world. The history of so-called "natural" evolution traces for us a tableau of successive attempts—none of which have been successful—aiming at establishing through complete enfoldment a viable organism with an absolutely autonomous consciousness, without falling prey to madness. Is not the atom an entity produced by enfoldment, which is autonomous and independent? But atoms *associate* themselves with one another in molecules! Is the molecule, therefore, not an autonomous entity? Well, molecules associate themselves into mysterious fraternities of life that we name "organic cells". Then there are the innumerable associations of molecules in the organism. . . the history of the evolution of living organisms is that of the triumph of the principle of association and cooperation over that of dissociation and isolation. The latter has succeeded in forming only non-viable monsters, e.g. the dinosaurs and giant reptiles which overran the earth and which had their uncontested reign for a hundred million years of the mesozoic or reptile era, Where are they now? They were only a great biological impasse, therefore they perished. Their reign gave way to that of mammals and birds. The former also produced many forms of impasse before an upsurge of vertebrates came, during the advance of which form after form was rejected, condemned either to a rapid or a slow extinction, until the primates, from which one subdivision— that of *homo sapiens*— took possession of the earth, and now rules without rival.

Thus our planet, which was in the mesozoic era the "planet of reptiles", has now become the "planet of human beings". Is the human being the grand-daughter of the reptile? Or, in Biblical terms, are human beings the "children of the serpent", the "children of darkness", the product of enfoldment — or are they "children of the light" (Luke xvi, 8)?

Man has the most developed brain. Now the brain is—as Henri Bergson has shown—an organ which plays the role of a *sieve* with respect to consciousness: it is an instrument of knowledge and ignorance at one and the same time. Its function is to admit on behalf of consciousness what is appropriate to it and not to admit—"to forget"—what is not appropriate to it from the point of view of action, or the will aspiring to action.

The brain is therefore an organ of *selection* — the epitome of the process of evolution! For what the brain does is essentially what took place during millions of years of biological evolution. The whole of evolution is the process of the sequence "creation-selection-rejection-forget", repeated incessantly. The "proper" forms are chosen, the others are rejected. There is an invisible sieve at work. Now, this sieve has become visible; it has become flesh. It is the brain. Henri Bergson says concerning the brain:

In the work of thought in general, as in the particular case of memory, the brain appears to be charged simply with the task of impressing on the body the movements and attitudes which *act* what the mind thinks, or what the circumstances invite it to think. I have expressed this by saying that the brain is an "organ of pantomime". . . Indeed, the cerebral phenomena are to the mental life just what the gestures of the conductor are to the symphony: they mark out the motor articulations, they do nothing else. In other words, we should find nothing of the higher workings of the mind within the cerebral cortex. Except its sensory functions, the brain has no other part than to *mime*. in the full meaning of the term, the mental life. (Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy*; trsl. H. W. Carr, London, 1920, pp. 74-75)

The brain is therefore an organ effecting mimicry, choosing what it is going to mime. It mimes accordingly.

Now, relevant mimicry is precisely what the Book of Genesis understands by *cunning* when it says that "the serpent was more cunning (*arum*— אָרוּם --) than any other wild creature that the LORD God had made" (Genesis iii, 1). It is, as it were, the "psychological" principle of the serpent, just as enfoldment and movement in a closed circle is its "dynamic" principle. To be cunning is to mime wisdom, after having eliminated the essential—its light—and then to make use of it for one's own ends. This is why it is said that "the devil is the ape of God", that he apes God.

The brain is therefore due to the serpent. It is the work of the serpent; and mankind, as the animal species endowed with the most developed brain, is certainly a grand-daughter of the serpent. Human beings, as cerebral beings, are indeed "children of the serpent" or "children of darkness".

This is why there exists a kind of brotherly piety with which the serpent is venerated in various places in the world — Egypt, India (the "sacred *nagas*"), Mexico, central America and, lastly, China, where the sacred reptile is venerated in its flying form, that of the dragon. Even Moses erected a bronze serpent on a pole in the desert, and it was only in the time of the reign of Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, king of Judah, that worship of the serpent was put to an end — notably when Hezekiah "broke in pieces the bronze serpent that Moses had made, for until those days (i.e. during all the centuries of Judges and Kings, until Hezekiah!) the people of Israel had burned incense to it; it was called Nehushtan" (II Kings xviii, 4). But many centuries later a gnostic sect, the Kaascnes (Nahashenes), worshipped the serpent in the same region — and this was after Jesus Christ!

Even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, several occultist writers have striven to restore the cult of the serpent, this time in an intellectual form. Thus H. P. Blavatsky did much in her *Secret Doctrine* to honour the serpent as the philosophical idea of ancient wisdom. She interpreted it as the principle of universal energy, *fohat*, which has a unique and indispensable place between the universal intellect, *mahat*, and universal matter, *prakrtti*. She evoked the ancient legends and traditions of the teachers of childlike humanity, who were the creators of civilisation — the "sons of the serpent" — the benefactors of mankind at the dawn of its history.

Eliphas Levi presented the serpent as the "great magical agent", i.e. the intermediary principle between consciousness and the world of objective facts. According to him, the serpent is the principle of realisation, i.e. that which in practice translates the will into events, that which objectifies the subjective.

Stanislas de Guaita dedicated his unfinished work to the serpent by giving it the title *Le serpent de la Genese*. In this book he portrays the reality of the role of the "great magical agent" in history.

As to the Theosophical Society, the serpent biting its tail with a hexagram and Egyptian tau within the closed circle of the serpent was chosen as its symbol and seal, accompanied by the motto of the Maharajas of Benares: *satiyat nasti paro dharmah* — "there is no religion higher than truth".

