

*Meditation on the
Thirteenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot*

DEATH
LA MORT

And the woman said to the serpent,
"We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden;
but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the
tree which is in the midst of the garden,
neither shall you touch it, lest you die.' "
But the serpent said to the woman,
"You will not die.
For God knows that when you eat of it
your eyes will be opened,
and you will be as gods,
knowing good and evil."

(Genesis iii, 2-5)

O dry bones, hear the word of the LORD.
(Ezekiel xxvii, 4)

LETTER XIII



Dear Unknown Friend,

Have you ever been struck by the contrary statements concerning death made by God and the serpent in the narrative in Genesis on the Fall? Because God says there, "You shall not eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for on the day when you eat from it you will die", and the serpent says, "You will not die". Here God is categorical; the serpent is just as much so.

Did the serpent quite simply lie? Or is it a matter of a fundamental error on the part of the serpent? Or again, did he state a truth from the range of truths proper to the domain of the serpent which are untruths in the domain of truths for God? In other words, are there *two* immortalities and *two* different deaths - one from the point of view of God, the other from the point of view of the ser-

pent? Thus, is it simply that the serpent understands by "death" what God understands by "life" and that he understands by "life" what God understands by "death"?

Now, I invite you dear Unknown Friend to set to work with a view to finding an answer to this question, whilst bringing to your attention fruits of the work that I have made towards the same end. For the answer to this question is the Arcanum of the thirteenth Card of the Tarot, "Death", which represents a skeleton who reaps only what pushes up from the black soil and rises above it—hands, heads, etc.

Our empirical experience of death is the *disappearance* from the physical plane of living beings. Such is the fact of our experience from without, that we have by means of our five senses. But the *disappearance* as such is not confined to the domain of outward experience of the senses. It is experienced also in the domain of inner experience, in that of consciousness. There the images and representations disappear just as living beings do so for the experience of the senses. This is what we call "forgetting". And this forgetting extends each night to the totality of our memory, will and understanding—of a kind such that we forget *ourselves* entirely. This is what we call "sleep".

For our whole experience (outer and inner) forgetting, sleep and death are three manifestations of the same thing—namely the "thing" which effects disappearance. It is said that sleep is the younger brother of death. It is necessary to add: forgetting is the brother of sleep.

Forgetting, sleep and death are three manifestations—differing in degree—of a sole principle or force which effects the disappearance of intellectual, psychic and physical phenomena. Forgetting is to sleep as sleep is to death. Or again: forgetting is to memory as sleep is to consciousness, and sleep is to consciousness as death is to life.

One forgets, one goes to sleep, and one dies. One remembers, one awakes, and one is born. Remembering is to forgetting as awakening is to falling asleep, and awakening is to sleeping as birth is to death. One forgets oneself when one goes to sleep, and one remembers oneself when one awakes. It is also the mechanism of forgetting which is at work when one dies, and it is the mechanism of remembering which works at birth. When Nature forgets us, then we die; when we forget ourselves, then we fall asleep; and when we lose active interest in something, then we forget it.

Nevertheless, it must not be forgotten that the respective domains of forgetting, sleep and death are more vast and more profound than intellectual forgetting, organic sleep, and clinical death. Apart from intellectual forgetting there is also forgetting in the domain of the soul (psychic forgetting) and a forgetting in the domain of the will, just as there is memory in the domain of the soul and memory in the domain of the will—beyond intellectual memory. Thus, for example, one can retain a clear and precise intellectual memory of a friend from the past but at the same time have completely forgotten him psychically. One

recalls, but without the living friendship of former times. Similarly, one can remember a person intellectually and psychically, i.e. with vivid feeling, but at the same time have forgotten him in the domain of the will. One remembers him with tenderness perhaps, but one *does nothing* for him.

Beyond organic sleep, i.e. when one is in bed and oblivious of everything including oneself, there is psychic sleep and a sleep of the will. During the sixteen or eighteen hours that we are in the waking state there are layers of our psychic being which are asleep. During the waking state one is "asleep" to many things — facts, people, ideas. God...

And if the Buddha is considered — and venerated — as "fully awake" to the facts of human life such as sickness, old age and death, it is because those who are not Buddhas know that they are asleep with regard to these facts — not intellectually, but psychically and in their will. They "know" it and they *do not know* it at the same time. For one *knows* truly when one *understands* what one knows, when one *feels* what one has understood, and when one has *put into practice* what one has understood and felt.

Similarly, beyond clinical death there is a psychic death and a moral death. During our seventy or eighty years of life we bear within us layers of death in our psychic being. There are things which are missing from our psychic and moral being. The *absence* of faith, hope and love cannot be remedied either by arguments or by exhortations or even by a living example. An act of divine magic — or grace — is necessary to accomplish the *infusion* of life into that which is dead. And if Christ is worshipped as the Risen One, it is because those who bear death within them know that it is only divine magic which can raise what is dead within them and that the risen Christ is the guarantor of this.

Forgetting, sleep and death — like remembering, waking and birth — have imaginary and symbolic expressions proper to them. Thus *black* is the image of forgetting, *tufts of grass* are the image of sleep, and a *skeleton* with a scythe is the image of death. Black is the symbol both of involuntary and natural forgetting and of that voluntary and supernatural forgetting of which St. John of the Cross speaks — this threefold night of the senses, the understanding and the will, in which the union of the soul with God is accomplished. Tufts of grass or leaves are the symbol of sleep, because deep sleep is the state where we live a vegetative life. Organic life — breathing, circulation, digestion and growth — continue during sleep without "animality" and "humanity" being present. We are "plants" when we are deep in sleep. And the skeleton is the symbol of death because it reduces the phenomenon of the conscious, mobile, living and material man to that which is *mineral* in him — the skeleton.

Natural forgetting reduces man to *animality*; natural sleep reduces him to *vegetality*; and natural death reduces him to *minerality*. The whole problem of death, comprising three degrees — forgetting, sleep and death proper, or the *Arcanum of death* — must therefore be presented to us as the image of a black sphere, beneath which there are tufts of grass and above which there is a skeleton.

And it is precisely the thirteenth Card of the Tarot which presents us this im-

age. The *context* of the Card is that of the threefold manifestation of the *principle of subtraction* by way of forgetting, sleep and death. We have here the black soil, the blue and yellow tufts of grass, and also the skeleton mowing. The Card contains still a fourth element, represented on the Card by the human heads and hands, and one foot, to which we shall return later.

The thirteenth Arcanum of the Tarot is therefore that of the *principle of subtraction* or death, and is the opposite of the *principle of addition* or life. It is necessary to *subtract* the Self from the astral body, the etheric body and the physical body in order to understand the mechanism of *forgetting*; it is necessary to subtract the Self and the astral body, from the etheric body and the physical body in order to obtain the state of *sleep*; and it is necessary to subtract the Self, the astral body and the etheric body from the physical body in order to obtain the corpse, i.e. the fact of *death*. These three degrees of subtraction in their totality constitute the process of *excarnation*, just as the corresponding three degrees of addition constitute the totality of the process of *incarnation*. For incarnation is the addition of an astral body to the Self, the addition of an etheric body to the astral body and the Self, and lastly the addition of a physical body to the etheric body, the astral body and the Self.

Now, the *scythe* which is held by the skeleton of the Card represents the work of subtraction. It is this which symbolises the force of excarnation, i.e. that which severs the ties between the Self and the astral body (forgetting), the ties between the astral body and the etheric body (sleep), and the ties between the etheric body and the physical body (death).

What are the ties between the soul and the body—rather, the soul and the *bodies*—that the scythe of the threefold principle of subtraction severs? What is it that unites the Self to the astral body, the astral body to the vital or etheric body, and the vital body to the physical body? In other words, how and why do we remember the past, how and why do we wake in the morning, and how and why do we live several decades?

In the first place, let us disregard the enormous literature where these questions are dealt with and endeavour to undertake a *meditative* work, i.e. to think *directly* about the subject which occupies us, without the intermediary of what may be borrowed from sources other than our immediate experience and understanding. To meditate is to think with a view to attaining certainty in the inner forum of consciousness, renouncing all pretension of arriving at things of general validity (i.e. things which may be a contribution to *science*). In meditation—and these Letters are only meditations—it is a matter above all of the question, posed in all honesty to our own conscience and answered in all honesty by our own conscience: "What do I *myself know*?", and not the question: "What is generally known?"

Let us disregard for the moment, dear Unknown Friend, *what is generally known and said on* the subject of the ties between the soul and the body, and let us

endeavour to take account — just for ourselves — of what *we* know and are able to know about it.

