

*Meditation on the
Sixteenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot*

THE TOWER OF DESTRUCTION

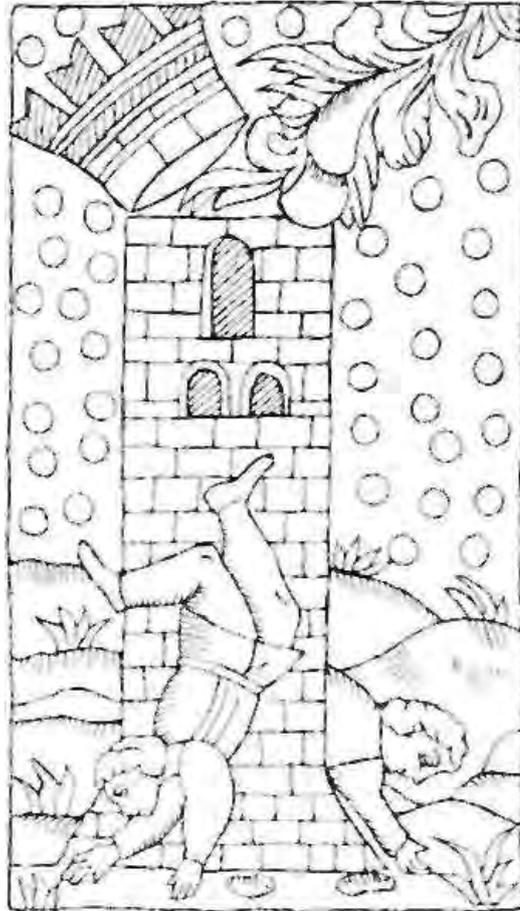
LA MAISON DIEU

My soul magnifies the Lord.
And my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour.
For he has regarded the low estate of his
handmaiden.
For behold, henceforth all generations will call
me blessed. . .
He has scattered those who have proud
thoughts in their hearts,
He has put down the mighty from their
thrones,
And he has exalted those of low degree.
He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich he has sent away empty-handed.
(Luke i, 46-48, 51-53)

He who exalts himself will be abased,
And he who humbles himself will be exalted.
(Luke xiv, 11)

The kingdom of God is as if a man should
scatter seed upon the ground, and should
sleep and rise night and day, and the seed
should sprout and grow, he knows not how,
(Mark iv. 26-27)

LETTER XVI



THE TOWER OF DESTRUCTION

Dear Unknown Friend,

The generation of artificial demons and the nature of the entities of hierarchies of the left constituted the principal theme of the preceding Letter. One could ask oneself, after having let pass in review before the inner eye all that one knows concerning the diverse beings of the world of evil, whether it is not so, given that the flesh itself is innocent and the kernel of the human being is in the image of God, that it is the demons and entities of the hierarchies of the left alone who are the cause of evil, and that without them there would be no evil in human life and in the history of mankind.

The question is not new. It was a preoccupation in antiquity, already in the

third century of our era. This is what Origen says concerning it (born in Alexandria ca. A.D. 185):

. . .the simpler sort of believers in Christ the Lord suppose that all the sins that men have committed come from the persistent influence of the contrary powers on the sinners' minds, because in this invisible contest the powers are found to be superior; that if, so to speak, there were no devil, no man would ever sin at all. We however, who look more carefully into the reason of things, do not think that this is so; especially when we consider the acts that arise clearly from the necessities of our body. Are we to suppose that the devil is the cause of our being hungry or thirsty? I suppose there is no one who would venture to maintain this. If then he is not the cause of our being hungry or thirsty, what of that condition when an individual has attained the age of puberty and this period has called forth the exciting movements of the natural heat? It follows without a doubt that, as the devil is not the cause of our being hungry or thirsty, so neither is he the cause even of that impulse which is naturally called forth at the time of maturity, that is, of the desire for sexual intercourse. It is certain that this impulse is by no means always aroused by the devil, so as to lead us to suppose that if there were no devil our bodies would not have the desire for such intercourse.

Then again let us consider in regard to food,—if it be true, as we have shown above, that this is not sought for by men at the instance of the devil, but from a natural instinct—whether human experience, supposing there were no devil, could possibly employ such great self-control in partaking of food as absolutely never to exceed the limit, that is, never to take anything but what the occasion demanded or more than reason permitted, and that it should never happen that men went astray in the observance of due measure and moderation in their food. I for my part do not think that, even if there were no impulse from the devil to urge men on, this rule could be so observed by them that no one would exceed due measure and moderation in partaking of food, not at any rate before they had learned this lesson by long practice and experience. What then? In regard to foods and drink it would be possible for us to go wrong even apart from the instigation of the devil, if we happened to be caught at an intemperate or careless moment; and are we to suppose that in regard to the control of the sexual appetite and the natural desires we should not be affected in a similar way? My own opinion is that the same process of reasoning can also be applied to the rest of the natural emotions, such as covetousness, anger, sorrow or any others whatever, which by the fault of intemperance exceed the limits of their natural measure. The fact

is therefore clear that, just as in regard to things that are good the mere human will is by itself incapable of completing the good act,—for this is in all cases brought to perfection by divine help—so also in regard to things of the opposite kind we derive the beginnings and what we may call the seeds of sin from those desires which are given to us naturally for our use. But when we indulge these to excess and offer no resistance to the first movements towards intemperance, then the hostile power, seizing the opportunity of this first offence, incites and urges us on in every way, striving to extend the sins over a larger field; so that while we men supply the occasions and beginnings of our sins, the hostile powers spread them far and wide and if possible endlessly. (Origen, *De principiis* III, ii, 1-2; trsl. G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles*, New York, 1966, pp. 213-214)

This is a clear answer: there is in man—notably in his soul, and not in his body—a seed of evil of his own, without which temptation coming from outside would not exert any action on him. Because temptation would be impotent if it did not find a terrain already prepared in the human soul.

Now, as the fifteenth Arcanum is related to demoniacal evil, so the sixteenth Arcanum is related to human evil, i.e. to evil which does not come from outside, but which certainly has its origin within the human soul.

The unfortunate misunderstanding locating innate human evil in the body instead of in the soul is due to a tendency towards a materialistic interpretation of the Biblical story of paradise and the Fall. Indeed, if paradise is understood as a place on the terrestrial or material plane, and if the Fall is similarly understood as having taken place on this plane, innate human evil cannot be understood otherwise than as biologically hereditary, i.e. that it is the flesh which bears it and transmits the seed of evil from generation to generation. Then it is the flesh which is the enemy of the soul and against which one has to struggle. Hence one "disciplines" it by flagellation, one weakens it by depriving it of food and sleep, and one scorns it and mistreats it in many ways—one is ashamed of one's body.

However, it is the body which, rightly, has more reason to be ashamed of the soul inhabiting it, than the latter of the body. For the body is a miracle of wisdom, harmony and stability, which does not merit scorn but rather the admiration of the soul. For example, can the soul boast of moral principles as stable as the body's skeleton? Is it as indefatigable and as faithful in its sentiments as, for example, the heart, which beats day and night? Does it possess a wisdom comparable to that of the body, which knows how to harmonise such opposing things as water and fire, air and solid matter? Whilst the soul is torn by opposing desires and feelings, this "contemptible" body knows how to unite opposing elements and make them collaborate: the air that it breathes, the solid matter of food, the water that it drinks, and the fire (warmth) that it produces unceasingly within it. . . And if this does not suffice to change scorn into respect, admiration and gratitude.

then one can recall, if one is a Christian, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, inhabited this flesh and that he honoured it to the point of uniting himself with it in the Incarnation. Similarly, if one is a Buddhist or Brahmanist, one should not forget that Buddha and Krishna, also, inhabited this flesh and that it served them well in the accomplishing of their respective missions.

Negative asceticism, directed *against* the body and not *for* celestial things, is the practical consequence of the materialistic interpretation of paradise and the Fall. However, the fact alone that a Cherubim "was placed at the east of the garden of Eden, with a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life" (Genesis iii, 24), suffices to drive away any shadow of a doubt: here it is a matter of a plane higher than the terrestrial plane, and it was therefore souls who committed the original sin—and the body had nothing to do with it.