Yes, the serpent is indeed the "great magical agent", that is to say, the principle which mimes consciousness and which is therefore the link between the subjective and the objective, just as the brain is the link between consciousness and action. Yes, the first representatives of cerebral intellectuality, the "sons of the serpent" of ancient legends, were certainly the first masters of new-born civilisation. It is certainly they who taught the rudiments of the arts and sciences to childlike humanity.

Having admitted this, I nevertheless ask myself: Is the serpent, as the "great

magical agent", the *only* magical agent, and is he the magical agent of *all* magic? Does divine or sacred magic (which we have referred to in the Letters relating to the third and fifth Arcana of the Tarot) make use of the same agency as that of fakirs, hypnotists, magnetic healers and necromancers?

Now, centuries of experience show that there is not only *another agent* and *another magic*, but also that there is another consciousness and experience than that due to the brain. It was not the serpent that John the Baptist saw descend upon the Master of sacred magic, the greatest thaumaturgist of history, but rather a *dove*.

John bore witness: I saw the Spirit descend as a dove from heaven, and it remained on him. (John i. 32)

. . .several days later the miracle of the wedding at Cana was accomplished.

The seven miracles—the wedding at Cana, the healing of the nobleman's son, the healing of the sick man at the pool of Bethsaida, the feeding of the five thousand, the walking on water, the healing of the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus—did not have the serpent as their agent, nor was the brain the instrument of their accomplishment, nor was cerebral intellectuality the source of their initiative. The agent here is the dove, i.e. the Spirit which is above the brain, above the head, and which *descends* upon the head and remains there—the Spirit which *transcends* cerebral intellectuality. This Spirit is the source of initiative and, simultaneously, is the agent and instrument of divine or sacred magic.

Therefore I ask myself—and I ask you, dear Unknown Friend—why occultist-authors have not directed their zeal, fervour and ability to serve the cause of the dove, instead of that of the serpent? Why have they not recognised *the great agent* of sacred magic, which has certainly demonstrated that it is called to illumine, heal and transform the world? Why did the Theosophical Society, which values truth above all belief, not choose the dove of the Holy Spirit as its standard? Why was the dove of the Holy Spirit, which is the very principle of universal spirituality, not chosen instead of the serpent biting its tail? Why did Stanislas de Guaita not write a book entitled *The Dove of the Gospel*? Why did Eliphas Levi not refer to the *new* great magical agent, the dove, which is called to replace the ancient magical agent, the serpent? Why did H. P. Blavatsky refuse to see that there are two principles of cosmic energy, that of *fohat* or the energy of the serpent, and that of the Holy Spirit or the energy of salvation? Even if the *Stanzas of Dzyan* do not make any mention of it, are they to be taken as the only source of truth? And is the testimony of prophets, apostles and saints for over three thousand years for nothing!?

I am perplexed, I repeat, not because the interpretation of the serpent according to the above-mentioned occultist-authors is not true, in what it essentially concerns, but because the subject of the serpent is treated by them with a strange

exclusiveness, even partiality, that is difficult to explain by objective facts referring to the problem as such, without recourse to psychological factors.

Be that as it may, there is a rather pronounced tendency in occult literature to present the serpent as the sole principle of realisation, and even as the sole principle of knowledge, including occult knowledge.

Now, with respect to ourselves, we are able, in the first place, to see in the serpent only the principle of cerebation, cerebral intellectuality, and the principle of enfoldment, the tendency to form closed circles—or, in other words, the principle of the *Fall*. I say: *in the first place*, because, thanks to the work of salvation, which has a millennial-old history, a gradual spiritualisation of the work of the serpent—including cerebral intellectuality—has taken place, and because intervention from above not only frustrates the formation of completely closed circles, but also gives to the tendency of enfoldment a direction towards *solidarity* through stages such as the family, the nation and the community of civilisation. In other words, providence sees to it that the circles formed by the serpent are not entirely closed, and that the series of its circles is changed into a series of as many *spirals*.

But the benefits of this gradual metamorphosis of the work of the serpent are not due to the serpent, but rather to the other principle—the contrary principle—that of the "*light which shines in the darkness*". For the reality and entirety of *evolution* consists on the one hand of the enfolding activity of the serpent, which has formed the brain and produced cerebral intellectuality, and on the other hand of the activity of the light from above, which *opens* the enfolded and illumines cerebral intellectuality. The serpent and the dove: these are, in the last analysis, the factors underlying the *whole* process of evolution.

If you were to ask me, dear Unknown Friend, if one has to choose and take the side of either the serpent or the dove, my reply would be in the framework of the Master's counsel:

Be wise as serpents and innocent as doves (Matthew x, 16),

i.e. that one should try to unite cerebral intellectuality with spiritual spontaneity. It is certainly necessary to think in articulated thoughts and in a discursive manner, but above this process of discursive thought there always soars the ideal! It is in the light of the ideal that one should think.

But let us return to the question: Are human beings "children of the serpent" or "children of the light"? We have said that human beings, as the animal species endowed with the most developed brain, are children of the serpent. Now, it is necessary to add that as beings aspiring to the ideal of the good, the beautiful and the true, human beings are children of the light. Because, whatever may be said in the contrary sense, there is no reason—nor is there anything given in the whole domain of biological evolution culminating in the formation of the human brain—which explains and makes the human aspiration towards truth, beauty and goodness appear necessary. Every monastery and convent is, moreover, a direct

contradiction to the thesis that mankind is only the product of biological evolution. All renunciation of concrete things—such as wealth, power, health and even life—for an ideal, bears witness to the trans-evolutionary and trans-cerebral reality of the nucleus of the human being.