Firstly, let us consider the domain of forgetting and remembering — the memory. Memory is the magic, in the subjective domain, which effects the evocation of things from the past. It renders past things present. Just as a sorcerer or necromancer evokes the spirits of the dead by making them appear, so does memory evoke things of the past and make them appear to our inner mental vision. The present *remembrance* is the result of a magical operation in the subjective domain, where one has succeeded in evoking from the black void of forgetfulness a living image from the past. A living image from the past. . . imprint? symbol? copy? phantom? It is all of these at once. It is an imprint in so far as it reproduces an impression received in the past; it is a symbol in so far as it makes use of my imagination to represent a *reality* which goes beyond its imaginary representation; it is a copy in so far as it only aims at reproducing the original from the past; it is a phantom in so far as it is an apparition from the black abyss of forgetfulness and in so far as it recalls to life the past in making it present to my inner vision.

What is the force at work in the subjective magical operation of remembering?

There are four types of memory that one experiences: mechanical or automatic memory, logical memory, moral memory and vertical or revelatory memory.

Mechanical or automatic memory hardly makes any demand on the act of recall. The remembrance simply *happens*. It takes place in an automatic way according to the laws of association — i.e. resemblances, affinities and alliances between things — which effect recall without my taking any other part than that of an observer. This sort of memory supplies me, on the occasion of each impression that I receive, with a host of images of the past from which I can choose. Thus when I see a pipe, I can choose between images of the past which present themselves to my mind, e.g. "an old sea-dog whom I saw at B. in 19. . ."; "a book on Red Indians where it was a matter of the peace-pipe ritual", "my friend S. who used to put everyone to flight when he lit his pipe of tobacco cultivated and prepared by himself at the time of the last war when there was no tobacco for sale", etc.

In so far as logical memory is concerned, I am more active than in the case of automatic memory. Here I have *to think* in order to remember things. Thus, for example, if I want to remember the Hindu Trinity, amongst whom I have forgotten one of the three terms, I ask myself: If there is a Creator and a Destroyer, Brahma and Shiva, which third principle *ought* to be found between the Creator and the Destroyer? I concentrate on the empty place between the two and I make an effort to fill it logically. "Ah, it is the Conserver principle- this is Vishnu — of course!" I say to myself. In logical memory there is less automatism and more conscious effort.

With respect to moral memory, there is hardly any automatism. Here the remembrance is no longer something which happens but rather it is an authentic magical act, although subjective. It is love which is at work in moral memory when

it recalls things from the past. Here it is admiration, respect, friendship, gratitude, affection and a thousand other things which have deeply moved you, which render things from the past *unforgettable*, i.e. evocable at each instant. The more one has loved, the more one remembers through moral memory.

As a general rule young people possess a very strong mechanical memory. It becomes feebler with age and it is logical or intellectual memory which comes to its assistance. This demands an effort to think, an intellectual effort. People who have failed to develop a taste for thinking and intellectual effort will have difficulties with their memory in mature age. Mechanical memory will fail them more and more, and logical memory, called to supplement it, will also be lacking.

With respect to moral memory, it is above all in old age that it replaces more and more not only mechanical memory but also logical and intellectual memory. It is the heart then which supplies the energy which nourishes and maintains memory and which supplements the growing lapse of mechanical memory and intellectual memory. Senile lapse of memory is due to the fact that the person who suffers from it failed to replace in time the functions of intellectual memory without mentioning mechanical memory— by those of moral memory. People who are able to and who know how to give everything a moral worth and to see a moral sense in everything will not forget anything: they will have a normal, if not excellent, memory to a very advanced age.

Moral memory—which can comprehend everything without exception—is all the more effective the less one is morally indifferent. Indifference, a lack of moral interest, is the fundamental cause of the lapse of memory which often takes place in old age. The less one is indifferent, the more one remembers of the past and the more one is capable of learning new things.

Beyond the three types of memory—mechanical, logical and moral—of which it is a matter here, there is still the kind of memory that we have designated as "vertical or revelatory memory". It is not a memory of the past in the sense of the horizontal line: today, yesterday, the day before, etc.. but rather in the sense of the vertical line: here, higher, still higher, etc. It is a "memory" which does not link the present to the past on the plane of physical, psychic and intellectual life. but which links the plane of ordinary consciousness to planes or states of consciousness higher than that of ordinary consciousness. It is the faculty of the "lower self to reproduce the experience and knowledge of the "higher Self or, if you like, the faculty of the "higher Self to imprint its experience and knowledge upon the consciousness of the "lower self. It is the link between the "higher eye" and the "lower eye", which renders us authentically religious and wise, and immune to the assaults of scepticism, materialism and determinism. It is this also which is the source of certainty not only of God and the spiritual world with its hierarchical entities but also of the immortality of our being and reincarnation, wherever it is a matter of reincarnation. "Dawn is the friend of the muses" and similar

popular proverbs —such as *Die Morgenslunde hat Goldiim Munde* ("the morning hour has gold in its mouth"), or *Utro vechera mudreye* ("morning is wiser than the evening"), or even *De morgenstond heeft goudin den mond* (the Dutch version of *Die Morgenstunde bat Go/dim Munde*) — relate to the benefits of vertical memory from which one benefits in the morning, after the return of consciousness from the plane of "natural ecstasy" or sleep.

Vertical memory is the more effective to the extent that the three sacred vows — obedience, poverty and chastity—render the lower man capable of listening to, perceiving and receiving things from above without distortion. Vertical memory is fundamentally only moral memory carried in its development to a still higher degree. This is why it is only moral purification, which the practice of the three sacred vows entails, that counts in the case of vertical memory. Intellectual interests, as such, do not count here.

This is an outlined inventory of the domain of memory. Let us now return to the question: What is the force at work in the subjective magical operation of recall?

It is necessary, firstly, to take account of the fact that in the scale that we have established: "mechanical memory"—"intellectual memory"—"moral memory"—"vertical memory" it is a matter of degrees of *remoteness and proximity*, concerning an immediate and lucid understanding of the evidence as to "how" and "why" memory functions through consciousness. In fact, the more something is mechanical, the more it is removed from immediate understanding through consciousness, and the more it is removed from the latter, the more it is mysterious and incomprehensible. A purely mechanical explanation is, truth to tell, not at all an explanation, because it removes the object to be explained from the domain where understanding takes place—by shifting it from the domain of comprehensibility, i.e. from "thinkability" and "feelability"—into the domain of the unconscious and therefore of incomprehensibility. He who wants to explain the phenomenon of smiling, for example, by the contraction of muscles in the region of the mouth and cheeks, and this latter through electrical impulses transmitted through the nerves from the centre called the "brain", will in no way give an explanation of the phenomenon of "smiling", even if he correctly describes the entire mechanical process in the muscles and nerves, for the simple reason that he disregards the *joy* of which the smiling is a manifestation and which set in motion both the muscles of the mouth and the electrical impulses of the nerves. For it is not nerves and muscles which are manifested in smiling, but rather joy.

And just as the description of the mechanical process of the muscles and nerves is in no way a reply to the question: What is smiling?, so is every mechanical explanation of whatever it may be in no way an explanation of the whole, but rather it reduces questions to silence by shifting the subject of the questions from the domain of comprehensibility to that of incomprehensibility—from the light of consciousness to the darkness of the unconscious. For what we call "mechanical"

is in reality only the unconscious (or rather "that which is deprived of consciousness") and is therefore inaccessible to consciousness, and therefore incomprehensible, unthinkable and unfeeling. "Mechanicalism" is therefore not at all the realm of answers, but rather the graveyard for real questions.

This is why in the scale of memory under discussion we must not — and in fact cannot — seek to understand the working of recall in the domain where it is unknowable and incomprehensible, i.e. in that of "mechanical memory". On the contrary, we must seek it at the other end of the scale — where it is least embedded in the darkness of "mechanicalism" and where it most reveals its essence in the light of consciousness, i.e. in the domain of "moral memory" and "vertical memory". For it is the stage of complete development which illumines and explains the previous stages, and not vice versa. The minimum is only the reduced maximum and it is through the maximum that one understands the minimum, and not vice versa. It is consciousness which renders the mechanical and unconscious comprehensible, the latter being only consciousness reduced to a minimum, and not vice versa. It is man who is the key to the biological evolution of Nature and not the primitive organic cell.

We must therefore seek for the key to the operation of recall in memory at the highest degree of memory's development — "moral memory" and "vertical memory". Therefore, what is the force at work in the subjective magical operation of remembering, such as it is revealed in "vertical memory" and in "moral memory"?

The following reveals it to its highest conceivable degree — other degrees being only its analogous, weakened manifestations:

Now Jesus *loved* Martha and her sister and Lazarus. . . when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. . . Jesus wept. . . Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb; it was a cave, and a stone lay upon it. Jesus said: *Take away the stone...* So they took away the stone.. Jesus *cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come out.* The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with bandages, and his face wrapped with a cloth. (John xi, 5-44)

Here is the *force of recall* in its most complete, most strong and most elevated manifestation. It is *love*, for "Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus".

The operation of *recall* to life — or resurrection — comprises *three* stages: that of *coming*, that of *taking away the stone* and that of *recall*, i.e. "crying with a loud voice".