The Fall occurred prior to the terrestrial life of mankind—this is the Hermetic doctrine (cf. *Kore Kosmu* 24-26), which was taken up by Pythagoras and Plato, and was represented in the first centuries of the Christian era by Origen. Origen taught that God had created all souls equal, but that amongst these souls some sinned in the spiritual world and had to leave it for the earth: these are human souls. Others on the contrary, in turning towards God, perfected themselves and became Angels. But let us give the words of Origen himself. This is what he says:

. . . the following objection is raised by many, and particularly by those who come from the schools of Marcion, Valentinus and Basilides. . . they raise an objection on the score of the differences that exist among men on the earth. Some, they say, inherit at birth a happier lot, as for example the one who springs from Abraham and is born by promise, and the other, the child of Isaac and Rebecca who, while yet lying in the womb, supplants his brother and is said, before he is born, to be loved by God; and, speaking generally, one man is born among the Hebrews, with whom he finds instruction in the divine law, another among the Greeks who are themselves men of wisdom and no small learning, another among the Ethiopians, whose custom is to feed on human flesh, others among the Scythians, where parricide is practised as if sanctioned by law, or among the Tautians, where strangers are offered in sacrifice. If then they ask us, this great diversity and these various and different conditions of birth, in which certainly the power of free will has no place—for a man does not choose for himself either where or in what nation or what state of life he shall be born,—if, they say, all this is not caused by a diversity in the natures of souls, that is, a soul with an evil nature is destined for an evil nation and a good one for a good nation, what alternative is there but to suppose that it is the result of accident or chance? . . . We, however, speaking simply as men, will, in order not to nourish the insolence of the heretics (e.g. Marcion, Valentinus and

Basilides) by being silent, to the best of our ability reply to their objections with such arguments as may occur to us, as follows. We have frequently shown in the preceding chapters, by declarations which we were able to quote from the divine scriptures, that God the Creator of the universe is both good and just and omnipotent. Now when "in the beginning" he created what he wished to create, that is rational beings, he had no other reason for creating them except himself, that is, his goodness. As therefore he himself, in whom was neither variation nor change nor lack of power, was the cause of all that was to be created, he created all his creatures equal and alike, for the simple reason that there was in him no cause that could give rise to variety and diversity. But since these rational creatures, as we have frequently shown and will yet show again in its proper place, were endowed with the power of free will, it was this freedom which induced each one by his own voluntary choice either to make progress through the imitation of God or to deteriorate through negligence. This, as we have said before, was the cause of the diversity among rational creatures, a cause that takes its origin not from the will or judgement of the Creator, but from the decision of the creature's own freedom. . . For this reason the Creator will not appear to have been unjust when, according to the above principles, he placed everyone in a position proportionate to his merit; nor will the happiness or unhappiness of anyone's birth, or any condition whatever that may fall to his lot, be supposed to be due to chance; nor will it be believed that there are different creatures or souls that are diverse by nature. (Origen, *De principiis* II, ix, 5-6; trsl. G. W. Butterworth, *On First Principles*. New York, 1966. pp. 133-135)

The doctrine that the pre-existent soul, in having sinned, took into itself the seed of evil in the pre-terrestrial sphere, has as a practical consequence *positive* asceticism, i.e. that of the soul's atonement and reunion with God.

Positive asceticism does not struggle against the body but rather against the seed of evil in the soul, for the sake of its reunion with God. If, for example, the only food that Teresa Neumann had for decades was the host from the Sacrament of Holy Communion, this was not because she struggled against the body or despised it but rather because she really lived from the Holy Sacrament without prejudicing the health of the body. And if, for example, another passes the night in prayer, without sleep, he does not do so in order to deprive the body of rest, but rather in order to unite with God in prayer. St. Martin gave his coat to a poor man not because he wanted to make his body suffer from the cold but rather because he wanted to put an end to the suffering of his neighbour, whose body was deprived of protection against the cold. St. Anthony went into the desert not in order to make his body suffer but rather in order to be alone in the presence of God. A monk renounces marriage not because he hates love, women and

children but rather because he is fired by the love of God and there is no room in him for another love.

Positive asceticism is universal. Everyone practises it. A scientist who shuts himself in his room with a view to pursuing his studies does so because he is taken up with the truth that he is seeking and not because he wants to deprive his body of sun, fresh air and other benefits or pleasures of the world outside his room. A ballerina fasts much so as to keep her body slender and supple. A doctor interrupts his sleep during the night if he is called out to a sick person. A missionary lives in a miserable hut in a village in Africa— as is his wish — not because he loves misery but because he wants to share the lot of his brothers.

The principle of positive asceticism is found enunciated in the Gospel in a way that could not be clearer:

The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls, who, on finding one pearl of great value, went and sold all that he had and bought it. (Matthew xiii, 44-46)

Positive asceticism is therefore the exchange of good for better.

Let us now return to the problem of innate human evil. What is it?

It is *ahamkara*, the sense of self, due to *avidya*, primordial ignorance, caused by maya's power of projection (*viksepa-shakti*), associated with maya's power of obscuration (*avarana-shakti*), which consists in the illusory identification of the true Self (*atman*) with the empirical self—as is clearly attested by the revelation of Scripture (*shruti*), direct authentic experience [*pratyaksha*], tradition (*smirti*) and inference (*anumand*). This is the answer according to the ancient wisdom of India, from the mouth of Shankara (ninth century A.D.), the author of this summary and synthesis (cf. *Viveka-cuda-mam* 105-107, 111-113, 343-346; English trsl. by Swami Madhavananda, Mayavati, 1932).

It is desire (*tanha*), engendered by ignorance (*avidya*), which consists in attributing the central role to an illusory mental construction of the "self, whilst the centre is nowhere, or everywhere, answers Buddhism (cf. *The Prajnaparamita of Nagarjuna*).

The other current of tradition, the right wing of the entity of Wisdom, if you wish—the western (Egyptian-Jewish-Christian) current—gives another reply. According to it, innate human evil is not due to primordial ignorance (ἀγνοσία), but rather to the *sin of knowledge* at one's own instigation instead of that through God. Pre-Christian Hermetic treatises (e.g. *Kore Kosmu* and *The Divine Pymander*) and the Bible (Genesis) are in agreement that it is *original sin* which underlies innate human evil.

Both the Hermetic treatises and the Bible state that the original sin was com-

mined in heaven (Hermeticism) or paradise (the Bible) before the original Fall (*πρώτη καθόδοσ*). Both pre-Christian Hermeticism and the Bible describe this original sin as an act of disobedience towards God, i.e. a separation of the human will from that of God, and a discordance between these two wills, caused by the desire for another type of knowledge than that of revelation and for another subject of knowledge than God and his revelation through the world.

Among the Hermetic texts, it is *Kore Kosmu* which speaks in the most explicit way of the sin prior to the Fall (whose consequence and punishment was the Fall), where Isis says to Horus:

"Having thus spoken, God mixed together the two remaining elements, water and earth, and breathed into them a certain life-giving substance, and spoke over them certain secret spells, potent indeed, but not so potent as those which he had uttered before. These things he stirred well together; and when the scum which floated on the surface of the mixture had become translucent, he took this scum, and out of it he fashioned the vital spirits of (from) the animal (circle, i.e. the zodiac).. . (*Kore Kosmu* 18).

"But the residue of the mixture he handed over to the souls that had by this time made progress, those souls that had ascended to 'the places near the stars'. and had been given a new name, and were called 'holy daemons'; and he said to them, 'My children, offspring of my being, take the residue left over from my handiwork, and let each of you fashion something, relying on his own ability; and I will set before you as models these things which I have made'. . .and then he withdrew... (*Kore Kosmu* 19)-

"And God arranged the zodiac in accord with the movings of Nature; and having bestowed on it powers of all-various working, he bade it be productive of all the animals that were to be in all time to come (i.e. all that were to be born after the making of the first specimen, or pair, of each kind)*. . . (*Kore Kosmu* 20).

"(And God promised) to join to the visible works of their hands the invisible vital-spirits, and to give to each of the creatures that should be made power to generate others like itself, in order that the souls might not thereafter be obliged to make anything else beside what they made at first. . ." (*Kore Kosmu* 21).

Horus: "Tell me then, mother, what did the souls make?"—And *Isis* said: "When the souls, my son Horus, had received the min-

*Note added by Walter Scott

gled mass, they first examined it, and sought to find out of what ingredients it was compounded; but this it was not easy for them to discover. Thereupon they feared they might incur the Father's anger for having tried to find out; and they betook themselves to doing the work they had been bidden to do. . . They fashioned the race of birds. . . fishes. . . quadrupeds. . . reptiles. . . (*Kore Kosmu* 22).

"But the souls, my son, thinking that they had now done something great, began to arrange themselves in presumptuous audacity, and transgress God's commands; for they sought to vie with the gods in heaven, claiming nobility equal to theirs, in that the souls themselves had been made by the same Maker. And so they now began to overstep the bounds of their own divisions of the atmosphere; for they would not any longer abide in one place, but were ever on the move, and thought it death to stay in one abode. . . (*Kore Kosmu* 24).