If the excavations carried out by palaeontologists supply skulls and skeletons as evidence of the biological evolution leading to the human brain, the martyrs throughout history bear witness at the same time to the fact of the transcendence of the nucleus of human nature with respect to biological evolution. This is because complete evolution is the intersection of biological evolution and spiritual evolution. The fact of the intersection of these two quite different domains is the reality of the Fall.

The other term of the cosmic drama with which we are occupied, and which is linked to that of the Fall, is *redemption*.

We have said above that redemption is the "cosmic act of the Reintegration of (the fallen world, first in creating an *opening* in its closed circle (religion, initiation, prophecy), then in instituting a path of exit (Buddhas) and entrance (Avatars) through this door, and lastly in transforming the fallen world from within by the radiation of the incarnated Word (Jesus Christ)".

Thus, the thesis that we are advancing here is that the work of salvation leading to actual redemption is *universal* concerning both *time* and *space*. For it has acted since the cradle of mankind's history and it extends to all groups and all religions of mankind. The centuries are its stages and the whole of mankind was—and is—its field. The work of salvation is *catholic* in the literal. Hermetic, magical, gnostic and mystical sense of the word. This means to say that the history of the suffering, militant and triumphant Church is as long as that of humanity, and that it is as vast as humanity itself. For the Word is the "true light that enlightens every man coming into the world" (John i, 9). i.e. every human being, always and everywhere.

There is therefore only a single work of salvation, which includes all human endeavour truly aiming at transcending the brain and cerebral intellectuality, and which includes all true revelations from above, throughout all the ages of the history of mankind. It operates in stages. . From the first altar erected somewhere on a hill or in the corner of a field, to the great cathedrals of Europe aspiring to heights of consciousness above the sphere of cerebral intellectuality; it has been in stages.

The stages of the work of universal salvation constitute the spiritual history of mankind, which is the great universal Bible of which the historical Bible is a part. It can be summarised in two ways according to two different points of view: from the point of view of *revelation*, and that of *operation*.

According to the first point of view, mankind's spiritual history could be summarised—as the Cabbala does—by giving the various aspects of God that are revealed successively in the spiritual history of mankind. The ten *names of God* of the Cabbala, which correspond to the ten Sephiroth of the Sephiroth Tree, represent a summary of mankind's spiritual history from the point of view of the gradual

revelation of God. For, from the aspect represented by the name ADONAI (LORD), to the aspect indicated by the name EYEH (I AM), there is a long road, the former name being a term for the superiority of power, pure and simple, whilst the latter name signifies intuition of the Being who is the essence of being, or "He who is".

According to the point of view of the operation of the work of salvation, one could summarise mankind's spiritual history by describing its stages from the first opening of the closed circle of the serpent to the advent and blossoming of the "reign of God" within this circle. The stages in question are, therefore, the *opening* of the closed circle, the *path* of exit and entrance through this door, and the *Incarnation of the Word*. The first stage, that of the opening of the closed circle, makes way for the entrance of *faith* into incarnated mankind; the second brings it *hope*; the third kindles *love* within it, which is the active *presence* of divine life at the heart of the circle of the serpent. All that mankind had been believing, had been hoping, has become reality in the present—this is the essence of the whole spiritual history of mankind in a single phrase.

But this summary comprises a world of events. It includes: the first awakening of memories of paradise in souls immersed in the darkness of the struggle for existence; the institution of worship (cult) to guard these memories and to protect them from being forgotten; the arising of priests charged with this cult, and of seers and prophets who keep it alive and develop it; the arising of schools of individual effort aspiring to trans-cerebral experience; the glorious news that such endeavour is not in vain, that there is a path of exit; the teachings of the Buddhas, the masters of this path; the revelations of the Avatars, Rishis, great masters and "men of God"—demonstrating the reality of the path of entrance, manifestation and incarnation; the spiritual preparation in the whole world, and the real preparation in a chosen people—Israel—of the Incarnation prefigured by the incarnations and manifestations of Avatars and Boddhisattvas (on the path to "Buddhahood"); then the Incarnation itself, and lastly all that is implied in St. Paul's words:

Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by Angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, and taken up in Glory. (I Timothy iii, 16)

Now, what is generally understood by "evolution" is due to the concurrence of two principal lines of operation—that of the serpent and that of the work of salvation. Principal, I say, because there are also secondary lines which play an intermediary role between the principal lines—such as, for example, the line of evolution of individual souls by way of repeated incarnations. This subject has been considered in a preceding Letter (Letter IV) and will be considered again in the thirteenth Letter. We draw attention here, in the context of general evolu-

tion, only to the following fact.

Science is at present confronted with the problem of the transmission by way of heredity of characteristics acquired through experience. This problem, such as it is presented today, is due to the paradoxical contradiction between what is known of the law of heredity and what is known about evolution and progress in general. Notably, it has been found that acquired characteristics do not transmit themselves by heredity and, on the other hand, the sum-total of facts concerning general evolution provides evidence of progress. In order to resolve the contradiction between heredity, which only *reproduces*, and general evolution, which demonstrates *creativity*, it is necessary to have recourse to a further dimension, i.e. to add the vertical dimension to that of horizontal continuity in time—the latter dimension being that of heredity, which connects successive generations. It has to be admitted that acquired characteristics are accumulated *somewhere else* other than by way of the mechanism peculiar to heredity, and that between "heredity" and "acquired characteristics" (which latter do not disappear but are simply relegated "somewhere else") there is an active tension which manifests itself in education and self-education, as well as in the arising of intellectual and moral geniuses as fruits of a mediocre line of forefathers. This tension between the mechanism of heredity and characteristics acquired through experience—and accumulated "somewhere else"—leads in the long run to the prevalence of the latter, and a kind of "eruption" of acquired characteristics takes place in the hereditary mechanism. The fruits of past experience, so to say, "reincarnate".