Firstly, coming: "To come and to arrive" is the activity which seeks and finds the *last door* which separates the recaller from the recalled. The "about two miles between Bethany and Jerusalem that the Master went in order to arrive at the tomb of Lazarus represent the first effort in the whole operation of recall: that which aims at arriving at the point of maximum approach to the subject of recall.

Then, the taking away of the stone: this is the effort which vanquishes doubt.

depression, fatigue and, lastly, despair, which bar the way to the recalled, like the stone placed before the tomb. By analogy, one is powerless to recall in the domain of vertical memory and moral memory things that one believes are lost for ever, or regarding which one believes that it is impossible to call them to the light of consciousness. This doubt and lack of faith paralyses the effort to recall and is like the stone placed before the tomb. This stone is often—if not always—the cause for many people of the absence of all living feeling and conviction, without speaking of precise and concrete remembrances, of former lives, i.e. of reincarnation. The remembrances have knocked at the door in vain, the stone placed before it not allowing them to come out from their depths and enter into the light of consciousness.

Lastly, recall: "To cry with a loud voice" is the culminating—and the supreme—effort of the operation of recall through the force of love, whether to life, as was the case with Lazarus, or whether to memory, as is the case of recall with vertical and moral memory.

A voice is louder, i.e. more audible, in the physical world, the more intense the vibrations are that it produces in the air. It is otherwise in the spiritual world. There a voice is more audible, i.e. "louder", the more it expresses underlying *effort* and *suffering*. *Work* and *suffering* are the things which render our voices audible to the spiritual world and in the spiritual world. These are the factors which create "vibrations" sufficiently "loud" in the spiritual world in order to render our voices audible. This is why the rosary-prayer repeats the *Ave Maria* one hundred and fifty times and the *Pater Noster* fifteen times. For if it is suffering which renders audible the ejaculative prayer of a single word—"Jesus!", for example—it is *effort* which renders the rosary-prayer audible. I would lack respect for the truth if I did not say that the *effort* of the rosary-prayer founded on *suffering* makes it a powerful means—sometimes almost all-powerful—in sacred magic.

Now, the "cry with a loud voice", which is the decisive act in the whole operation of recall, must be strong both in effort and in suffering: "Jesus wept. . . Then Jesus, deeply moved again, came to the tomb. . . Jesus cried with a loud voice: Lazarus, come out." It is love which wept and which strove to accomplish the miracle of recall from death to life—which is also the case in recall from forgetfulness to memory.

Is recall therefore a miracle?

...-yes, a miracle. But allow me, dear Unknown Friend, to say something concerning the miracle that I believe to be of the highest significance, of which every Christian Hermeticist and every Cabbalist should take account: it is that *there is no freedom outside of the miraculous* and that man is man only in so far as he lives from the miracle, through the miracle and for the miracle.

All that is not mechanical—physical, psychic and intellectual—is miraculous, and all that is not miraculous is only mechanical—physical, psychic and intellectual. Freedom is a miracle and man is only free in so far as he is not a machine—Physical, psychic and intellectual. We have no other choice than between the

machine and slavery, on the one hand, and the miracle and freedom, on the other hand.

The human machine *functions* according to the determined programme "maximum pleasure at minimum cost" in a way so as to lend itself to precise prediction in its reactions to given circumstances. In the intellectual domain it rejects every notion and every idea which does not harmonise with the intellectual system established in it; in the psychic domain it rejects all that does not harmonise with the complex of "happiness" established in it; and in the physical domain it automatically follows the orders transmitted by the complex "instinct" established in it.

It is only the *functioning* of the human machine when a rich man declares himself anti-communist and a poor man declares himself pro-communist. But it is a *miracle*—that is to say an act of freedom—when a rich man abandons his possessions and embraces poverty, as did St. Anthony the Great and also many other saints, and also Carmelites, Franciscans, Dominicans, etc., who took the vow of poverty. The *miracle* of St. Francis is not only the healing of a leper but also the love of St. Francis for "Lady Poverty". Did not the miracles of Jesus Christ, after the resurrection of Lazarus, culminate in the cross on Calvary where, in the full agony of torture, he said: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do" (Luke xxiii, 34)?

All that one *does* is miraculous; all intellectual, psychic and physical *functioning* according to "nature", i.e. according to human automatism, is mechanical. The *Sermon on the Mount* is the teaching of *doing* and of the triumph over *functioning*.

Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you. . . and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. (Luke vi, 27-28; Matthew v, 44-45)

Is this not a teaching which aims at the liberation of the machine, i.e. of all *functioning*, and which is a school for the miraculous?

Because to bless those who curse you is a miracle from the point of view of the "normal and natural" functioning of the reactions of the human machine. This does not just happen, it is *done* (it is created); and I repeat, one only *does* miracles, and all that is *done* is a miracle, and nothing is *done* without it being a miracle, All that which is not a miracle is not really *done*—it happens, as part of automatic functioning. It is only through the miracle that true being expresses itself, that the creative Word is revealed.

It is wrong, therefore, to interpret the phrases at the beginning of the Gospel according to John as the teaching of a kind of cosmic rationalism, analogous to the Stoic doctrine of *nous* ("mind"). No, the phrases at the beginning of the Gospel according to John openly declare the cosmic role of the *miracle*, and that the world is due to a miracle, i.e. that it was *made* by the creative Word, and not that it

was due to any functioning, to any automatic—even highly intellectual—process:

All things were made through the Word, and nothing that was made was made without him (John i, 3).

This is what the Evangelist says; and what we have said above concerning the miracle and the machine—i.e. concerning "doing" and "functioning"—is only the micro-cosmic analogy to the statement of macrocosmic significance from the Gospel according to John.

Now, "all things made through the Word" includes also *recall* in vertical and moral memory. The act of recall belongs to the sphere of "doing" and therefore to that of the miraculous, and not to the sphere of "functioning". Recall in "logical memory" is a mixture of doing and functioning. Lastly, recall in mechanical memory is only functioning, i.e. the act of moral recall reduced to a minimum.

If recall is an act analogous to the resurrection of Lazarus, then what is *forgetting*?

Forgetting outlines a scale analogous to that of recall. It can take place automatically, semi-automatically, and in a free and conscious way, according to the category of memory in which it is placed. In mechanical memory one forgets automatically; things are just forgotten. In logical memory things become distant and are effaced little by little if one does not recall them from time to time to the field of conscious attention. In moral memory and in vertical memory *nothing is forgotten*; forgetting here is a moral act of will.

Let us follow the same procedure as is the case in recall, i.e. let us begin at the end of the scale where forgetting is an act of consciousness and where it is understandable—where it takes place in the light of consciousness.

Now, there is no one who does not know through experience that all conscious effort entails concentration or contemplation, and that concentration and contemplation signify conscious and willed *forgetting* of many things which do not relate to the subject of concentration or contemplation. One knows that when one prays the *Pater Noster* one forgets not only one's daily affairs but also all other prayers for the time that one prays the *Pater Noster*.

It is the same with spiritual and divine *values*, and those of the phenomenal world. The three stages on the way towards the soul's union with God—those of purification, illumination and union—are simply the history of a single growing effort of concentration of the entire soul upon God. St. John of the Cross says of the effect of the experience of actual union of the soul's powers with God:

. . . all the powers of the soul together, because of the union in the inner cellar, drink of the Beloved. . . This draught of God's most deep wisdom makes the soul forget all the things of this world, and consider all its previous knowledge, and the knowledge of the whole world besides, as pure ignorance in comparison with this knowledge. (St. John of the Cross, *A Spiritual Canticle* xxvi, 7, 10; trsl. D. Lewis, London, 1909. pp. 204-205)

And again:

. . .the more the memory is united to God the more it loses all distinct knowledge, and at last all such fades utterly away, when the state of perfection is reached. In the beginning, when this is going on, great forgetfulness ensues, for these forms and knowledge fall into oblivion. . . the memory is lost in God. But he who has attained to the habit of union does not forget, in this way, that which relates to moral and natural reason; he performs in much greater perfection all necessary and befitting actions, though by the ministry of forms and knowledge, in the memory, supplied in a special manner by God. (St. John of the Cross, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel III*, i. 5; trsl. D. Lewis, London. 1906. pp. 244-245)

I may add that the masters of Raja-yoga, Bhakti-yoga and Jnana-yoga teach the practice of complete forgetting of the phenomenal world with a view to attaining perfect contemplation. The teaching of forgetting is found also in the mystical Cabbala and in Mohammedan mysticism, e.g. that of Sufism.

Now, forgetting is the means of transition from one state of consciousness to another. Even in the case of *sleep*, which can be considered as a "natural ecstasy", one has to forget the world of the day in order to be able to pass into the world of the night. In order to fall asleep one has to be able to forget. Insomnia is due to the inability to forget.