"But when the souls did thus, my son, the Lard of all (so Hermes said. . .) failed not to mark it; and he sought a way to punish them. And so the Ruler and Master of all. thought good to fabricate the human organism, to the intent that in it the race of souls might through all time suffer punishment. . ." (*Kore Kosmu* 25)*

Now, let us look at the salient facts of this text: souls are entrusted with fashioning animals according to their celestial models in the zodiac; but instead of accomplishing this *synthetic* work, "they first examined it (the mixture), and sought to find out of what ingredients it was compounded", i.e. they gave themselves up to *analysis*, preferring *analytical knowledge* to *creative synthetic work*; this had the consequence that they changed their fundamental attitude from the vertical attitude (God-soul) to the horizontal attitude (soul-world) and "were ever on the move" in the horizontal, "for they would not any longer abide in one place"—i.e. the immobility of the vertical—since they "thought it death to stay in one abode".

Let us now compare these salient facts with those of the Biblical account. There, man is placed by God in the garden of Eden—called to the creative *work* of "tilling it and keeping it" (Genesis ii, 15). He lives under the law of the vertical: there are all the *trees* of the garden from which he eats, i.e. methods of ecstasy and enstasy, whereby through prayer, meditation and contemplation the soul is elevated to God. And there is only one prohibition — that of "eating" from a single "tree", the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, for on the day that he eats of it he will die. Man in paradise "gave names to all the animals" that God placed under man's dominion "so that whatever man called every living creature, that was its name" (Genesis ii, 19-20). Lastly, moved by the desire "to have their eyes opened and to be as gods, knowing good and evil" (Genesis ii, 5), Adam and Eve ate from (*Kore Kosmu* 18-22, 24-25; trsl. W. Scott. *Hermetica*. vol. i, Oxfotd, 1924,469-473)

the forbidden tree and were driven out from the garden of Eden in order to cultivate the land.

The similarity, if not identity, of the two narratives leaps out at one. In both it is a matter of the sin of "presumptuous audacity" (or "impudent curiosity"); in both man follows the desire "to have his eyes opened and to be as a god"; in both man is entrusted with a creative magical task with regard to the animals; in both man changes his fundamental attitude from the vertical to the horizontal — which has the consequence that he incarnates, with the consequences of incarnation: suffering, toil and death.

Concerning the points of difference between the two accounts: souls fashioning animals, man only giving them their names; "the places near the stars", the garden of Eden; the multitude of souls, Adam and Eve; the composition of the mixture of the Father, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil —they are easily understood if one takes account of the difference that there is in general between the Genesis of Moses and the treatise *Kore Kosmu*. The latter *teaches*, i.e. it gives an exposition of a teaching, whilst the former *recounts* the dawn of mankind and world history. The one is a *commentary* on the world, whilst the other is a *chronicle* of it. This is why even the facts and events in *Kore Kosmu* are presented in an intellectualised way, i.e. in so far as and in as much as they are stated with sufficient clarity as *ideas*. With regard to the narrative in Genesis, it only presents to the mind of the reader, with magical force, the facts relevant to the spiritual history of the world and mankind. *Kore Kosmu* wants to *convince*, whilst Genesis *awakens* profound memories of a remote past which slumber in the depths of the soul —memories from the "collective unconscious" as Jung would have said.

Being a magical text, Genesis does not say that man "fashioned" the animals, but rather that "he gave them *names*". Now, the "name" is the formative principle in the language of magic. To give a name means to say. in magic, to assign a mission, to charge with a function and at the same time to render capable of acquitting it. Man, according to Genesis, gave the animals created by God their specific missions and functions on the plane of realisation—which entailed a specific organism. *He fashioned them* by giving them names with respect to the plane of realisation.

With respect to "the places near the stars" and the garden of Eden, here again the Biblical account is magical: it does not aim so much at answering the question, "Where in the cosmos was mankind to be found before the primordial Fall?" as the question, "What was mankind doing and what was happening around it before the Fall?"

Now, the answer in Genesis is that mankind was set in a garden "in order to *till* it and *keep* it" (Genesis ii, 15). This means to say that the dawn of humanity did not take place either in a *desert* where nothing happens, or even in a *jungle* where everything sprouts forth and grows without the regulating and directing control of the Spirit or, lastly, in the conditions of a city or *town* where nothing

sprouts forth and grows but where everything is caused and is done through the regulation and direction of the Spirit. A "garden" is thus a state of the world where there is cooperation and equilibrium between Spirit and Nature, whilst a "desert" is a state of immobile passivity both of Nature and Spirit, a "jungle" is the state of activity of Nature alone, and a "town", lastly, is that of activity of Spirit alone. One could say, making use of Hindu philosophical language, that a "garden" corresponds to the state of *sattva* of Nature (*prakrtti*) towards the Spirit (*purusha*). And it was in such a "*sattvic*" milieu—or "garden"—that humanity was placed and was assigned its primordial and eternal mission: to cultivate and maintain this "garden".

Let us stop here for a moment, dear Unknown Friend, to breathe in again, after the magnitude and significance of this compressed and lapidary statement from Genesis (ii, 15) has so taken our breath from us. The primordial and eternal mission of mankind is thus to cultivate and maintain the "garden", i.e. the world in a state of equilibrium and cooperation between Spirit and Nature! What a world of content is found enclosed in seed form in this statement! May spiritual light—moral and practical, mystical, gnostic and magical—radiate forth when one opens one's heart and mind to the touch of this seed-statement!

One then understands in a split second. . . that it is not necessary either *to do*, or *to leave alone*; either to build systems of thought, or to let all thought pass through the head without control; either to devote oneself to exercises of occult, ascetic and mystical training, or to do without constant and continuous endeavour. . . that it is necessary to work, and to allow growth; to think, and to await the growth and ripening of thought; and that it is necessary for the magical word to be accompanied and followed by the *magical silence*. In a word, it is necessary *to cultivate and maintain*'.

To cultivate and to maintain. . . culture and tradition. . . To will and to dare... to know and to be silent.

Here is the essence of the mission of Hermeticism, which is the memory working in the depths of our souls of the primordial and eternal mission of mankind: that of cultivating and maintaining the unforgettable garden of the dawn of mankind. There are "trees" to cultivate and maintain in this garden: the methods or ways of uniting earth and heaven—the rainbow of peace between that which is below and that which is above. In India these methods or ways of union are called "yoga". There the following ways of union are taught: Hatha-yoga, Jnana-yoga, Bhakti-yoga, Karma-yoga, Tantra-yoga, Mantra-yoga and Raja-yoga, i.e. union through breathing and the circulatory movement of life (*prana*), union through thought, union through feeling, union through conduct, union through love, union through the magic of the word, and union through the will.

Black Elk, the guardian of the sacred pipe of the Sioux tribe, who went blind owing to his advanced age, revealed to Joseph Epes Brown (in *The Sacred Pipe*, Baltimore, 1953) the seven traditional Sioux rites or ways of man's union with the Father (the Great Spirit) and Mother (the earth), which constitute the soul of the

spiritual life of the Red-Indian tribes from the coast of the Gulf of Mexico as far as Maine in the north and from Georgia as far as Idaho in the west.

But in so far as we—Christian Hermeticists—are concerned, the "trees" or "yogas" of the garden that we want to cultivate and maintain, are given to us in the "seven pillars of the house that Wisdom has built" (Proverbs ix. 1). i.e. the seven "days" of Creation (including the sabbath), the seven miracles of the Gospel of St. John, the seven "I am" sayings of Jesus Christ and, lastly, the seven Sacraments of the Church.

Such are the "trees" of the garden that we cultivate and maintain, i.e. the mysteries of union—mystical, gnostic, magical and Hermetic—of that which is below with that which is above. For mysticism, gnosis, magic and Hermetic science are the four branches of the "river" which flows out of our garden of Eden "to water"—the "river" which "divided and became four rivers" (Genesis ii, 10).

Let us therefore imitate with respect and gratitude both Swami Vivekananda of India and Black Elk of the North American Sioux, concerning their faithfulness to the task of cultivating and guarding that which providence wanted to entrust them with of the memory of the garden of Eden—by cultivating and guarding with the same faithfulness what providence certainly wants to entrust us with of the memory of this same garden. And let us not trouble ourselves about the lot of those whose culture and tradition differs from ours. God, who sees all, will certainly not forget to crown the head of every cultivator and faithful guardian of his garden.

Another point of difference between *Kore Kosmu* and Genesis is the multitude of souls, on the one hand, and Adam-Eve, on the other. Here again the difference is explained by the semi-philosophical nature of *Kore Kosmu*, in contrast to the magical nature of Genesis. *Kore Kosmu* has *substances* in mind, whilst Genesis speaks of the *act*. From the point of view of substance it was a multitude of souls who caused and underwent the Fall; from the point of view of the act they were only one, since their act was one—having been committed collectively—and it was Adam-Eve who committed it.