It is thus that one is led to postulate the principle of reincarnation. And when modern depth psychology of the school of Jung adds sufficient material concerning the resurgence of past experiences in dreams, vision, and in the life of fantasy, of people who—in their normal consciousness—know nothing about it (and thus, for example, the rituals and symbols of the ancient mysteries reappear in the full light of day of the twentieth century), then the postulate necessary to explain the possibility of progress ceases to be solely a postulate, but becomes a conclusion, based on experience and endowed with a high degree of probability.

It is true that Jung designated the realm where past experiences are buried as the "collective unconscious". But why *collective*! Why not individual unconscious? Is it simply because experiences of the past, which arise from the depths of consciousness, have much in common? . . . that they resemble one another?

But it is *human beings* in whom these experiences of the past arise. It is therefore quite natural that they have much in common—in fact, as much in common as human beings have in common. For this reason alone, is it necessary to postulate the *collectivity* of subconscious (or superconscious) memory that spans millennia? Is it not more simple and natural to conclude that the one who remembers an experience is also the one who experienced it?

But to do justice to Jung it should be pointed out that he did not insist on a *substantial collectivity* to his "collective unconscious". As a true scientist, he leaves

open the question whether the collective unconscious is a reservoir common to mankind, or whether it is a totality derived by synthesising *characteristics common to individuals*. The "metaphysic". so to say. of the collective unconscious was but little elaborated by Jung. Be that as it may, the *facts* that Jung assembled and presented lend themselves *at least* as easily to interpretation in terms of reincarnation as in terms of a collective unconscious.

But for the inner forum of consciousness—and I remind you, dear Unknown Friend, that these Letters are addressed only to your inner forum, and that on principle they do not aim to advance doctrines of general, i.e. scientific, validity—it is the experience within the depths of your own soul which has the last word on the problem of individual reincarnation, and it is to this that the task falls of transforming the possibility and probability of reincarnation into certainty. . . certainty in the inner forum of consciousness, of course.

There are, therefore, three "continuities" in evolution: biological or hereditary continuity, psychic continuity or reincarnation, and spiritual continuity or the work of salvation. Note that these three lines of continuity correspond to the dynamic triangle to which Fabre d'Olivet reduced the history of the human race—the triangle: destiny, will, providence. Heredity corresponds to destiny (fate), reincarnation to will (freedom) and the work of salvation to providence. This is what he says concerning this triangle:

But if man is. at first. . . only a power in germ which civilisation must develop, whence will come to him the indispensable principles of this culture? I reply that it will be from the two powers to which he finds himself linked and of which he must form the third. . . These two powers, between which he finds himself placed, are destiny and providence. Beneath him is destiny, *natura naturata* (necessitated Nature); above him is providence. *natura naturans* (free Nature). He is himself, as kingdom of man, the mediatory will, the effective force, placed between these two Natures to serve them as a link, a means of communication, and to unite two actions, two movements, which would be incompatible without him.

The three powers which I have just named. . . constitute the universal ternary. Nothing escapes their action; all in the universe is subject to them; all except God himself who, enveloping them in His unfathomable unity, forms with them the sacred tetrad of the ancients, that immense quaternary, which is all in all and outside of which there is nothing. (Fabre d'Olivet, *L'histoire philosophique du genre humain*; trsl. N. L. Redfield. *Hermeneutic Interpretation of the Origin of the Social State of Man and of the Destiny of the Adamic Race*, London-New York, 1915, intr., pp. xl-xli)

I permit myself to add to this quotation from Fabre d'Olivet that during my whole life I have not succeeded in finding a more lucid formula and a more effective general key for understanding the evolution and history of mankind than that given by Fabre d'Olivet. However, the century and a half which has elapsed since his work and the growth of knowledge concerning mankind's history which has been achieved in this lapse of time—and also the unfortunate bias of Fabre d'Olivet, which blinded him with respect to certain mysteries of Christianity—has forced me to revise the *application* by Fabre d'Olivet of his praiseworthy general principles concerning concrete problems and details of the history of mankind. The same remark is applicable also to Saint-Yves d'Alveydre, above all to his work *Mission des juifs* ("The Mission of the Jews"), excepting the anti-Christian bias, which is not to be found with him.

Heredity, reincarnation and the work of salvation—reincarnation being the intermediary principle between the other two—therefore together constitute the cosmic drama of evolution.

The tenth Card of the Tarot, in evoking this whole problem, gives a cross-section through the *middle* of the problem of evolution by portraying the aspect of most practical significance, i.e. the relationship between "animality" (animal nature) and "humanity" (human nature). The sphinx above the wheel represents animality and humanity united—either *still* not differentiated, or *already* reintegrated. The enigma of the sphinx is therefore that of the humanisation of animality and the animalisation of humanity. The dog ascending towards the sphinx represents animality aspiring to union with humanity; the monkey descending represents the process of the animalisation of humanity.

It is a matter, therefore, of the Arcanum of the practical solution of the problem: How to accomplish, without eradication or ejection, a wholeness of the human and animal elements in the human personality without the former animalising (becoming "monkey") or the latter falling under the tyrannical domination (becoming "dogs") of the former? Or, in other words: How to descend into the animal element without becoming animalised and how to make an ascent without the coercion of animality to the human element?

Now, the tenth Arcanum is also strictly practical. It is a spiritual exercise which has the aim of awakening an "arcanum", i.e. skilled knowledge of a certain "know-how". And the "know-how" of which it is a matter with the tenth Arcanum is the right way of handling on the one hand the elements of animalised man, which proceed away from a centre, and on the other hand those elements of animality aspiring to humanity, which strive towards a stable centre. This stable centre is the sphinx, placed above the wheel of animality, i.e. above the *automatic* movement in man's psychic nature.