And awakening? Awakening is simultaneously an act of recall of the world of the day and an act of forgetting the nocturnal world. Awakening would be incomplete—which it, moreover, often is—if one did not forget the experiences of the nocturnal world. The night would then be mingled with the day and human consciousness would be hindered in its capacity with respect to the tasks and duties of the day—its concentration being hampered by the haunting memory of nocturnal remembrances.

And birth and death?

If the soul's mystical union with God is forgetting of the phenomenal world and recall of God, death is simultaneously the *call from* above and *forgetting* below. The three stages of the way leading to the soul's union with God—purification, illumination and union—are repeated after death: *purgatory* is purification (*catharsis*), which precedes illumination or *heaven*, and heaven is the state of the soul when it arrives at union with God, analogous to that experienced by mystics during their terrestrial life. This union, there as here, becomes habitual—which is a sovereign good for the soul—and then it remembers anew the earth and its trials. Memory then manifests a "greater perfection" (says St. John of the Cross concerning the resuscitated functions of memory in the case of the soul which has the *habit of union*) in all its action — let us add, actions directed towards the earth.

This is the motivation for the blessed work of saints. Saints are souls who possess the "habit of union" and are therefore in possession of the higher spiritualised memory spoken of by St. John of the Cross. They *do not seek* union with God; they *are* united with God. This is why they act — their faces being turned towards the earth and not towards God — in the name of God on earth. They act, *being united* with God, in the guise of organs of his will.

It is the same with the celestial hierarchies—with *Angels*, for example. Guardian Angels could never be guardians of human beings if their looks were turned towards God, if they were absorbed in contemplation of God. It is thanks to their *habitual* union with God, i.e. thanks to the *accomplished fact* of the union of their will with the divine will, that they are able to fulfill their task as guardians of men. They know the divine will in a "blind" way—through the dim intuition of their own will, i.e. through *perfect faith* — whilst what they *see* is the earth and human life on earth. Their faces, as are those of the saints, are turned towards the earth. This is the motivation for devotion to the guardian Angels.

With respect to birth, it can, also, be either "holy" or "natural", i.e. it can either be an act of obedience to divine will or rather it can be effected as a consequence of a "call from the earth". A soul can be *sent to* the earth or it can be *attracted by* the earth. In the first case it is an *act* analogous to the recall of vertical and moral memory, i.e. analogous to the miracle of the resurrection of Lazarus. In the latter case it is an event that is half-voluntary and half-involuntary, where the soul falls —often without realising it —into the sphere of terrestrial attraction, which bears it to birth, and thereby it is made little by little to forget its experiences above. Birth is then a forgetting of heaven and simultaneously a recall to the earth.

This is not so with "holy birth". Here it is the remembrance of the divine which is the force which accomplishes incarnation. It is not thanks to forgetting of the divine that the soul is then incarnated, but rather thanks to its remembering. It is in the state of "habitual union" with God that the soul is incarnated. Then its will does not lose memory of the divine. This memory acts in it, imprinted as it is in the soul's will, during the whole terrestrial life which follows a "holy birth". One could then speak of a "mission", or an "election". . . and rightly, because such a mission is the only one which really exists. For the true mission is not what the *human being* proposes to do on the earth according to his tastes, his interests and even his ideals, but rather what God wants him to do. Arbitrary "missions", although due to the best intentions in the world, have only contributed confusion to human history. It is to these inopportune "missions" that we owe many crises upsetting the life of mankind's living traditions —interrupting, in the guise of passing comets, the peaceful and constructive flow of true progress.

A true mission on the earth serves the cause of the ennoblement and spiritualisation *of that which is*, i.e. of what lives as tradition. It brings an impulse effecting the rejuvenation and intensification of tradition. Arbitrary missions, on the contrary, aim at revolutionising the course of mankind's history and substituting specific innovations for what lives as tradition. In pushing this to the extreme one

could say: a true mission brings to greater perfection everything human on the earth — the family, civilisation, culture, religion, etc., whilst arbitrary missions can result in summoning the intervention of Martians or Venusians so that they rule affairs on the earth!

Now, birth, awakening and recall, on the one hand, and death, falling asleep and forgetting, on the other hand, constitute, so to say, the two "pillar-forces" of reality. They manifest in remembering and forgetting, in the rhythm of sleeping and waking and in that of birth and death—as well as in the respiration of organisms, in the circulation of blood, and in alimentation. They are the "yes" and "no" in every domain—mental, psychic and physical.

The Gospel maxim, "Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil" (Matthew v, 37) reveals its significance in this context. The "yes" and the "no"—this is the essential of reality, i.e. the *truth*, pure and simple, whilst the "surplus" comes from evil, i.e. it belongs to the sphere of the serpent. For the serpent of Genesis has his own word—the word which is the "surplus" over "yes" and "no". He is in possession of a *third* term.

And here we return to the question that we posed at the beginning of this Letter, namely: Has the serpent, having said, "You will not die", simply told a lie, or has he stated a truth from the range of truths proper to the domain of the serpent? In other words: What is the "surplus" that the serpent adds to the "yes" and "no" understood as *life* and *death*?

If you accept, dear Unknown Friend, what we have said in the preceding Letters on the difference in principle that there is between *life* and *electricity*, between the principle of the Virgin and that of the serpent, you will certainly be able to penetrate more deeply the secret of the "surplus" offered and promised by the serpent to humanity concerning the "yes" and "no" understood as life and death.

Here is this secret: the serpent offers and promises such a *crystallisation*, according to the principle of enfoldment, that the human being will resist death and become, so to say, "death-proof, immune to death. This crystallisation is effected *through friction*, i.e. by the electrical energy which is produced by the struggle between "yes" and "no" in man.

Without doubt you know, dear Unknown Friend, that there are schools—occult or other—which teach and practise *crystallisation* and that there are other schools which teach and practise *radiation*, i.e. the complete de-crystallisation of the human being and his transformation into a "sun", into a centre of radiation. "Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matthew xiii, 43)—this is the practical aim of "schools of radiation", to which that of Christian Hermeticism belongs.

The "schools of crystallisation" are quite numerous and widespread. There are those which are entirely secret, with very serious intentions; there are also those which are known in the guise of almost popular movements for "health, rejuvenation and longevity". I shall not speak here of the practices of entirely secret schools,

the secret not being mine but that of others. Also I shall not speak about the almost popular movement, because it will certainly be easy to understand their aim and methods after having understood the aim and method of an occult school that I have chosen as an illustrative example. I have chosen this particular occult school as an example, because it is something between the secret schools and the almost popular movements and because it has itself taken the decision to show itself in broad daylight, thus authorising me to speak of it and to cite its documents, accessible to everyone.

I have in mind the school of G. J. Gurdjieff, and I am going to cite the work *In Search of the Miraculous* by P. D. Ouspensky. Now, the following is the teaching of Gurdjieff, such as it has been understood and formulated by Ouspensky, concerning the practical task of survival:

On one occasion, at one of these meetings, someone asked about the possibility of reincarnation, and whether it was possible to believe in cases of communication with the dead. "Many things are possible," said G. (Gurdjieff). "But it is necessary to understand that man's being, both in life and after death, if it does exist after death, may be very different in quality. The 'man-machine' with whom everything depends upon external influences, with whom everything happens, who is now one, the next moment another, and the next moment a third, has no future of any kind; he is buried and that is all. *Dust returns to dust*. This applies to him. In order to be able to speak of any kind of future life there must be a certain crystallisation, a certain fusion of man's inner qualities, a certain independence of external influences. If there is anything in a man able to resist external influences, then this very thing itself may also be able to resist the death of the physical body. . . But even if something survives, its future can be very varied. In certain cases of fuller crystallisation, what people call 'reincarnation' may be possible after death, and, in other cases, what people call 'existence on the other side'. In both cases it is the continuation of life in the 'astral body', or with the help of the 'astral body'. You know what the expression 'astral body' means. But the systems with which you are acquainted and which use this expression state that *all men* have an 'astral body'. This is quite wrong. What may be called the 'astral body' is obtained by means of fusion, that is, by means of terribly hard inner work and struggle. Man is not born with it. And only very few men acquire an 'astral body'. If it is formed it may continue to live after the death of the physical body, and it may be born again in another physical body. . . Fusion, inner unity, is obtained by means of friction', by the struggle between 'yes' and 'no' in man. If a man lives without inner struggle, if everything happens in him without

opposition, if he goes wherever he is drawn or wherever the wind blows, he will remain such as he is. But if a struggle begins in him, and particularly if there is a definite line in this struggle, then, gradually, permanent traits begin to form themselves, he begins to 'crystallise'. . . Crystallisation is possible on any foundations. Take for example a brigand, a really good, genuine brigand. I knew such brigands in the Caucasus. He will stand with a rifle behind a stone by the roadside for eight hours without stirring. Could you do this? All the time, mind you, a struggle is going on in him. He is thirsty and hot, and flies are biting him; but he stands still. Another is a monk; he is afraid of the devil; all night long he beats his head on the floor and prays. Thus crystallisation is achieved. . . Such people can become immortal." (P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, London, 1969, pp. 31-32)

Let us now take account of the essential points in the quoted text. Firstly, it is *the physical body* which gives birth to what is called in the quotation the "astral body" which will be the bearer of survival. Then, according to the text, immortality is neither a birthright of the human soul nor a gift of divine grace — *it is made* by means of the crystallisation of a new body within the physical body which can resist death and survive the destruction of the physical body. That is to say, the soul created by God does not exist; it must be created by the human being from within the human physical body. Thus it is a quantity of energy crystallised within the human physical body and engendered through this latter, produced by friction or the struggle between "yes" and "no" in man. For both the robber and the monk, and also the occultist, can become immortal through the *energy* that they produce by their efforts.