Thus, there are two answers to the question, "What is innate human evil?" The one—given by the left wing of traditional Wisdom—is "*ignorance*"; the other—given by the right wing of traditional Wisdom—is *the sin of illicit knowledge*.

A contradiction? Yes and no. The two answers are contradictory in so far as ignorance and knowledge are opposites. But they are in agreement in so far as innate ignorance is a consequence of the original sin of the will, which became infatuated with the desire to replace knowledge due to revelation by knowledge due to experimentation. There is certainly a difference, but there is in no way a contradiction. The difference consists in that the oriental tradition puts the accent on the *cognitive aspect* of the fact of discord between human consciousness and cosmic reality, whilst the occidental tradition puts it on the *moral aspect* of this same fact.

The oriental tradition sees in innate human evil a kind of misunderstanding.

or undervaluing, where consciousness mistakes the empirical personality—relating to the body and the psychic life—for the true Self which is immutable and eternal. In contrast, the occidental tradition sees here the consequence of the sin of having wanted to be "like gods, knowing good and evil", i.e. the *disfiguration* of the "likeness of God", although the image—which corresponds to the "true Self of the orientals—has remained intact. And it is the "empirical self which bears the features of disfiguration due to original sin. Therefore it is not a question of the erroneous identification of the true Self (or "image of God") with the "empirical self, but rather of the disfiguration of this latter. The identification would be perfectly justifiable if the "empirical self" had remained in the "likeness of God", i.e. if it had not been disfigured as a consequence of the Fall.

In other words, the difference between the two traditions is that in the oriental tradition one aspires to divorce in the marriage of the "true Self and the "empirical self, whilst the occidental tradition regards this marriage as indissoluble. The "true Self, according to the occidental tradition, cannot or should not rid itself of the "empirical self by repudiating it. The two are bound by indissoluble links for all eternity and should together accomplish the work of re-establishing the "likeness of God". It is not the freedom of divorce but rather that of reunion which is the ideal of the occidental tradition.

It is thus in the *will that* the original sin took place and brought about the Fall. Genesis describes this sin of the will as the desire to arrogate to oneself knowledge of good and evil, to become "like gods".

But Genesis does not confine itself to the first stage of the Fall in paradise—although this is the decisive one—but adds three subsequent stages: notably *Cain's fratricide*, *the generation of giants*, and *the building of the tower of Babel* (Genesis iv, 1-16; vi, 1-4; xi, 1-9).

Although these three subsequent stages are simply a logical development from the original sin committed in paradise, they are nonetheless new stages in so far as the *realisation* of the original sin in the terrestrial domain of mankind's spiritual history is concerned. For Cain's fratricide is the primordial phenomenon (Goethe's *Urphaenomen*) containing the seed of all subsequent wars, revolutions and revolts in the history of the human race. The generation of giants is the primordial phenomenon which is the proto-historical seed of all subsequent pretensions in the history of the human race for individuals, groups and peoples to play a domineering role as divine sovereigns, and thus all pretensions of being "supermen". The Caesars who arrogated divine honour and authority to themselves, Nietzsche's "superman" (*Uebermensch*), and likewise the diverse fascist and communist *Führers* of our century, are only particular manifestations of the primordial "gigantism" of which Genesis speaks. And the building of the tower of Babel (Genesis xi, 1-9) is the primordial phenomenon containing in seed form all subsequent tendencies in the history of the human race towards the conquest of heaven by means of erees acquired and developed on the earth.

At the root of Cain's fratricide is the revolt of the "lower self against the "true

Self—of the fallen "likeness" against the intact "image". At the root of the generation of giants is the marriage of the "lower self with entities of the fallen hierarchies—instead of with the "true Self. And at the root of the building of the tower of Babel is the collective will of "lower selves" to achieve the replacing of the "true Self of the celestial hierarchies and God with a superstructure of universal significance fabricated through this will.

Revolt, possession, and substitution of the fabricated for the revealed—with these three sins there correspond three "falls" and effects entailed by them. Cain, who killed his brother Abel, became an *exile*—he became a wanderer. The generation of giants was followed by the *flood*. The building of the tower of Babel had as its effect the "thunderbolt" of the "descent of the Lord", who "confused their language"—that of the builders—and "scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth" (Genesis xi, 7-9), so that they would no longer understand one another's language.

Just as the building of the tower of Babel is the summary of the preceding stages of sin — those of revolt and "gigantism"—so the *effect* of the building of the tower of Babel—the thunderbolt dispersing its builders and confusing their language—is the summary of the effects of the two preceding sins. This is why, it seems, the sixteenth Card of the Major Arcana of the Tarot represents only the blasted tower and the thunderbolt—quite disregarding the flood and Cain's exile. For the tower blasted by lightning suffices to reveal to serious meditation the comprehensive *arcanum* of the relationship between the will and destiny—between what one wants and what happens.

For *to wander* is the inevitable lot of the revolt of the "lower self against the "higher Self; *to be drowned* is the lot entailed by the pretension to be a "superman"; and *to be blasted by a thunderbolt* is the fate—as inevitable as the two preceding—of building, collectively or individually, it does not matter, a tower of Babel.

The Arcanum "The Tower of Destruction" teaches a general and universal *law* that it presents in the comprehensive form of the tower of Babel. A general and universal law—this means to say a law which operates both on a small scale and on a grand scale, in individual biography as well as in that of mankind, and in the past, present and future equally. According to this law, he who rebels against his "higher Self will no longer live under the law of the *vertical* but, rather under that of the *horizontal*, i.e. he will be "a fugitive and a wanderer on the earth" (Genesis iv, 12).

He who unites himself with an entity of the fallen hierarchies, instead of with his "higher Self, to the point of being possessed, will be *drowned*, i.e. he will fall prey to madness. This happened to Nietzsche, the inspired author of works lauding the "superman" and the antichrist. Likewise, this happened to humanity at the time when "giants were on the earth"—"these were the mighty men of old, the men of renown" (Genesis vi, 4). For the flood inundated the earth not only with water but also with that other "water" which drowns consciousness and

memory—that very "water" of forgetfulness and imbecility which inundated Nietzsche. It is thus that the very advanced civilisation of Atlantis was drowned in forgetfulness. just as the cradle continent of this civilisation was engulfed by waters. It is thus that the "primitive" tribes and nomadic peoples, disinherited from their past and obliged to begin everything again, began to live in caves or camp under trees. There were once powerful kingdoms and magnificent towns in Africa, but their descendants had lost all memory of them and gave themselves up entirely to the daily life of "primitive" tribes—the life of hunting, fishing, agriculture and war. The forgetting on the part of the indigenous Australians was even more complete.

Similarly, he who builds a "tower" to replace revelation from heaven by what he himself has fabricated, will be blasted by a thunderbolt, i.e. he will undergo the humiliation of being reduced to his own subjectivity and to terrestrial reality.

The "law of the tower of Babel" has already been stated in the thirteenth Letter on the Tarot with respect to certain occult practices aiming at achieving a kind of immortality by means of the crystallisation of energy emanated from the physical body to the point of resisting death. There it was a matter of building an individual "tower of Babel" consisting of superimposed "doubles" in ascending order from the physical body. It was the aspect of "building" alone which was in question there, without the other aspect of this law being dealt with—that of the "thunderbolt". Now, under the title of the sixteenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot there is occasion to deal with the entire law, i.e. that of the "thunderbolt" as well as the aspect of "building".

We pointed out above that the law of the tower of Babel is universal, i.e. that it works both in individual biography and in humanity—and even in other hierarchies. The point of this law is that all autonomous activity from below inevitably meets with divine reality above. What one has built through the autonomous effort of the "lower self" must, sooner or later, be confronted by divine reality, and undergo the effects of comparison with it. The law—or arcanum—of the tower of Babel is manifest, for example, in the fact of purgatory after death. For every man who is not a saint or fully righteous man builds a kind of "tower of Babel" which is his own. His actions, opinions and aspirations—autonomous or personal—constitute a "private world" that he has built and that he bears with himself into the spiritual world after his death. This subjective world must there pass through the trial of meeting with trans-subjective spiritual reality—the *thunderbolt*. And this meeting of subjectivity with spiritual reality is the essence of the post-mortem stage known by the name "purgatory".

Purgatory is therefore the state of the soul where the actions, opinions and aspirations of the past life are seen in the true light of day of trans-subjective consciousness. No one judges it; it is the soul itself who judges itself in the light of a completely awakened conscience.