The wheel and the sphinx above it. . . what practical task does this context suggest? The following:

There is "created" animality and there is "evolved" animality. The former had its origin before the Fall and the latter owes its existence to evolution since the

Fall. i.e. to the work of the serpent. There is the animality created by the divine Word of which the Gospel of John says that "all things were made through him, and nothing that was made was made without him" (John i, 3). and of which Moses' Book of Genesis speaks in terms of the creation of animals "according to their kinds" (Genesis i, 24) on the fifth and sixth days of the creation.

The animality of divine origin is summarised by the four prototypes or kind of the holy *Hayoth* (Cherubim). These are: the Bull, the Lion, the Eagle and the Angel or Man. And if one unites these four prototypes in one sole being, one obtains the *sphinx*. The sphinx is therefore the prototype-synthesis of holy animality, i.e. divine instinctivity, or the principle of spontaneous obedience to God. For "holy animality" means nothing other than "spontaneous obedience to God" or "divine instinct".

The *other* instincts are due to the evolution of the serpent. They are summarised by the term *bestiality*. Therefore, there are instincts of divine origin and there are bestial instincts. Thus, the instinct which leads to elevation of the spirit and of the heart is symbolised by the Eagle, which iconographic tradition represents as the inspirative principle—or channel of divine inspiration—of John the Evangelist. At the same time, the eagle as the prototype of the bird of prey represents the instinct of aggression and lightning attack. It is the eagle as the instinct of rapaciousness which figured, as the inspiring principle, on the standards of the Roman legions.

Similarly, the Lion symbolises the instinct that can be designated as "moral courage". The martyrs were representatives of the Lion, and it is the Lion as "moral courage" which is associated with the evangelist Mark in Christian iconography. But just as there is the Eagle and the eagle, so there is the Lion and the lion. Ferociousness is to moral courage as the lion is to the Lion. The former is a degeneration of the latter.

The Bull is the symbol of the instinct of productive concentration. It underlies the propensity to deep meditation. It is the channel of divine inspiration of the evangelist Luke. It is the Bull in this sense which has given rise to the cult of the sacred Cow (the female aspect of the Bull) in India. The worship of the cow in India is simply a popular counterpart to the Hindu propensity for meditation. But again there is the Bull and the bull. The latter is a degeneration of the former. It is concentration of the will on a single thing, rendering the subject blind to everything else. In sacrificing the bull in the Mithraic mysteries, it was not intended that the propensity to meditation be killed, but rather that impetuosity—rage which blinds—be slain.

The evangelist Matthew, according to iconography, has the Angel or Man as inspiring companion, who represents the propensity to objectivity, which is manifested, for example, in the truthfulness of an epic narrative made by an annalist or chronicler. But there is objectivity and "objectivity". One can be objective, i.e. impartial, in taking everything equally to heart. And one can be "objective" ("impartial") in assuming an attitude of equal indifference towards every-

thing. The former is Angelic objectivity; the latter is its degeneration—it is that of cold and heartless observation. The former manifests itself by means of the instinct that we call *conscience*; the latter is manifested in what many take to be the "scientific spirit" and which, truth to tell, is only the propensity towards *cynicism*.

Thus we have a comparative array of the principle instincts of divine origin and those that have originated since the Fall.

Now, the practical task which follows from this is that of inner alchemy: the transmutation of fallen instincts into their non-fallen prototypes, i.e. the transmutation of "eagle" into Eagle, of "lion" into Lion, of "bull" into Bull, and of "man" into Angel—or, in other words, the task is to establish, or re-establish, the *sphinx* above the wheel of instinctivity, to transform the "wheel" of psychic automatism into the sphinx. How is this to be done?

By way of metamorphosis, i.e. by alternating contraction and expansion. . . just as the growth of a plant is the manifestation of two tendencies—a vertical tendency and a horizontal tendency—operating alternately, so that the former pushes upwards and the latter effects its blossoming out, so does psychic metamorphosis operate by restriction of the expansive tendency, which results in elevation, followed by expansion on the new plane attained by elevation which, in turn, will be followed by restriction, resulting in a new elevation, and so on. This is the law of metamorphosis which Goethe ascertained and studied in the plant realm, and it is also the law of transmutation of psychic forces—the narrow way, or the way of the Cross—in the human kingdom. For human beings and plants live under the law of the Cross—the latter organically, the former spiritually. For this reason the plant is a "manual" of practical Hermeticism, where one can read the immutable laws of spiritual discipline. Schiller, the "brother" of Goethe, understood this. which is why he said:

Dost thou seek the highest, the greatest?
 The plant can show it thee.
 What the plant is unconsciously,
 Be thou intentionally
 —That's it!

*(Suchst du das Höchste, das Grösste?
 Die Pflanze kann es dich lehren,
 Was sie willenlos ist, sei du es wollend— das is!s!)*

This is because the plant kingdom is the most virginal realm of Nature following the Fall, and because man is on the way to the Reintegration. Every garden therefore preserves something of the garden of Eden, and can serve as a living library for someone aspiring to salvation.

Now, it is a matter of extending the law of the Cross, which rules the plant realm organically and the human kingdom spiritually, to the *animal kingdom* also. And

this must be done not by training dogs, horses and parrots, but rather by applying the law of the Cross to the inner animality in man's psychic life. It is necessary to restrain the bull in us in order to elevate it to the Bull. This means to say that the instinctive desire which shows itself as rage concentrated upon a single thing, and which blinds one to everything else, is to be restrained and thus elevated to the propensity for profound meditation. This entire operation is summarised in Hermeticism by the words "to be silent". The precept "to be silent" is not, as many authors interpret it, solely a rule of prudence, but it is moreover a *practical method* of transforming this narrowing and blinkering instinct into a propensity towards depth and, correspondingly, an aversion towards all that is of a superficial nature.