It is a matter of a plan of construction, from within the physical body, of a tower or a "house of four rooms" or levels (Ouspensky, *ibid.*, p. 44), rising from the sphere of mortality to that of immortality, from earth to heaven. Now, the Bible knows of the method of building "a tower with its top in the heavens" and of making "a name for ourselves lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Genesis xi, 4). It is the ideal and millennial-old method of construction of the *tower of Babel*. The "tower of Babel" is a very ancient method. The following is what Gurdjieff says about it:

According to an ancient teaching, traces of which may be found in many systems, old and new, a man who has attained the full development possible for man, a man in the full sense of the word, *consists of four bodies*. These four bodies are composed of substances which gradually become finer and finer, mutually interpenetrate one another, and form four independent organisms, standing in a definite relationship to one another but capable of independent action. The reason why it is pos-

sible for four bodies to exist is that the human organism, that is, the physical body, has such a complex organisation that, under certain conditions, a new independent organism can grow in it, affording a much more convenient and responsive instalment for the activity of consciousness than the physical body. . . In this second body, under certain conditions, a third body can grow, again having characteristics of its own. . . In the third body, under certain conditions, a fourth can grow, which differs as much from the third as the third differs from the second and the second from the first... (p. 40)

An Eastern reaching describes the functions of the four bodies, their gradual growth, and the conditions of this growth, in the following way: Let us imagine a vessel or a retort filled with various metallic powders. The powders are not in any way connected with each other and every accidental change in the position of the retort changes the relative position of the powders . . . It is impossible to stabilise the interrelation of powders in a state of mechanical mixture. But the powders may be fused; the nature of the powders makes this possible. To do this a special kind of fire must be lighted under the retort which, by heating and melting the powders, finally fuses them together. Fused in this way the powders will be in the state of a chemical compound. . . The contents of the retort have become indivisible, "individual". This is a picture of the formation of the second body. The fire by means of which fusion is attained is produced by "friction", which in its turn is produced in man by the struggle between "yes" and "no". . .

The process of imparting new properties to the alloy corresponds to the process of the formation of the third body. . . The process of fixing these acquired properties corresponds to the process of the formation of the fourth body. And only the man who possesses four fully developed bodies can be called a "man" in the full sense of the word. This man possesses many properties which ordinary man does not possess. *One of these properties is immortality*, (P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous*, London, 1969, pp. 40, 43-44)

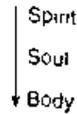
Now, the "special fire lit under the retort" is due to friction which is, in its turn, the product of the struggle between "yes" and "no". This fire is therefore what we understand by "electricity". It is therefore thanks to electricity, or energy produced by friction, that the process of crystallisation works.

The architects of the tower of Babel also made use of *fire* for the preparation of its materials of construction. " 'Come, let us make bricks, and *burn them thoroughly*'. And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar" (Genesis xi, 3)-

The essence of the method of "construction of the tower of Babel" is *inverse crystallisation*. Normal crystallisation—the "stone"—is the final state of the pro-

cess of transition from the gaseous to the liquid state and from the liquid to the solid state. Thus vapour becomes water (liquid) and water becomes ice. Ice is crystallised vapour. Similarly, a general but warm intention becomes a current of discursive thought which, in its turn, results in a well-defined formula. Or in still other terms: the spiritual becomes psychic and the psychic becomes corporeal.

The process of normal crystallisation is therefore one of concretisation from above below:



The process of crystallisation designated as the "construction of the tower of Babel", takes place, in contrast, from below above:



With regard to this latter process, it is a matter of transformation into "body" of the psychic and spiritual. And it is thus that one can conquer death and realise immortality, corporeal immortality. For if the spiritual and the psychic, in becoming corporeal, become mortal, would it not be possible that the corporeal, in rising to the psychic and spiritual, becomes immortal?

Is this scheme realisable or is it simply an illusion, pure and simple? Although this question belongs to the framework of problems of the sixteenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot, and although it will be treated in the sixteenth Letter, let us nonetheless consider some facts with a view to coming to an answer.

The facts that I have in mind are those of *corporeal survival*, i.e. *physical manifestations* that one attributes—rightly or wrongly—to dead people or to "ghosts". Ghosts exist. This is not a question of belief; it is a matter of fact. There is an immense literature, without speaking of facts that one can find in the sphere of personal experience, which bears witness to the existence of ghosts. Now it is no longer a matter of believing or denying; now it is a matter only of understanding and explaining. Ghosts exist therefore. Thus it happens from time to time after someone's death that this person or "something" of him or similar to him manifests in an outward and physical way (noises, movements, etc.) in the guise of an active *energy*. It is as if a certain quantity of energy, freed through death, but remaining condensed and not dispersed, manifests as an entity or as an individual "body".

An analysis of the manifestations of ghosts has enabled me to extract from them the following characteristic traits:

1. a ghost is an entity made up of psycho-physiological electrical energy, with an inferior consciousness in comparison with that of a normal human person;
2. the consciousness which is revealed by the actions of a ghost, and by its way of acting in general, is very limited and extremely specialised — one is tempted to characterise it as "maniacal", since it manifests itself as the crystallisation of a single passion, a single habit, or a single fixed idea;
3. the energy of which the ghost is constituted becomes weakened with time — provided that it is not nourished by an affirmative and favourable attitude from its human entourage; it fades away. One can make it disappear through the Church ritual of exorcism, or by individual prayer, or lastly by a special action which demands courage and which consists in *clasping and breathing in* the ghost, in such a way as to receive it into oneself and of oneself to make the electrical energy of the ghost dissipate. I dare not recommend this latter method because it entails the experience of an electric shock — which can be excessive — at the moment when the energy of the ghost passes into your organism. I may add, however, that it is this experience of an electric shock which gives absolute certainty with respect to the electrical nature of the "body" of the ghost. At the same time it can also supply proof — in the inner forum of consciousness, it goes without saying — that the ghost is not the soul of the departed one. and that it is a burden to him, being bound to the soul of the departed by a heavy link of responsibility. In the case that I have mentioned, soon after the dissipation of the ghost's electrical energy through its reception into oneself, the departed one hastens to make acknowledgement of his gratitude, by means of a very vivid and clear dream, for his deliverance from this heavy burden.

What, then, is a ghost? It is exactly what Gurdjieff teaches concerning the product of psychic crystallisation effected from within the physical body, and which can resist the death of the latter. This is the "astral body" of which Gurdjieff said that, "if it is formed it may continue to live after the death of the physical body. . . if it is not re-born, then, in the course of time, it also dies; it is not immortal but it can live long after the death of the physical body" (Ouspensky, op. cit. p. 32). Of course, the "astral body" spoken of by Gurdjieff has nothing to do with the "astral body" of Hermeticism, which latter is, truth to tell, simply the totality of the soul's *psychic* memories.

A ghost is always constituted as a consequence of *crystallisation*. i.e. crystallisa-

tion of a desire, a passion, or a purpose of great intensity, which produces a *complex* of energy in the human being. Thus, a "genuine brigand" who stands "with a rifle behind a stone by the roadside for eight hours without stirring" or "a monk. . . (who) is afraid of the devil (and) all night long he beats his head on the floor and prays" (Ouspensky, op. cit., p. 32) in fact crystallise within them a *complex* of energy, a psycho-electrical *double*, which would be able, as a dense *complex*, to resist death.

And the same thing that *happens* with human beings who are possessed by strong desires, passions and intentions can be *achieved* methodically by making use of the scientific method of the "construction of the tower of Babel". Then one could not only animate the double crystallised from a desire, a passion or a dominant intention, but also equip it with an intellectual apparatus of very developed functioning and a mechanical memory in which all the facts of experience on the physical plane are accumulated. The "self of such an occultist would then be allied to this double, who is the bearer of his memory and intellect, and could incarnate himself anew—avoiding purgatory and the whole path of purification, illumination and union which is the lot of the human soul after death.