One often speaks of the "darkness" into which the soul is plunged on entering purgatory, and also of the "solitary confinement" that it undergoes there. There

is truth in these descriptions of the state of the soul in purgatory, but it is necessary firstly to understand them in order to be able to rightly appreciate their truth. Seen from *without*, a soul who enters the state of purgatory disappears from the sight of other souls and is thus plunged into the darkness of invisibility and inaccessibility. It is in this sense, i.e. in the sense of being inaccessible, that one can certainly say that the soul in purgatory undergoes "confinement". For the soul is then outside of contacts and relationships with the "free" beings of the spiritual world.

But seen from *within*, a soul who enters into purgatory is plunged into the absolute light of trans-subjective consciousness which, being so luminous, seems to envelop and make the soul so concentrated as to become inaccessible to everyone.

Concerning how the purification of the soul in purgatory takes place, the nature of the darkness and confinement of the state of purgatory and, lastly, the fruits of this state—no one has given a clearer idea and a more convincing description, being founded on authentic experience, than that given by St. John of the Cross in his *Dark Night of the Soul*. In the chapters where he deals with "the dark night of the spirit" we find an analogy that is as close as possible to the state of the soul in purgatory—the experience described being in every way analogous to the experience of purification that the soul undergoes in purgatory:

The dark night is a certain inflowing of God into the soul which cleanses it of its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural and spiritual. . . . But it may be asked: Why does the soul call the divine light, which enlightens the soul and purges it of its ignorances, the dark night? I reply that the divine wisdom is, for two reasons, not night and darkness only, but pain and torment also to the soul. The first is, the divine wisdom is so high that it transcends the capacity of the soul, and therefore is, in that respect, darkness. The second reason is based on the meanness and impurity of the soul, and in that respect the divine wisdom is painful to it, afflictive and dark also. To prove the truth of the first reason, we take for granted a principle of the philosopher, namely, the more clear and evident divine things are, the more dark and hidden they are to the soul naturally. Thus the more clear the light the more does it blind the eyes of the owl, and the stronger the sun's rays the more it blinds the visual organs; overcoming them, by reason of their weakness, and depriving them of the power of seeing. So the divine light of contemplation, when it beats on the soul, not yet perfectly enlightened, causes spiritual darkness, because it not only surpasses its strength, but because it blinds it and deprives it of its natural perceptions. . . . This is the reason why the illuminating ray of hidden wisdom, when God sends it from Himself into the soul not yet transformed, produces thick darkness in the

understanding. . . The soul, by reason of its impurity, suffers exceedingly when the divine light really shines upon it. And when the rays of this pure light strike upon the soul, in order to expel its impurities, the soul perceives itself to be so unclean and miserable that it seems as if God had set Himself against it, and itself were set against God. So grievous and painful is this feeling—for it thinks now that God has abandoned it—that it was one of the heaviest afflictions of Job during his trial: "Why hast Thou set me contrary to Thee, and I become burdensome to myself?" (Job vii, 20). The soul seeing distinctly in this bright and pure light, though dimly, its own impurity, acknowledges its own unworthiness before God and all creatures. That which pains it still more is the fear it has that it never will be worthy, and that all its goodness is gone. In the second place, the pain of the soul comes from its natural, moral and spiritual weakness; for when this divine contemplation strikes it with a certain vehemence, in order to strengthen it and subdue it, it is then so pained in its weakness as almost to faint away... for sense and spirit, as if under a heavy and gloomy burden, suffer and groan in agony so great that death (annihilation) itself would be a desired relief. . . (this is a thing) wonderful and piteous. . . So great are the weakness and impurity of the soul that the hand of God, so soft and so gentle, is felt to be so heavy and oppressive, though neither pressing nor resting on it, but merely touching it, and that, too, most mercifully; for He touches the soul not to chastise it, but to load it with His graces. . . (*Dark Night II*, v, 1-4, 6, 8-9).

A sunbeam coming in by the window is perceived the less distinctly the more pure and free from atoms and motes the air is, but the more of these there are, the more distinct is the beam to the eye. The reason is that we do not see light itself, but by means of it we see the objects on which it falls, and these reflecting it, the light itself becomes a visible object; had it not struck them it would itself remain invisible. . . Thus this ray of divine contemplation, transcending as it does the natural powers, striking the soul with its divine light, makes it dark, and deprives it of all the natural affections and apprehensions which it previously entertained in its own natural light. Under these circumstances, the soul is left not only in darkness but in emptiness also, as to its powers and desires, both natural and spiritual, and in this emptiness and darkness is purified and enlightened by the divine spiritual light, but it does not imagine that it has it; yea, rather, it thinks itself to be in darkness, as we have said of the sunbeam which, though passing through the middle of the room, cannot be seen if the air is quite pure and there are no objects on which it may fall. However, the spirirual light falling on the soul if there is anything to reflect it, that is, upon

any matter, however small, of perfection, which presents itself to the understanding or a decision to be made as to the truth or falsehood of anything, the soul sees it at once, *and understands the matter more clearly than it ever did before it entered into this darkness*. In the same way the soul discerns the spiritual light which is given it that it may easily recognise its own imperfection. . . (*Dark Night II*, viii, 5-6).

. . . the divine fire of contemplative love which, before it unites with, and transforms the soul into itself, purges away all its contrary qualities. It expels its impurities, blackens it and obscures it, and thus its condition is apparently worse than it was before, more impure and offensive. For while the divine purification is removing all the evil and vicious humours, which, because so deeply rooted and settled in the soul, were neither seen nor felt, but now, in order to (effect) their expulsion and annihilation, are rendered clearly visible in the dim light of the divine contemplation, the soul — though not worse in itself, nor in the sight of God — seeing at last what it never saw before, looks upon itself not only as unworthy of His regard, but even as a loathsome object and that God does loathe it. . . (*Dark Night II*, x, 2).

. . . the light of God which illumines an Angel enlightens him, and sets him on fire with love, for he is a spirit already prepared for the infusion of that light; but man, being impure and weak, is ordinarily enlightened, as I said before, in darkness, in distress and pain — the sun's rays are painful in their light to weak eyes — till the fire of love, purifying him, shall have spiritualised and refined him, so that being made pure he may be able to receive with sweetness, like the Angels, the union of this inflowing love. . . (*Dark Night II*, xii, 4).

(St. John of the Cross, *The Dark Night of the Soul II*, v, viii, x, xii; trsl. D. Lewis, fourth ed., revised, London, 1916, pp. 83-88, 104-106, 118, 130)

The foregoing extracts from *The Dark Night of the Soul*, i.e. from chapters 5, 8, 10 and 12 of Book II (concerning "the dark night of the spirit"), are the most relevant here in the doctrine of St. John of the Cross. The purification portrayed in these extracts amounts to a school of humility, and the divine light present here, which puts the soul in darkness and bears down on it by making it experience the weight of the inevitable necessity of the confrontation of human nature with divine truth, can be summarised by the image of the tower blasted by a thunderbolt, and the fall of its constructors, i.e. by the Card of the sixteenth Arcanum of the Tarot. The *thunderbolt* which *blasts* is the divine light which *dazzles* and *bears down*; the blasted tower is what the human powers of understanding, imagination and will have erected, which find themselves confronted with divine reality; the constructors who fall represent the "school of humility" for the human

powers of understanding, imagination and will. Purgatory, the way of purification which precedes illumination and mystical union, the great historical events which have had the effect that mankind had to begin again, lastly, the events in the biographies of individuals where the latter were overwhelmed by a thunderbolt-blast in order to rise again from it either illumined, like Saul of Tarsus, or alienated, like Nietzsche—all these things which appear so different are only diverse manifestations of the same law or arcanum: that of *the tower blasted by a thunderbolt*.

It is this law which is the theme of the *Magnificat* that I have put at the head of this Letter, where it is said:

He has scattered those who have proud thoughts in their hearts,
He has put down the mighty from their thrones...
He has filled the hungry with good things,
And the rich he has sent away empty-handed.

(Luke i, 51-53)

It is the eternal law of the tower of Babel which is sung in the *Magnificat*—the law of the tower blasted by a thunderbolt, and of the humble heart raised by the same thunderbolt to divine illumination. For the *Magnificat* is the song of a heart struck by this very thunderbolt which "puts down the mighty from their thrones, and exalts those of low degree".

The essence of this law can hardly be expressed in a more precise and concise way than it is in the Gospel according to Luke: "Every one who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke xiv, 11). There are many ways of exalting oneself, and there is a single way of being abased.

In biology, for example, it has been established that in the process of evolution there are many ways which lead to a temporary advantage due to the specialisation of an organism in a determined direction, but which always ends in an impasse. Thus the great reptiles, the Saurians, attained uncontested dominion on the earth owing to their physical strength, their agility in movement, and their formidable natural weapons in the form of jaws and other members. But they lasted only to give way to small beings without the advantages of physical strength and natural weapons (i.e. tearing jaws and crushing limbs). These small warm-blooded beings, the first mammals, were not so specialised as the reptiles, and were insignificant beings alongside the latter.