The winged Bull is therefore the result obtained by the procedure of "being silent". This means to say that the Bull is elevated to the level of the Eagle and is united with it. A marriage of the impetus towards the heights and the propensity towards depth is effected by this union. The marriage of opposites—this traditional theme of alchemy—is the essence of the practice of the law of the Cross. For the Cross is the union of two pairs of opposites, and the practice of the Cross is the work of conciliation of four opposites—two horizontal and two vertical opposites. The Eagle and the Bull are vertical opposites: they are the tendencies towards the heights and the depths, towards the general and the particular, towards a comprehensive overview and towards the minutiae of points of detail.

The Angel and the Lion constitute the other pair of opposites on the cross of man's instinctivity. Here it is a matter of the transformation of combative courage into moral courage—into the courage of *conscience*. For the instinct that we call "moral conscience" is the effect of inspiration on the part of the Angel, and it is by elevating instinctual courage, i.e. the desire for heroism, adventure and struggle, that the latter is united with conscience and becomes the moral courage that we admire in martyrs and saints.

The *winged Lion* is the result to be obtained by the procedure signified by the term "to dare", which implies moral courage. Just as the Bull becomes winged through its conjunction with the Eagle by the practice of "to be silent", and just as the Eagle acquires the constancy and perseverance of the Bull thanks to the practice of "to will"—so does the Lion acquire wings through its conjunction with the Angel by the practice of "to dare", and the effect of the inspiration of the Angel, which one's "daring" produces, becomes spontaneous certainty by the practice signified by the term "to know". These are therefore the four lines of endeavour with a view to achieving the task symbolised by the sphinx: to be silent, to will, to dare and to know.

"To be silent" is the restriction of the will which elevates itself, following the law of the Cross, as a consequence of this restriction. Then it has its expansion on another plane. There it becomes the true "to will".

Constant attention to conscience restrains impulsiveness and this latter is therefore raised to a new plane, where it has its expansion. The disciplining of impulsiveness by conscience is the practical sense of "to dare" and "to know". For

it is only in harmony with knowledge due to conscience that impulsiveness becomes a "legitimate daring" or moral courage.

Here is the principle of Hermetic asceticism over the millennia. It is based on the law of the Cross; its aim is the sphinx, which is animality united with humanity. It is clear that this is a very ancient teaching and that the tenth Arcanum goes back to ancient Hermeticism before our era; we are put into contact with the ideas of those who erected the sphinx and the pyramids. It is *intrinsic* evidence—not iconographic and historical evidence—which leads us to this conclusion.

And what reinforces this, moreover, is what is missing from the tenth Card. It presents us the wheel of animality and the sphinx as the solution to the practical problem of animality. Now, a more profound and sustained analysis of the sphinx and of the whole context of the Card leads us inevitably to *four* animals and to all that this comprises: divine and fallen animality, the Fall and the Reintegration, the principle of practical asceticism, etc. All this can be amplified by the facts and knowledge that modern history, biology and psychology supply us with. But one essential thing is lacking from this Card—this is the *quinta essentia*, the "fifth essence"—which would make the sphinx a reality for us, *but which is not the sphinx itself*. The active principle of the Cross—the "fifth essence", without which the whole operation cannot be practised and would remain only knowledge and a hope—is not to be found indicated here. The sphinx figures here as the last solution or, rather, as the last *enigma*.

The absence of a *direct* indication (for indirectly the whole Card relates to the enigma of the sphinx and, through this very fact, to the "fifth essence") in the context of the Card of the principle of the *New Adam*, who is the "fifth essence"—as we know today equally in esotericism and exotericism—indicates the *pre-Christian* origin of the tenth Card. From the point of view of iconography it is clearly mediaeval (of the *late* Middle Ages), as all the other Cards are, but *intrinsically* it is older, notably pre-Christian.

Is it the oldest or is it simply the *least evolved* of the twenty-two Cards of the Major Arcana of the Tarot?

The twenty-two Cards of the Major Arcana of the Tarot being an *organism*, a complete whole, it is not a question of diverse and disparate origins of particular Cards, but rather of the degrees of their evolution or transformation. For the Tarot, also, is *not a wheel*, a closed circle, but rather a *spiral*, i.e. it evolves through tradition and . . . reincarnation.

The authors who saw in the Tarot the "Sacred Book of Thoth" (Thoth = Hermes Trismegistus) were both right and wrong at the same time. They were right in so far as they traced back the history of the *essence* of the Tarot to antiquity, notably to ancient Egypt. And they were wrong in so far as they believed that the Tarot had been *inherited* from ancient Egypt, i.e. that it had been *transmitted* (torn generation to generation subject to minor iconographic changes. As support for their thesis the ingenious story or legend (that you probably know) is recounted concerning the council of Egyptian priests who deliberated on the problem of

the preservation of the essence of their wisdom for the generations to come, after the extinguishing of the light of Egypt. Proposition after proposition was rejected—whether to commit the wisdom to paper, stone, metal, etc.—and at last it was decided to entrust the wisdom to a less destructible and more stable agent than paper, stone and metal, i.e. to human *vice*. Thus a game of cards, the Tarot, was devised, which has come down to us.

But from an iconographic point of view, the Tarot is definitely mediaeval. And from a historical point of view, there is no evidence that it existed before the end of the fourteenth century (cf. Gerard van Rijnberk, *Le 'larot*, Lyons, 1947, pp. 48ff.). Therefore if it is a matter of a popular game—designed to be as such by Egyptian sages—we would have to have a lot of material concerning the Tarot (as a card-game) during the fourteen, or at least ten, preceding centuries during which there is a complete silence concerning the Tarot.