It is therefore not purely and simply a matter of an illusion in the case of the ideal and method of the "construction of the tower of Babel". Rather, it is a matter of *another kind of immortality*, notably that which the serpent of Genesis had in mind when he said, "*You will not die* if you eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil". For the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil produces the inner friction in man of the struggle between "yes" and "no", and this friction in its turn produces the electrical fire which effects the crystallisation whose product will resist death. This is the meaning of the promise—or rather the *programme*—of the serpent. This programme underlies the millennial-old method of the "construction of the tower of Babel", and it constitutes the esoteric kernel or the hidden secret of *materialistic science in general*.

We have chosen Gurdjieff (and Ouspensky) to exemplify the ideal and the method of the "construction of the tower of Babel", but Gurdjieff—being openly materialistic in the true sense of this word, and being deprived of all mystical sense—only spoke on behalf of the multitude. All he did was to give forth clearly what animates and impels—in an unconscious or semi-conscious way—millions and millions of scientists devoted to the cause of *longevity*, i.e. to the victory over death through human science, without God and without mysticism: the universal cause of the *construction of the tower of Babel*.

Gurdjieff is simply a representative of the cause of materialistic science; he knew what it wants in reality and he also knew what he wanted himself. He was, moreover, a good-natured man, endowed with an exquisite sense of humour, a good son, a good friend, and very intelligent with respect to common sense—to indicate only the qualities that he possessed which leap out at one. It would therefore be wrong to see in him a "prophet of darkness" or an instrument of a special "Satanic mission". No, he was simply a good representative of the "wisdom of this

world", i.e. of good sense and empirical experience *without any mystical inclination*. Gurdjieff was not any more a "Satanist" than the celebrated Russian physiologist Pavlov or any other representative of materialistic science.

Assuredly, his practical and theoretical teaching of crystallisation from below above is not compatible either with Carl Jung's process of individuation or with Christian Hermeticism or with the Cabbala. For Hermeticism also teaches a crystallisation but it is a crystallisation from above below, i.e. the crystallisation of which Hermeticism itself—in so far as it is philosophy and knowledge—is the product: crystallised mysticism being gnosis, crystallised gnosis being magic, and crystallised magic being this philosophy and knowledge which passes under the name of "Hermeticism". Thus if one disregards the intermediary stages, one could say that Hermeticism is crystallised mysticism, whilst Gurdjieff's materialistic occultism replaces—and abolishes—mysticism by crystallised materialistic science.

In returning to the question posed at the beginning of this Letter: Did the serpent of Genesis simply lie?—we are now able to answer: no, he did not lie. He opposed to divine immortality another immortality: that of crystallisation from below above, or the "tower of Babel". He advanced the bold programme—but real and realisable—aiming at a mankind which would be composed of the living and of ghosts, with the latter reincarnating almost without delay and avoiding the way which leads through purgatory to heaven.

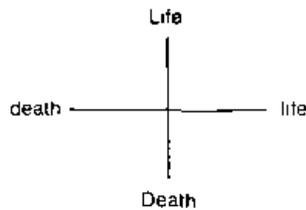
You see now, dear Unknown Friend, *why* the Church was hostile to the *doctrine* of reincarnation, although the *fact* of repeated incarnations was known—and could not remain unknown—to a large number of people faithful to the Church with authentic spiritual experience. The deeper reason is the danger of reincarnation by way of the ghost, where one avoids the path of purification (in purgatory), illumination and celestial union. For humanity could succumb to the temptation of preparing for a future terrestrial life, instead of preparing for purgatory and heaven, during earthly life. To prepare for a future terrestrial life, instead of preparing for the confrontation with Eternity, amounts to crystallisation in the sense of the formation of an electric double—the body of the ghost—which could, in its turn, serve as the bridge from one incarnation to another and be the means of evading purgatory and the confrontation with Eternity. One ought during earthly life to prepare for this meeting with a fully awakened consciousness, which is purgatory, and for the experience of the presence of the Eternal, which is heaven, and not to prepare for a future terrestrial life, which would amount to the crystallisation of the "body" of a ghost. It is worth a hundred times more to know nothing of the fact of reincarnation, and to deny the doctrine of reincarnation, than to turn thoughts and desires towards the future terrestrial life and thus to be tempted to resort to the means offered through the promise of immortality made by the serpent. This is why. I repeat, the Church was, from the beginning, hostile to the idea of reincarnation and did all that it could so that this idea would not take root in consciousness—and above all in the human will.

I confess that it is only after hesitation, due to objections of a very serious moral

order, that I have decided to write of the danger that the doctrine of reincarnation entails, and above all of that abuse that can be—and is, in fact—made of it. It is the faith that you, dear Unknown Friend, understand the weight of responsibility that weighs on each person who sees himself treating reincarnation not as belonging to the domain of esoteric (i.e. intimate) experience, but as an exoteric teaching to popularise—called to convince everyone—which has determined me to speak of the practical abuse of the fact of reincarnation. I *implore* you therefore, dear Unknown Friend, to have the good will to examine, in the light of moral conscience, the question whether the way of treating reincarnation in exoteric teaching that has been adopted and is practised in general both by representatives of the French occult movement of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and by Theosophists. Anthroposophists. Rosicrucians, etc., is justified and desirable.

I may add that in the last analysis it is a matter not only of the moral danger of evading purgatory- and the experience of Eternity, but also of *replacing one immortality by another*, namely that of God by that of the serpent. For there are *two* deaths and *two* immortalities.

The "death" of which the father speaks in the parable of the prodigal son—"my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found" (Luke xv, 24)—is *remoteness from the Father and his house*, whilst the death of the physical body means remoteness from the physical plane and the electrical field of terrestrial gravitation (which was the matter in question in the twelfth Letter, concerning the Arcanum "The Hanged Man"). Now, the refusal to take the way of purgatory and heaven amounts to refusing to return to the house of the Father, i.e. the decision to remain *remote* from the Father. And it is precisely this which is *death* in a divine sense. *Complete crystallisation* is therefore complete death from the divine point of view, whilst complete life is the state of "radiating as the sun", i.e. that of *complete de-crystallisation*. Thus the divine words, "You shall not eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day when you eat of it you will die", state simply that "the day when you eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, *you will remove yourself from Me*". And the promise of the serpent, "You will not die", means to say, "You will live remote from God and it will be I who shall attend to the uninterrupted continuation of your life in the horizontal, for I shall make up for the lack of divine wisdom and love by replacing them with the intellect and with psycho-physical electricity, which will be the source of your life". Therefore the serpent understands by "life" what God understands by "death"—and vice versa. Now, Hermeticism—Christian Hermeticism as well as ancient and pre-Christian Hermeticism—has always advanced the fundamental thesis of all true mysticism, true gnosis, and true sacred magic, that there is *vertical* Life and Death and that there is *horizontal* life and death. For Christian Hermeticism the Cross of humanity—the Cross of Calvary—is that of two opposed lives and deaths. Resurrection is not only the triumph of Life over Death, but is moreover the triumph of Life over life.



It is the victory of the vertical over the horizontal, of radiation over crystallisation. This is why when the women who went to the tomb at the break of day did not find the body of Lord Jesus, the two men who appeared to them in resplendent apparel said to them, "Why do you seek the living *among the dead?*" (Luke xxiv, 5). Therefore, let us no longer seek amongst the dead for he who is living, and above all let us not seek for immortal Life in the domain of death—in the domain of the intellect borne by electricity or, to employ an image borrowed from the Cabbala, in the domain of Samael mounted on the dragon.

It is not phantoms and ghosts which are the source of certainty of survival or immortality. The source of this certainty is found elsewhere. Where, then? . . . in the experience of the kernel of the human being and his relationship with the breath, light and warmth of God.

Certainty of immortality issues from the participation experienced in that which is intrinsically indestructible and imperishable, and therefore immortal. He who has had experience of the kernel of his being, i.e. he who has once been *truly himself*, permeated by the divine breath, bathed in divine light and ardent with divine warmth, he *knows* what immortality is and that he is immortal. You will have beautifully explained to him the "epiphenomenal nature" of consciousness, i.e. that consciousness is only the functioning of the brain and nervous system and that it is like the rainbow— a play of colours resulting from the refraction and reflection of solar rays on the clouds—you will have beautifully said all this, and he will have not even a little grain of doubt that all this is false and the contrary is true. Perhaps he would not be able to find valid arguments *for you* against epiphenomenalism, but as for *him*, he has no need of them. For it is not to arguments that he owes his certainty, but rather to experience.

Imagine the reaction of a St. John of the Cross or a St. Teresa of Avila to a discourse, armed with all the arguments of modern science, addressed to them so as to prove to them that the soul is only a mirage produced by chemical and electrical reactions of the organism! To prove this to them! — they who many times went out of the body, left in a state of complete insensibility, and returned full of life and light drawn not only from beyond all chemical and electrical reactions but also from beyond all sense imagery and all intellectual activity! I think that they would have sent the author of such remarks either to a psychiatrist or to an exorcist!