Their very insignificance enabled them to survive during the long period when the land was dominated by powerful and specialised types of reptile. (Julian Huxley, *Evolution in Action*, London, 1953, p. 123)

And it is also their lack of specialisation which allowed them to adapt to the radical change in climatic conditions, and other changes effected by the formation of

mountains towards the end of the Mesozoic period, to which the dominant reptiles were unable to adapt; and thus they disappeared.

Therefore mammals replaced reptiles as masters of the earth. Much later, however, branches of mammals specialised, elevating themselves in their turn by developing organs and faculties which certainly gave them temporary advantages, but which brought them to an impasse, i.e. they were rendered incapable of further evolution. And it is the group of mammals who, instead of specialising themselves, were engaged in the *process of general growth*, or in a balanced evolution of the physical organism and the psychic faculties, who came to the crest of the wave of evolution and who eventually produced organisms capable of serving as instruments for human souls. Therefore, expressed in biological terms, "to exalt oneself amounts to *specialisation*, which gives temporary advantages, and "to humble oneself in order to be exalted" means, in terms of biology, *general growth*, i.e. a balanced evolution, of the physical and psychic faculties of beings. And what is true in the domain of biology is also true in all other domains.

for this reason I thought it was the right place to add—at the head of this Letter—to the formula, "He who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke xiv, 11), the following text from the Gospel according to St. Mark:

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. (Mark iv, 26-27)

For it is the way of *general growth* or that of "humbling oneself to the role of a seed", in opposition to the ways of *specialisation* or those of "exalting oneself by *building* towers", which sets this text in relief. To *grow* or to *build*—this is the choice which it comes down to in the last analysis: the "way of salvation" and the "way of perdition"; or the way of infinite perfection and that resulting in an impasse. The idea of hell is simply that of a definite spiritual impasse; that of purgatory refers to the process of the rejection of tendencies towards impasses of specialisation, with a view to safeguarding and keeping the way of perfection open—the "way of salvation".

To exalt oneself or to abase oneself, to specialise oneself in order to gain temporary advantages or to be moved only by the hunger and thirst for truth, beauty and goodness, to *build* a tower or to *grow* "sleeping and rising night and day. . . without knowing how"—here is the choice that every human being, every community, every tradition or spiritual school, *must* make.

Now, we occultists, magicians, esotericists and Hermeticists — all those who want to "do" instead of merely waiting, who want "to take their evolution in their own hands" and "to direct it towards an aim"—are confronted with this choice in a much more dramatic way, I should say, than is so for people who are not concerned with esotericism. Our principal danger (if not the *only* true danger) is that

of preferring the role of "builders of the tower of Babel" (no matter whether personally or in a community) to watching over "as gardeners or vine-growers the garden or the vine of the Lord". Truth to tell, the only truly morally founded reason for keeping esotericism "esoteric", i.e. for not bringing it to the broad light of day and popularising it, is the danger of the great misunderstanding of confusing the *tower* with the *tree*, as a consequence of which "masons" will be recruited instead of "gardeners".

The Church was always conscious of this danger. This is why it always insisted — whilst appreciating and encouraging effort as such — on the principle of *grace* as the sole source for advancing on the way of perfection. This is also why it was always suspicious of so-called "initiation fraternities" or such-like groups who formed themselves at its periphery or beyond it. For, leaving rivalry and other human imperfections out of account, the *serious* reason for the Church to take a negative attitude towards initiation fraternities is the danger of the substitution of building for growth, of "doing" for grace, and of ways of specialisation for the way of salvation. I do not know if this explains the persecution of the Order of Templars, but it certainly explains the opposition of the Church with regard to Freemasonry.

Be that as it may for particular historical cases, what occupies us here is the arcanum of the tower blasted by a thunderbolt, i.e. the totality of relevant ideas and facts relating to the will "to exalt oneself, which produces specialisation, which in its turn leads inevitably to an impasse. It is therefore a matter of a choice between "building" and "growth" in the domain of esotericism.

You see a fakir who is insensible to the nails on which he stretches himself out, or who has himself buried alive for a week without being suffocated, or who makes a plant grow in your presence. This fakir has realised some advantages; he *can do* what you cannot do. But he has attained it at the expense of general development as a human being; he has specialised himself. He will never make a contribution of value to philosophy, religion or art. With respect to his general human progress he is at an impasse — awaiting a thunderbolt from above which can enable him to get out of it.

And then the problem that disquieted Agrippa of Nettesheim, author of the classic work on magic, *De Occulta Philosophia*: How could it be that the author of this book in which one finds a multitude of things based on authentic experience, how could it be that he, the enthusiastic adept, became the sceptic disenchanted with life who wrote *De Incertitudine et Vanitate Scientiarum* ("On the Uncertainty and the Vanity of the Sciences"), which was written during his last years of life?

The answer to this question is that Agrippa had built a "tower of Babel" which was later blasted by a "thunderbolt from above". It was higher reality which made all the "sciences of the supernatural"—to which he had devoted the best years of his life—appear vain to him. The tower was shaken, but the way of heaven was opened. He was free to begin again, i.e. in a condition to enter upon the way of *growth*.

The fakir and the magician both need equally the liberating thunderbolt from above in order to return to the way of purely *human* evolution, i.e. to that of general growth, without the impasses of specialisation. It is likewise with the specialised gnostic and mystic. This is why we have repeated so many times in these Letters that practical (i.e. *lived*) Hermeticism is neither occult science, nor magic, nor gnosis, nor mysticism, but rather their synthesis. For it is a *tree* and not a *tower*. And it is man himself, the *whole* man—who is at one and the same time philosopher and magician, gnostic and mystic—who is this tree.

Is this therefore the Sephiroth Tree of the Cabbala? Maybe. Or the Tree of Consciousness and Life in the middle of the garden of Eden? Yes. But above all I would most love to see here the Tree of Death and Resurrection—the Cross from which the Rose springs. This is the Cross that is mortifying and vivifying at the same time—the Cross where the agony of Calvary and the glory of the Resurrection are united. For the Cross is the law of *growth*: that of perpetual dying and becoming. It is the way which does not lead to impasses of specialisation, but rather to "throughways" of *purification*—which lead to *illumination* and end in *union*.

Practical Hermeticism is the mysticism, gnosis, magic and science of the Cross. The object of its pursuit, its basic impulse and reason for existence is the great work of *growth*—working through spiritual, psychic and corporeal transformation, sublimation, transubstantiation and transmutation. Yes, alchemy, the alchemical principle, is the soul of Hermeticism. One finds this principle expressed in the Gospel: "nothing should be lost... all should have eternal life" (John vi, 39-40). Can one imagine an ideal or aim where more faith, hope and love could be implied? Whilst those who lack perfect faith resort to the surgery of the separation of the true Self from the lower self, as is the case with Sankya and with yoga, those who lack hope make up for the absence of faculties and forces by resorting to artificial limbs, i.e. to the construction of mechanisms called to replace the functions of faculties which are absent—as is the case with the constructors of machines, the authors of philosophical systems, those who carry out rituals of ceremonial magic and, in general, *tower-builders*. Adepts of the "great work", however, confess to "the folly of the Cross" (I Corinthians i, 18), i.e. they believe, hope and desire that "nothing should be lost... all should have eternal life".

The "good news" that the world received more than nineteen centuries ago is in no way that of successful surgical operation of freedom from suffering; no more is it that of the successful construction of a tower attributed to man—small though the tower may be, or of unparalleled grandeur, i.e. "reaching up to heaven"; but rather it is that of *resurrection*—the great alchemical operation of the successful transmutation of the human being. Liberation through spiritual surgery, power owing to the construction of mental or other mechanisms, *or* resurrection thanks to the Cross, to the law of spiritual growth—here is the choice of ideal that every human soul must make.

Now, Hermeticism has made the choice. It has embraced for ever the law of "living life"—the Cross—as its way and resurrection as its ideal. For this reason

there is nothing mechanical about it, nor is there anything surgical about it. In Hermeticism one does not build any kind of tower and one does not seek to accomplish any divorce. It is a matter solely of the transmutation of the forces and faculties of human nature, i.e. the *great work* of human evolution, avoiding the impasses of specialisation.