No, the Tarot is *not inherited*, it has *reincarnated*. It has "reincarnated" in conformity with the experience of modern depth psychology of the school of Jung, who ascertained the upsurge of ancient and even archaic mysteries and cults from the depths of the unconscious of people in the twentieth century. The Tarot is the "Sacred Book of Thoth"—not inherited or transmitted—but reborn.

In support of this thesis, let us make a quotation—this time not from a modern legend, but from the text of a Greek Hermetic treatise of considerable antiquity. This is *Kore Kosmu*, or Isis teaching her son Horus the mysteries of heaven, here it is a matter of the "Sacred Book of Thoth", concerning its nature and origin. The following is the relevant text:

As long as the Craftsman who made the universe willed not to be known, all was wrapped in ignorance. But when he determined to reveal himself, he breathed into certain godlike men a passionate desire to know him, and bestowed on their minds a radiance ampler than that which they already had within their breasts, so that they might first will to seek the yet unknown God, and then have power to find him. But this, Horus my wondrous son, it would not have been possible for men of mortal breed to do, if there had not arisen one whose soul was responsive to the influence of the holy Powers of heaven. And such a man was Hermes, he who won knowledge of all. Hermes saw all things, and understood what he saw, and had power to explain to others what he understood. . . *for what he had discovered he inscribed on tablets, and hid securely what he had inscribed, leaving the larger part untold, that all later ages of the world might seek it. . .* And thus did Hermes speak: ". . . And now I must deposit hard by the secret things of Osiris these holy symbols of the cosmic elements, and after speaking over them a prayer, depart to heaven." It is not fitting, my son, that I should leave this report unfinished; I must tell you all that Hermes said

when he was depositing his books. Thus did he speak: "Ye holy books, which have been written by my perishable hands, but have been annointed with the drug of imperishability by Him who is master over all, *remain ye undecaying through all ages.* and be ye unseen and undiscovered by all men who shall go to and fro on the plains of this land, until the time when heaven, grown old, shall beget organisms (those that the Creator has named *souls*) worthy of you." Having spoken this prayer over the works of his hands, *Hermes was received into the sanctuary of the everlasting zones.* (*Kore Kosmu*; trsl. Walter Scott, *Hermetica* vol. i. Oxford, 1924, pp. 459-461)

This is the Graeco-Egyptian version of the nature and origin of the "Sacred Book of Thoth". According to this version the books comprising it were engraved by "perishable hands, but have been annointed with the drug of imperishability" and remain deposited "undecaying through all ages" in the "sanctuary of the everlasting zones" belonging to Hermes, so "that all later ages of the world might seek them. . ." They are therefore "inscribed" magically in a region *between heaven and earth*, close enough to the earth to be reached by the souls of seekers on the earth and to awake in them the spirit of quest through their attraction, and far enough removed, on the other hand, so as never to be seized by cerebral intellectuality, i.e. to be taken hold of, analysed and exploited by it. The *original* of the "Sacred Book of Thoth" is to be found in the "trans-cerebral" region. For this reason it is necessary to seek for it not in crypts, manuscripts or stone inscriptions, nor even in secret societies or fraternities, but rather in the "sanctuary of the everlasting zones" belonging to Hermes, It is necessary to *elevate oneself* above the zone of cerebral intellectuality, because the "sacred books" were written, according to the Hermetic treatise that we have quoted, *before* the formation of the brain. They make an appeal — magically effective across time, "throughout all ages"— to transcend cerebral intellectuality, and to raise "the organisms worthy of them, those that the Creator has named *souls*", to the region where they remain deposited.

This region, this garden of the "holy symbols of the cosmic elements", planted between earth and heaven — these magical formulae, gnostic symbols and mystic fires of the primordial revelation, which constitute the "sanctuary" above cerebral intellectuality and below heaven — is the *reality* of Hermeticism. It is an incentive across the ages, stimulating human souls to aspire to the vision of "all things" and, having seen this totality, to comprehend it, and having comprehended it, to attain the power of revealing it and showing it. The *totality of things* (*ta sympanta*. in Greek) — this is the soul of Hermeticism across time, "throughout all ages". And as the brain is the organ of practical specialisation, the appeal and aspiration to the totality of things (*la sympanta*) amounts to an appeal and aspiration to transcend the brain and cerebral intellectuality.

Hermeticism haunts mankind from century to century. Is this because of a pleiad

of brilliant writers? Or because of secret societies, or again because of the attraction towards what is secret in general? It could be. . .

But why are there always writers, and in every epoch? And why are there secret societies? Why, lastly, does the secret itself exercise such an attraction?

Because in the depths of the unconscious—which knocks at the door and wants to become conscious—there is present the "sanctuary of the everlasting zones", where the "Sacred Book of Thoth" remains deposited, from whence symbolic and Hermetic works are born, or reincarnate. The Tarot is such a work.

The Tarot has its invisible prototype, and the function and mission of the Tarot is to elevate the soul to this original. This is why it is a system of spiritual exercises. It gives direction and an impulse to transcend cerebral intellectuality for the *soul* to penetrate into the "sanctuary of the everlasting zones" where the "holy symbols of the cosmic elements" remain.

The totality of things.. intuition transcending cerebral intellectuality . . Hermeticism.. But why Hermeticism? Is this not the aspiration of every metaphysical philosophy and all religious mystical practice?