Certainty in immortality can thus be *absolute*. i.e. in no way dependent on

the validity or invalidity of arguments, nor on the good or bad attestation of outer facts. It is when man has had experience of the kernel of his own being and of his essential relationship with God.

I certainly know the logical, philosophical and psychological criticism of the Cartesian argument, *cogito ergo sum* ("I think therefore I am"), and I accept it without reserve *in foro scientiae*, but it was not the force of this argument in the tribunal of science which gave Rene Descartes certainty of his transcendent Self, the kernel of his being, but rather the *experience* in the tribunal of consciousness (*in foro conscientiae*) where, whilst thinking in the admirable way which was characteristic of him, he went out of discursive thought and found himself suddenly as the *thinker* of thoughts! It was therefore not a logical *argument* but a real and intimate experience of *thought*—in the process of thinking—which gave Descartes complete certainty of the reality of the "I am" which manifests itself in the "I think".

The German philosopher Immanuel Kant (a soul of childlike purity, endowed with a remarkable honesty and diligence) made Descartes' spontaneous experience a new method of inner effort aspiring to knowledge, namely the *transcendental method*.

This method amounts to the effort to transcend the thinking in which the thinker is ordinarily immersed, by going out from it and elevating himself above it, in order to *observe* thought—or "to think about thought"—from a point of observation taken *above discursive thought*. Kant's "Copernican discovery" consists above all in detaching the thinker from "naive thought", i.e. from the state where the thinker is lost in the process of thought, being immersed in it, so as to occupy a point situated above thought, from where the thinker can examine what is thought in an entirely detached way and with implacable and incorruptible truthfulness—this is the "transcendental criticism" of Kant. His works *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgement* are the fruits of the application of this method in the sense of the *revision* of the totality of our knowledge, and in the sense of a clear investigation of the pretensions of the intellect and of the senses to being able to judge things belonging to the metaphysical domain—for example, God, the immortality of the soul, and moral freedom. With respect to his *Critique of Practical Reason* we find here, beyond the results of the critical look of the thinker turned towards the domain of discursive thought and sense perceptions in which he had been immersed before, in addition what the thinker, this kernel of the human being, has to say himself. This can be summarised as follows:

I would have to alter the foundation of my very being, or to annihilate myself, if I were to say that God does not exist, that I am not free, and that I am not immortal. The very structure of my being is such that it postulates categorically the *existence of God* or infinite perfectibility, *freedom* or morality as such, and the *immortality of the soul* or the possibility of infinite perfecting.

It goes without saying that just as Rene Descartes' argument "I think therefore I am" became the object of the annihilating criticism of logicians, philosophers and psychologists, so is the fundamental argument advanced by Immanuel Kant in his *Critique of Practical Reason* the subject of a no less severe criticism —and no less founded *in foro scientiae* — than in the case of Descartes' argument. But here also it is necessary to say that it was not a *logical conclusion* or an argument of discursive thought which gave Kant certainty of God, freedom and immortality, but rather the real and intimate *experience* that he had when he practised his transcendental method. This latter evidently proved itself to be an *authentic spiritual exercise*, which led Kant to arrive at experience of the kernel of his being —just as Descartes arrived there —and from which he drew the threefold certainty: the reality of *God*, the reality of *moral freedom* and, lastly, the reality of the *soul's immortality*.

Similarly, in Hindu Jnana-yoga the yogi arrives at the transcendent Self by critically observing firstly his body and arriving at the experience, "This body is not the Self, then critically examining his psychic life —desires, feelings, memory images, etc.—to arrive at the experience, "This psychic life is not the Self, and, lastly, critically examining his thinking itself, from which he detaches himself, and experiences the thinker—just as Descartes and Kant arrived at the experience of the transcendent Self by rising from thought to the thinker. From this comes their certainty of "I am" (Descartes) and "I am free, I am immortal (and) I am in the presence of God" (Kant).

May the criticism of Descartes and Kant eventually become silent, restraining itself through understanding; may it *no more interfere with* that at which these two spirits arrived at, namely the *intimate experience* of the kernel of their being, the transcendent Self. May it one day cease from being repeated to satiety that Kant "proved himself to be unfaithful to his own method and to have betrayed his own principles" and that, in growing old and becoming senile, he "sank into the fideism of his youth". For the truth is that Kant betrayed nothing and did not sink into anything, but that he arrived at the ripe fruit of his life and work. Or would one wish that he had not arrived anywhere, and that he had finished his life as a master of criticism and doubt only? . . .that the honest and assiduous effort of his life had not brought any experience, and therefore any certainty, with regard to things belonging to the metaphysical sphere? Instead of rejoicing in and celebrating the fact of his certainty, one speaks of his lapse and one accuses him of unfaithfulness! Good Lord! How petty!

You see therefore, dear Unknown Friend, that the great thinkers of the West — just as the Hindu yogis —have arrived at the experience of the kernel of the human being, the transcendent Self, the experience of which gave them certainty of immortality.

Christian Hermeticism, being a synthesis of mysticism, gnosis and sacred magic, offers humanity *three* methods of experience, beyond the "philosophical method" outlined above, for arriving at the certainty of immortality.

There is in the first place the traditional mystical way of purification, illumination and union, which is the voluntary and conscious experience of the three stages of the way of the human soul after death - through purgatory to heaven, and from heaven to God. You will find this not only with the great Christian mystics such as Dionysius the Areopagite, Bonaventura, Teresa of Avila, and John of the Cross

...not only in the pre-Christian teachings of the Hermetic treatises attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, such as *The Divine Pymander*, but also in the great mysteries of pagans, Egyptians, and others, where the three stages of *catharsis* (purification), *photismos* (illumination) and *henosis* (union, or identification with the Divine) give consciousness of the *post-mortem* states and certainty of immortality. Jean Marques-Riviere says concerning this:

(This is) the essential teaching of Egyptian esotericism as well as that of the Greeks: the knowledge of states after death, in order to overcome fear of this death, psychological and human fear. The initiate had knowledge of what awaited him; what could he be afraid of? (Jean Marques-Riviere, *Histoire des doctrines ésotériques*, Paris, 1950, p. 90)

Just as the practice of *concentration* is the "art of forgetting" and the practice of profound communion, or *meditation*, is the mastering of the "art of sleeping", so does the *contemplation* of authentic initiation signify the mastering of the "art of dying". It is through mastering forgetting, sleep and death that one arrived in the past, that one arrives today, and that one will arrive in the future, at the mystical experience of the soul united with God, and therefore at the absolute certainty of immortality. And one arrived there, one arrives there, and one will arrive there through the three stages of the eternal mystical way: those of purification, illumination and union. St. John of the Cross shows that it is authentic *faith* which is revealed, acts, and increases in purification; that it is *hope* which is simultaneously both the agent and the fruit of illumination; and that, lastly, it is *charity* which achieves union of the soul with God (cf. John of the Cross. *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* II, v).

This is the eternal way. and no one can invent or find another. One can certainly divide it into thirty-three stages-or even into ninety-nine, if one wished; one can re-clothe it in intellectual vestments, or beautiful and simple symbolism; one can present it in diverse terminology-Sanskrit, Cabbalistic, Greek, Latin, etc. But one will always have to do with the sole way—and always the same way—of eternal mysticism: the way of purification, illumination and union. Because there is no other, and there has never been another, and there never will be any other.

Hermeticism, also, has no other way to offer than that of eternal mysticism — the gnostic, magical and philosophical methods being founded on it. In other words, one cannot dispense with purification in order to become a gnostic or a mage or even a philosopher (in the true and original sense of this word). Nor can

one any more dispense with illumination in gnosis, in sacred magic and in philosophy (again in the true and original sense of this word). For a non-illuminated gnostic would not be a gnostic, but rather an "oddball"; a non-illuminated mage would be only a sorcerer; and a non-illuminated philosopher would be either a complete sceptic or an amateur at "intellectual play". And with respect to the primary source from whence the gnostic draws his revelation, the mage his power, and the philosopher his enlightenment—there is only one: the more or less immediate contact of the soul with God. It is therefore always the same *way* on which one *advances*, without regard to whether one employs the mystical, gnostic, magical or philosophical method.

There are many tracks, but there is only one way. This means to say that whatever one does, one advances and grows only in the sense of purification, illumination and union; and that whatever one knows and whatever experience one has, the criterion of true progress is solely progress in purification, illumination and union. One judges a tree by its fruits; one judges the mystic, gnostic, mage and philosopher by their faith, hope and charity, i.e. by their progress in purification, illumination and union.

Spiritual greatness, the calibre of a soul, is measured only through faith, hope and charity (love). Buddha certainly saw that the world is sick—and, considering it incurable, he taught the means to leave it. Christ, also, saw that the world is sick unto death, but he considered it curable and set to work the force for healing the world—that which manifests itself through the Resurrection. Here is the difference between the faith, hope and love of the Master of Nirvana and that of the Master of the Resurrection and the Life. The former said to the world, "You are incurable; here is the means for putting an end to your suffering—to your life." The latter said to the world, "You are curable: here is the remedy for saving your life." Two doctors with the same diagnosis—but a world of difference in the treatment!