I have said that in practical Hermeticism there is nothing mechanical or surgical. This means to say that one will not find any kind of device within it—mental, ceremonial or physiological—by means of which one would be able to know and accomplish things surpassing the capacity of the moral and intellectual faculties that one possesses by virtue of moral and intellectual growth due to experience, endeavour and the action of grace from above. You will not find, for example, a technical method of awakening the "lotus centres" by means of the pronunciation of mantric syllables accompanied by breathing specially adapted to this end. The "lotus centres" grow and mature in the light, warmth and life of the true, the beautiful and the good, without any special technical method being applied. The "lotuses", just like the whole human being, develop according to the general law:

The kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed upon the ground, and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he knows not how. (Mark iv, 26-27)

It is *cordiality* which, in practical Hermeticism, renders the heart—the "twelve-petalled lotus"—warm, and not the awakening of the dormant Kundalini force through mantric syllables and respiration. It is *attention* due to the desire to understand which sets the lotus of intellectual initiative in motion—the "two-petalled lotus"—and not a mantric syllable and special mode of breathing; and so on. If it was otherwise, if one applied to each "lotus" a special method with a view to its development, one would achieve their development in the sense of *specialisation*, i.e. temporary advantages, but ultimately an impasse. It is the same with intellectual techniques. The calculating machine certainly has its place in the scientific work of today. But it—or anything analogous to it—has no place in Hermeticism, where personal and original effort of thought is irreplaceable. Neither the *ars combinatoria* ("the art of combination") of Raymond Lull nor the "arithmetic" of Saint-Yves d'Alveydre—ingenious and well-founded though they are—were accepted in Hermeticism as intellectual instruments for discoveries and classification. Similarly, the system of Aristotelian syllogisms such as was in use amongst Scholastic thinkers of the Middle Ages, gained hardly any access amongst Hermeticists.

It is because Hermeticism does not *want* to use *any instrument* that the above-mentioned excellent intellectual instruments were rejected by it. For Hermeticism has nothing to do with the desire to have "ready made answers" to all questions, obtained with minimum effort and maximum result. Its "questions" are *crises*

and the "answers" that it seeks are *states of consciousness* resulting from these crises. This is why Hermeticism — being the *art of becoming*, the art of transformation, transubstantiation and transmutation of human consciousness — cannot make use of any intellectual instrument. The symbols which it uses—or rather that Hermeticists let themselves make use of—are not intellectual instruments. There is nothing mechanical about them. Quite on the contrary, the symbols are mystical-gnostic-magical "ferments" or "enzymes" of thought, whose troubling presence disquiets thinking, stimulates it, and calls it to immerse itself to ever new depths.

Therefore symbols are in no way instruments of thought, but rather they are its guides and active masters, just like the "symbol of faith", the Christian Creed, which is not an instrument of thought, but rather is a stellar constellation high above the head. And if this were not so, I repeat, if Hermeticism were a "system" or an intellectual instrument, it could only have led to an impasse and would have died long ago. For it would have become "specialised" in its development—and therefore non-viable. It would have become a tower of Babel awaiting a salutary thunderbolt from above.

About forty years ago, I knew an engineer who was twenty years older than me. He was an esotericist and I considered him to be a master. He had studied the three volumes of H. P. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* in the solitude of the steppes of central Asia and had succeeded in reducing the mass of material of this work to a simple and elegant system—a circle with seven inner circles each in their turn subdivided into seven smaller circles. With time he had attained such an ability in manipulating this instrument that whatever question it was that he had to answer, he would find the answer to it almost immediately. The Russian revolution? This was 3 which aspired to 4. Science and religion? This was 5 and 4. European science and the esoteric wisdom of the Orient? This was 5 and 6.

And do not believe that all he said was these numbers. To the "non-initiated" he had many things to say each time—often very instructive and almost always quite to the point. The numbers were only for the "initiates", of whom I was one.

Now, the engineer, R., without doubt had an undeniable advantage in the instrument that he had constructed with the help of Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine*. He was evidently superior to others who did not have the benefit of this instrument. . . temporarily, for some years. The great boredom of the impasse made his disciples disperse, of whom each sought a way of authentic experience of the living spirit. With respect to the author of this prodigious intellectual instrument, he finished by publishing a book. . . on the "white lady" who haunted an old house in the town where he lived. It was, I think, the same boredom which made him occupy himself with this phenomenon—a phantom, yes, but nevertheless a phenomenon of reality.

The arcanum of the tower blasted by a thunderbolt from above. . . how I would like to proclaim aloud the significance and meaning of it, so that it makes as deep an impression as possible on every seeker for profound truth! The English always

say that it is sufficient to do one's best. But how can one know that it is *truly* one's best that one has done? Who can say with certainty that he has done his best? No, to say "I did my best" is quite convenient for someone who desires peace at any price, but this argument has no effect on anyone who desires the peace of certainty of conscience. . . . But enough of personal torments—let us return to the arcanum with which we are occupied.

There never has been—nor *can* be—anything mechanical in practical Hermeticism, since it does not build "towers of Babel". I said also that there is nothing *surgical* in it. This means to say that, the alchemical principle being the soul of Hermeticism, it is the "*marriage* of opposites" and not their *divorce* which constitutes the basis of practical Hermeticism.

The marriage of opposites is a principle of universal significance. This is *not* a compromise that one contrives, but rather the *cross* and the magic of the cross. It is thus that the "true Self is united to the "lower self in the human being, where the "lower self is the cross of the "true Self and the "true Self is the cross of the "lower self. The two poles of the human being then *live in the presence* of one another, the result of which is an alchemical process of gradual approach to one another.

It is similar with the hierarchies "of the right" and "of the left" in the world and in the history of the world. They can neither be united nor separated. They are engaged in a millennial-old discussion, where the arguments are facts and the conclusions are events. The hierarchies "of the left" are the cross of the hierarchies "of the right", and vice versa. There is no other hope in the world and in its history than the alchemical process of the transmutation of evil into good—the "sacrament of penance" on a cosmic scale. Divorce between the two sides would be an irreparable catastrophe.

Let us now take some historical examples nearer at hand. The wars of religion between Protestants and Catholics and also, before them, the wars between Christians and Mohammedans led—as in the recent Korean war—to the establishment of a line of demarcation, a "38th. parallel". The result was recognition of one another's existence and of the need to live in one another's presence, i.e. to suffer one another's presence. The decision was made to "carry the cross" instead of resorting to the surgery of war. Now the magic of the cross, the alchemical process of transmutation, could begin to work. And the result?

Both the Moslem and Christian world have at present not only no desire to convert one another by means of arms, but also not the least desire to populate hell with souls of the opposing religions. With respect to Protestants and Catholics, in Germany—the country which the Thirty Years' War ruined, no less than the Second World War of 1939-45—it is the united front of Catholics and Protestants, the CDU, which is in power.

It is similar in the conflict between the free world and the communist world. Whether we like it or not, we will have to mutually recognise one another and to tolerate the existence of one another, and to bear the suffering entailed thereby.

The 38th. parallel in Korea was the beginning of it. The result will be the operation of the magic of the cross, the alchemical process of transmutation. The free world, being in the presence of its judge and untiring competitor, will gradually eliminate what it recognises as social injustices; and the communist world, being in the presence of its judge and untiring competitor, will gradually liberalise itself and restore the freedoms that it recognises as postulates of human nature, which one cannot and must not violate.

It is the same again with the conflict between science and religion, both in the East and in the West. They will have to suffer one another. And the result will be that there will always be more Einsteins and more Teilhard de Chardins — believing scientists and scientific priests.

The magic of the cross, alchemy operating in the "marriage of opposites", is therefore the sole hope for the world, for mankind and for its history. And it is precisely this principle of the "marriage of opposites" which underlies Hermeticism. This is why it rejects the principle of divorce and war—the surgical principle— in practice as well as in theory, spiritually, morally and intellectually. The soul of Hermeticism is that "nothing should be lost... all should have eternal life" (John vi, 39-40).

Its fundamental thesis that all *can* be saved — this thesis which is Christian and alchemical at the same time — is without doubt that of faith, pure and simple, i.e. due to the experience of the divine breath. But it has the virtue of taking hold not only of the heart and the will but also of the understanding. The latter can find complete satisfaction here. The following is an example of how it can be found.

The parable of the lost sheep is well known. One generally understands it as portraying the care of the good pastor for the particular soul — and without doubt it does this. Nevertheless, one can, by analogy, apply it also to the inner life of the soul — its desires, aspirations, vices and virtues. If one does this, if one considers — by analogy — each particular force in the soul as a "sheep", one arrives at the understanding that the soul's faults and vices are not, fundamentally, monsters but rather, lost sheep. Thus, the eagerness to dominate, the desire to submit the will of other people to one's own is, fundamentally, a sheep which is lost. For at the root of the desire to dominate is found the dream of unity, union, the harmony of a choir. It is a "sheep". But instead of seeking the realisation of the dream of harmony by way of love, the will seeks to realise it by way of compulsion. This is a sheep that has lost its way. In order for it to return to the "flock", the fundamental will underlying the desire to dominate must be imprinted with the understanding that it is in the domain of love and not in that of commandment that it will find what it is seeking. Here is the return of the lost sheep — the alchemical process of transmutation of a "base metal" into "gold".