Certainly the mystical practice of religion transcends cerebral intellectuality. But it does so in order to attain *heaven*, and not the intermediary zone between heaven and earth, where the primordial revelation of the "mysteries of heaven" are found deposited. Saints *live* the light, warmth and life of heaven. Celestial gold, blue and white radiate into their lives and through their lives.

With respect to Hermeticists, they are called — or should I say "condemned"?— to live neither for the day of earth nor for the Day of heaven, but rather are immersed in the Night, in the profound darkness of the mystery of relationships between heaven and earth. The thinking which unites heaven and earth, which is immanent equally in every earthly phenomenal structure and every celestial noumenal entity, is that which is the vision and comprehension of the totality of things, as the power to reveal it and show it.

Saints do not aspire to cosmic *thought*, to a comprehension of the totality of things, but rather to divine *life*.

And metaphysicians? Do not idealist philosophers aspire to the totality of things. to grasp it through thought?

Plato, the father of metaphysical philosophy, had had the experience of trans-cerebral thinking, of thought that is not *conceived*, but *seen*. This is why he was able to teach the method of gradual elevation beyond cerebral intellectuality: the elevation from an opinion (*doxa*) which is possible, to a conclusion (*dianoia*) which is probable, by way of dialectical argument and, lastly, from a probable conclusion to the certainty of immediate perception (*episteme*). It is through *episteme*, through immediate perception, that he had had the experience of *objective* thought, cosmic thought, that he named the "world of ideas". Having had the experience of ideas that are not conceived or invented through subjective cerebral intellectuality, but perceived and contemplated through *episteme*, Plato com-

mitted an error—moreover, quite understandable—of peopling the higher sphere of the spiritual world with ideas, although no "world of ideas" as a separate world or sphere exists. The whole world is peopled only by *individual beings*, and ideas live and exist only in them, through them and in relationships between them. Ideas are certainly real, but as an *immanent* reality, not as a separate reality. Ideas live only in a given consciousness—be it that of God, or of the Angelic hierarchies, or of man.

But they can also be projected outwards (or "engraved", as our ancient treatise expresses it), incarnated in symbols and formulae, and thus conserved in the objective spiritual world. This entire operation of the projection, incarnation and conservation of ideas is called in Hermeticism "writing the book". It is of such a "book" that the Apocalypse speaks when it says:

And I saw in the right hand of Him who was seated on the throne a book written within and without, sealed with seven seals. (Revelation v, 1)

Such, also, is the "Sacred Book (or Books) of Thoth" of which *Kore Kosmu* speaks.

Now, Plato, in elevating himself above cerebral intellectuality, had a meeting with the "Sacred Book of Thoth", with the "holy symbols of the cosmic elements", which are "imperishable and undecaying", and which are in the "sanctuary of the everlasting zones" belonging to Hermes. As the Hermeticist that he was, he attained to the "sanctuary", but as the speculative philosopher that he was also, he failed to appreciate the magical fact of a *living spiritual monument* and he gave it an interpretation—which was later declined by his disciple Aristotle—which is not magical but "rational", in postulating a "world of ideas" beyond the world of phenomena.

Here is the fundamental error of all metaphysical philosophy, from Plato to the present time. It hypostatizes ideas. Ideas live only in the consciousness of individuals or are present *in potency* in books—in visibly written books, such as the Holy Scripture, in invisible books, which are living spiritual monuments due to the operation of divine magic and, lastly, in the whole world, which is also a great book containing *in potency* the ideas of its creation and destiny expressed through the *symbolism of facts*.

This is, therefore, how Hermeticism differs from religious mysticism and metaphysical philosophy. Hermeticism as the aspiration to the *totality of things* is neither a school, nor a sect, nor a community. It is the *destiny* of a certain class or group of souls. For there are souls who *must* necessarily aspire to the "totality of things", and who are impelled by the river current of thought, which never stops, flowing always forward and always further on, without cease. . . There is no stopping for these souls; they cannot, without renouncing their own lives, leave this river of thought, which pours without cease—equally during youth, mature age and old age—without halting, from one darkness needing to be illumined to

another darkness needing to be penetrated. Such was, is, and will be my destiny. And in addressing these Letters to the *Unknown Friend*, I address myself to he who shares this destiny with me.

Monsieur Professor, forgive me this arrogant and immodest (if not puerile, in your eyes) aspiration — the aspiration to personal certainty with respect to the totality of things — that you, in the industrious and fertile work that you do, hope to attain only after centuries of the collective endeavour of generations of scientists. But at least know that I am infinitely grateful to you, and that you have in me a disciple always eager to learn from you, with respect and gratitude, and who would never presume to teach you, whatever it may be.

Monsieur Priest, pardon me concerning what you think to be human pride which wants to penetate into the mysteries of God, instead of bowing before divine wisdom and goodness and accepting with humility, as befits a Christian, the revealed truths of salvation — which, in so far as they are practised, suffice absolutely for the well-being, happiness and salvation of the soul. I say this to you now as if at confession: *I am unable not to* aspire to the depth, the height and the breadth of comprehensive truth, to comprehension of the *totality of things*. I have made the sacrifice of the intellect (*sacrificium intellectus*) in all sincerity and without reserve, but what an intensification of the life of thought, what increased ardour in the aspiration to spiritual knowledge, that has followed! I know that the truths of salvation revealed and transmitted by the Council of the Holy Church are both necessary and sufficient for salvation, and I have no doubt whatever that they are true, and I strive to do my best to practise them; but *I am unable* to arrest the current of the river of thought which bears me towards mysteries that perhaps are meant only for saints—perhaps only for Angels—in any case, that I know without doubt are reserved for beings more worthy than me. Father, will you grant me absolution?

Come what may. I can only echo Jacob's words:

I will not let you go until you have blessed me.
(Genesis xxxii, 26)