Tradition teaches—and every serious esotericist and occultist knows that it is so—that the Archangel Michael is the archstrategist, i.e. that he directs the celestial army. Why is he in charge? Because his faith, hope and love are such that they have put him in charge. For "to be in charge" signifies in the spiritual world to be less subject than others to doubt, despair and condemning judgement.

Tradition teaches that the Archangel Michael represents the sun, and similarly the Archangel Gabriel—the moon, the Archangel Raphael—Mercury, the Archangel Anael—Venus, Zachariel—Jupiter, Oriphiel—Saturn, and Samael—Mars. Why *the sun*? Because the sun is the visible symbol, the image itself of faith, hope and love. It sheds light on the good and the wicked, without leaving or quitting its central post.

Yes, the greatness of God himself, i.e. of what is *divine* for us in him, is not his power in the sense that he is stronger than the totality of forces in the universe, nor his foreknowledge in the sense that he foresees, as a perfect engineer, the future functioning of the forces of the "world machine", pre-calculated and pre-

determined, nor even the fact that he is absolutely indispensable as the centre of all gravitation—spiritual, psychic and physical—of the universe. No, what is truly *divine* in God, i.e. what makes every knee bow before him, is his faith, his hope and his love. For just as we believe in God, so also does God believe in us—but with a divinely greater and more elevated faith; his hope with regard to this immense community of free beings that we call the "world" is infinite, just as his love for these beings is infinite.

We do not worship God because he is able to do more than us, or because he knows more than us, but rather because he has more faith, more hope and more love than us. Our God is infinitely *noble and generous*, and not only all-powerful and all-informed! God is great through his faith, hope and love—and the fear of God is basically that of offending such nobleness and generosity!

Now, Christian Hermeticism is based on the way of eternal mysticism; with regard to its practice, this is its basis and its point of departure. Point of departure—where? . . . in the domain of gnosis and in that of sacred magic, just as in the domain of Hermetic philosophy.

Gnosis—which, it goes without saying, has nothing to do with any method borrowed from the teachings of gnostic sects or with their articles of faith—is the contribution of mystical experience to understanding and memory. It is distinguished from pure mysticism in that the latter amounts to the experience in which the *will*—purified and illumined—is in union with the Divine, whilst understanding and memory are excluded from it and remain outside of the threshold of mystical experience. And it is precisely the fact of the non-participation of understanding and memory in mystical experience which renders it inexpressible and incommunicable. Gnosis, on the other hand, is the same mystical experience *with the participation of understanding and memory*, which pass the threshold together with the will and remain in a state of wakefulness. It is schooling by means of *symbolism* which renders them capable of participating in the mystical experience of the will without lapsing. They participate only as *witnesses*, i.e. they maintain complete silence and only play the role of a *mirror*. But the result of their presence as witnesses to the mystical experience of the will is the *ability to express and communicate* this experience. This is because understanding and memory have received an impression of it. And this impression is what we understand here by "gnosis". A mystic is a gnostic in so far as, and as much as, he can express and communicate to others his experiences. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him" (I John iv. 16)—this is a mystical statement. "God is the Trinity: Father, Son and Holy Spirit"—this is a gnostic statement. Or, "I and the Father are one" (John x, 30)—mystical statement; "In my Father's house are many rooms" (John xiv, 2)—gnostic statement.

Gnosis is therefore the fruit of the silent participation of understanding and memory in the mystical experience of the will. I say "*silent participation*" because otherwise, i.e. in the case of *active* participation, it would no longer be a matter of revelation, but rather of a statement produced by the understanding and im-

agination. For in order to apprehend one has to listen, and to listen one has to be silent. The faculty of understanding and that of memory/ imagination must be silent if they want to apprehend, i.e. to receive a revelation from above.

Just as gnosis is the fruit of the participation of understanding and memory in the mystical union of the will with God, so is sacred magic the fruit of the participation of the three forces of the soul in mystical union with God *with regard to one's neighbour and to Nature*. When the soul, having had the experience of union with the Divine, turns towards its neighbour and towards Nature, not in order to contemplate but in order to act — then the soul becomes that of a *mage*. Every mystic is a mage in as much as and in so far as he *acts*, being inspired by his mystical experience. Sacred magic is the putting into action of what the mystic contemplates and what the gnostic apprehends through revelation.

Hermetic philosophy, lastly, draws its conclusions from mystical, gnostic and magical experiences and works with a view to setting these in accord with the experiences of terrestrial life and with the sciences which are occupied therewith. It is thus that Hermeticism can give *trismegistic* ("thrice greatest") certainty of immortality, i.e. the threefold certainty of mystical, gnostic and magical experience.

As you see, this certainty is produced in three —or four—stages of *descending* revelatory movement, from above below. It is what tradition calls the "descent of the heavenly Jerusalem", as opposed to the method outlined above of the "construction of the tower of Babel". Christian (*and pre-Christian*) Hermeticism therefore belongs decidedly to the extended tradition which practises the method of the "descent of the heavenly Jerusalem", which works in the history of mankind with a view to preparing the whole of mankind for the future spiritual event of the "descent of the heavenlyjerusalem" on a universal scale. For the "descent of the heavenlyjerusalem" is at the same time a practical method of spiritual schools. The totality of inner mystical, gnostic, and magical experiences of individuals, the gradual transformation of the whole of human civilisation into a "celestial city", i.e. where the laws are those of heaven, and, lastly, the Reintegration of the whole of Nature, which is a work of cosmic significance, together comprise the realisation of a "new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation xxi, 1), where the world is *healed*. The "descent of the heavenlyjerusalem" therefore comprises the most intimate experiences of individual souls as well as the history and evolution of our planet —according to the law: ". . . nothing is covered that will not be revealed, or hidden that will not be known" (Matthew x, 26), for everything that takes place in subjective intimacy will one day become objective reality. It is the *magical* law of history that the subjective at some time becomes objective, that the aspirations, thoughts and feelings of today become the events of history tomorrow. "For they sow the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind" (Hosea ix, 7).

This leads me to return to the Card of the thirteenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot. Here we see that Death reaps hands, feet, and lastly heads, *which appear above the level of the black soil*. He does not reap growing grass or whole human figures —which, moreover, are not to be found here.

Death acts as the guardian of a determined *level*, and cuts off every member of the human body which appears above this level. It acts as a surgeon rather than as an exterminator.. .but what kind of surgeon is it?

We have spoken above of the method and ideal of the "construction of the tower of Babel", i.e. the method and ideal where one makes electrical energy *ascend*, after having animated and intellectualised it, from the physical organism to higher planes—firstly to the vital or etheric plane, the plane where "grass grows", according to the Card of the thirteenth Arcanum.

This ascent, provided that it is not effected methodically and in full knowledge of its action, i.e. within an occult school, in practice takes place partially—sometimes it is only the "electric hands" which succeed in ascending to the vital or etheric plane, sometimes it is the "feet", and sometimes it is only the "head". Now, Death on our Card sees to it that the vital world is not invaded by "emissaries" from the physical world. It *cuts off*, as a true surgeon, the electrical "members" of the physical body which appear above the level—which is the threshold of the two worlds—where the realm of the vital world begins. It therefore accomplishes *amputations* of sick members—"sick" in the sense that they have usurped a domain of existence which does not legitimately belong to them—before the sickness becomes irremediable. What Death does in this Card is therefore to act as a guardian of the threshold between the two worlds and, correspondingly, to apply a kind of surgery.

Now, in general, is not Death the principle of surgery in the world? Is it called to *kill*, to destroy, or does it not have a mission to *heal* through surgery?

The answer that I propose, dear Unknown Friend, is that Death is certainly the principle of surgery in the world. It effects the amputation of members that become unusable—even the totality of unusable members, i.e. the whole physical body—so as to free the whole human being.

Just as there is natural medicine which re-establishes health through the rules and habits of a sound life—diet, sleep, breathing, exercises, etc.—and just as there is homeopathic medicine which heals by helping the *whole organism* to overcome the sickness, and just as there is allopathic medicine, which combats sickness through opposites, and just as, lastly, there is surgery which saves the life of the organism by sacrificing part of it, so there is in the world a healing "mechanism" analogously hierarchical to the hierarchical scale of natural, homeopathic, allopathic and surgical medicine.

Death corresponds to surgery in the "cosmic hospital". It is the last expedient to save life. Beyond it there are three further principles for maintaining and re-establishing health in the world and in individual beings. These correspond to *mysticism*, *gnosis* and *magic*. Thus, in paraphrasing a slogan from the French revolution, one could say:

Mysticism, gnosis, magic—or death.