As it is the same with all the soul's faults and vices, we all have the mission of finding and bringing back to the flock (i.e. to the soul's choral harmony) the lost sheep in ourselves. We are missionaries in the subjective domain of our own soul, charged with the task of the conversion of our desires, ambitions, etc. We

have to *persuade* them that they are seeking the realisation of their dreams in a false way. by showing them the true way. It is not a matter of commandment, but rather of the alchemy of the cross, i.e. making present an alternative way for our desires, ambitions, passions, etc. It is a matter, moreover, of the alchemical "marriage of opposites".

The practical way of doing this is *meditation*. It is deep meditation which makes present every "lost sheep" in us, with sufficient force to impress on it the alternative concerned. To meditate is to think in the presence of God—just as to pray is to speak in the presence of God.

Meditation is therefore the honest and courageous effort of the "lower self to think together with the "higher Self in divine light. And just as *concentration* necessarily precedes meditation, so does the latter lead soon or later to *contemplation*, i.e. a transition is made from consideration and discourse to the immobility and complete silence of supernatural communion, where one no longer thinks *something* from a distance, but where this Thing itself is present and reveals itself. Contemplation is the union of the thinket with reality. Here one does not arrive at a "conclusion", but one receives—or undergoes—the *imprint* of Reality.

This is therefore the "technique" (although there is, nevertheless, nothing technical in practical Hermeticism): the transition from concentration to meditation, and from meditation to contemplation.

In order to concentrate, it is necessary to have attained a certain degree of freedom and detachment. In order to meditate, one must place oneself within the light from above. And in order to experience contemplation, it is necessary to become one with this light. For this reason the states or stages of the soul corresponding to concentration, meditation and contemplation are those of *purification*, *illumination* and *union*. And it is the three sacred vows of obedience, chastity and poverty which render concentration, meditation and contemplation effective, with a view to the realisation of the soul's purification, illumination and union. These are the practical "secrets" of inner "gardening"—concerned with the laws of *growth* (and not those of *building*) of the human being, in the sense of his becoming ever more human, i.e. in the sense of *human evolution* without the impasses of specialisation.

The sixteenth Arcanum of the Tarot, that of the tower struck down by a thunderbolt, reveals the nature and danger of the impasses of specialisation. *One must not build; it is a matter of growth*—this is its essential teaching. For all the towers that are built will sooner or later be struck down by a thunderbolt—and let us add here that all freedom that owes its achievement to surgical operations entails the necessity of beginning again. The balloon that one makes fly higher, by cutting the strings of the ballast-bags and letting them fall, sooner or later will have to make a landing—the wind at some time will inevitably blow it down.

Towers will be *struck down by thunderbolts* and balloons will be *blown down by the wind*. In the last analysis, it is death and birth which constantly save human evolution, by acting as the thunderbolt which strikes down and as the wind which

blows down. Is it not deeply significant that the spiritual head of the religion of liberation from the wheel of reincarnations is sought—and fourteen times was found—amongst children born immediately after his death? . . . that Dalai Lamas are found amongst children of the first generation after their decease, through the incontestable facts of concrete memories of their preceding incarnation? . . . that all fourteen Dalai Lamas are only successive reincarnations of a single soul or entity?

You will say: it is a mistake. Why? Can you prove that they are mistaken? . . . for those who are charged with the task of finding—or rather *refinding*—the Dalai Lama certainly have evidence to offer.

The Buddhists say that it is *mercy* which enables the soul of the Dalai Lama to return. But why could it not be a matter of the *wind*, i.e. the wind of compassion and mercy, just as the thunderbolt which strikes down towers is the divine love which saves us from impasses? For myself, on my part. I declare firmly that I have no doubt that death, which saves us from the impasse to which our bodily organisation leads, is the action of the thunderbolt of divine love, and that birth, which gives us the possibility of participating actively in the earthly history of the human race, is due fundamentally to the action of compassion for this earth and for mankind which inhabits it—at least, for a certain class of souls.

There is nothing mechanical or automatic at the foundation of world existence. Take away the mechanical appearances and you will find that the world is something moral—crucified love. Yes, mercenaries took His clothes and divided them into four parts, one for each mercenary, and they drew lots for His tunic; whereas the heart of the world—*naked*—is love crucified in the middle of two other crucified ones, on His right and on His left.

In fact, the mechanical sciences have divided the clothing of the Word and they dispute amongst themselves for priority in the application of the universal principle (the tunic) which manifests equally in each of their special domains—whether it can be reduced to the laws of physics, or the laws of chemistry, or the laws of energy, or lastly, biological laws.

But Hermeticism, decried and misunderstood as it is, does not in any way take part in dividing the clothing of the crucified Word, nor in drawing lots for its tunic. It strives to see the crucified Word clothed in appearance by the mechanical world. And this is why the alchemists, whose preoccupation was the chemistry of "puffers"—i.e. chemical, material processes directed by moral, psychic and spiritual breath—never took the clothing of the One to whom it belonged: their "chemistry" was not separated from the Word. This is why astrologers, also, whose preoccupation was the astronomy of "influences", or the "celestial breath", did not take the planetary and zodiacal world purely and simply as a mechanism; their "astronomy" was not separated from the Word. This is why also the magicians, whose preoccupation was the "physics of breath", i.e. movements and energies caused by the human word by analogy with the divine Word, did not take the clothing alone; their "physics" was not separated from the Word. Whatever the practical errors and abuses of alchemists, astrologers and magicians, at least they

are not to be found amongst those who divide the clothing and draw lots for the tunic.

But Hermeticism is not alchemy, astrology and magic—although these "sciences" are derived from it by way of specialisation. For the fundamental principle of Hermeticism—as the synthesis of mysticism, gnosis, magic and philosophy—is *non-specialisation*. For this reason it *evolves* by avoiding the impasses of specialisation—the towers which sooner or later are struck down by thunderbolts.

Thus. Christian Hermeticism of today has not remained behind in the great spiritual events which have changed factors of the first order in the domain of astrology—which events now play the role of "the thunderbolt which blasts the tower of astrology". What I have in mind here is that the planetary influences and the days and hours of these influences have given way to a power of a higher order. It is true that the day Sunday is the day of the sun with respect to the human psycho-physical organism, but nowadays it is the day of resurrection, with respect to man's psycho-spiritual life. Saturday is still the day of Saturn, but it is so only with regard to the natural, lower part of the human being. For the soul which turns towards the spirit and for the human spirit itself, Saturday is the day of the Holy Virgin. And the influence of Venus has given way to Calvary, to Christ crucified—Friday. Tuesday is no longer the day of Mars—for the soul that aspires to the spirit, or for spiritual personages—it is the day of the Archstrategist Michael. Similarly, with respect to the soul turned towards the spirit and with respect to the lives of spiritual personages, Monday is the day of the Holy Trinity, instead of being that of the moon. . . Wednesday is the day of the human pastors of mankind, instead of Mercury. . . and Thursday is the day of the Holy Spirit, instead of Jupiter.

Consequently, sacred magic of the present day uses formulae and signs which correspond to the supernatural power of the day and not to the natural planetary influence of the day, although, I repeat, the latter remains valid in a restricted domain—more restricted than in the past—and remains of practical value in this domain. Therefore, one invokes and unites oneself with the Holy Spirit on Thursday, instead of invoking the "genius of Jupiter", etc. The priority of supernatural power with regard to the astral influences of days, hours and years—this is the "thunderbolt" which has "blasted" the tower of astrology and specialised astrological magic.

Here is an example of this "thunderbolt" in action: a horoscope indicates a baleful configuration, a conjunction of Saturn and Mars in the eighth house (that of death), predicting a violent death—however, it happens that it is not Saturn and Mars which act, but rather the Holy Virgin and the Archangel Michael, and instead of the predicted death a spiritual illumination takes place.

What is true here for astrology and magic is also true for alchemy, because everything which is specialised becomes a tower, i.e. it crystallises and therefore becomes deprived of the faculty of keeping step with spiritual evolution—it leads to an impasse. And it is then the "thunderbolt from above" which enters into

play and removes the obstacle to further progress. The sixteenth Major Arcanum of the Tarot is therefore a warning addressed to all authors of "systems", where an important role is assigned to a mechanical ingredient — intellectual, practical, occult, political, social and other systems. It invites them to devote themselves to tasks of growth instead of those of construction —to tasks as "cultivators and guardians of the garden", instead of as builders of the tower of Babel.