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THE FASCINATION OF THE OBSCURE

Twenty years ago we should have said that it was impossible that the crude materialism of, say Haeckel or Ray Lankester, the materialism in which mind figures only as a function of matter, could under any circumstances seem the less objectionable of two anti-Christian beliefs. At the present moment after a considerable experience of the literature of New Thought, Theosophy, Occultism, and other kindred 'isms, we feel almost a kindliness for the plain speech of men like Huxley or Edward Clodd, if only as a constant to the sloppy incoherencies which pervade these other self-styled "systems" from the first page to the last. What is it that finds purchasers for these books, and disciples for the writers of them? Even under the present very unfavourable conditions of the publishing trade, works dealing with the mystical and the occult issue from the press in ever increasing numbers. Clearly this type of literature must *pay*. Barring an occasional fanatic, publishers as a race take a severely commercial view of the books they produce. Considering them as a whole such volumes are not brought out at a loss. Whether the authors who write the books make as good a thing of it as the firms who print and circulate them we have no means of learning. Mrs. Eddy, the foundress of Christian Science, whose genius for finance was such that she might under other circumstances have been a leader in Israel—or in Wall Street, made a fortune of something like a million dollars out of *Science and Health* and the various dilutions of that immortal work. But then Mrs. Eddy was her own publisher and also her own pope. No doubt that lady is unique and unapproachable, but she has now plenty of imitators, and the most striking fact of all is the increase in the numbers of publishers who devote themselves almost exclusively to this special line of business.

Meditating upon the problem involved in all this we are distinctly of opinion that for the minds which are fascinated by the literature of which we are speaking the principal attraction lies in the impossibility of understanding it. Its haziness, its indefiniteness, its use of exotic terms to which everyone attaches the meaning he best pleases, the absence of all precise dogmas,

but on the other hand the general suggestion of things unutterable, this we believe to be the form of religious emotion which in the chaos created by the decay of all true conviction and the overthrow of moral standards makes the greatest appeal to the man and still more to the woman of second-rate intelligence in this twentieth century. Do we not find much the same conditions prevailing in the realm of literature and of music and of art? Could the futurists and the Cubists and the Vorticists and the Post-Impressionists have found a public willing even to discuss their performances seriously if it were not that a large section of aspirants to culture had laid down the canon that obscurity is the hall-mark of genius. Any platitude, any extravagance, any outrage upon conventions will be received with acclaim provided only the author wraps himself in a cloud of mystery and conveys subtly to his hearers that he is speaking in terms of which the inner circle of adepts alone can fathom the meaning.

Naturally the adventurer of genius has not been slow to take advantage of this condition of things. Anyone who made acquaintance before the War with the publications of Mr. Aleister Crowley, and especially with his imposing periodical *The Equinox*, will know how that consummate performer has persistently put his tongue in his cheek and fooled his public to the top of their bent. The mystic robes of the School of Silence after all are only a feeble parody of the "ceremonial apparel" recommended "to the members of the A.:A.: and its adepts and aspirants." The Probationer's Robe, which at pre-war prices cost £5 and in a superior quality £7, is fitted, we are told, "for the performance of all general invocations and especially worn for the I of the H.G.A., a white and gold nemmes may be worn. These robes may also be worn by Assistant Magi in all composite rituals of the White." Similarly we learn—

The Adeptus Robe [it costs £10] is fitted for the particular workings of the Adeptus, and for the Postulant at the First Gate of the City of the Pyramids.

The Adeptus Major's Robe is fitted for the Chief Magus in all Rituals and Evocations of the Inferiors, for the performance of the rites of Mars, and the Postulant at the Second Gate of the City of the Pyramids.

The Adeptus Exemptus' Robe is fitted for the Chief Magus in all Rituals and Invocations of the Superiors, for the performance of the rites of Jupiter and for the Postulant at the Third Gate of the City of the Pyramids.

But what has especially led us to embark upon these remarks is the reception of the second, apparently of a projected series of seven bulky volumes, designated *Theou Sophia*, by Holden Edward Sampson, at one time a clergyman, but now the author of a long series of works which seem to be a cross between mysticism and astrology. We noticed the first volume in a recent issue, and we only propose here to use a page of this second installment of the work to give an idea of the rubbish that the modern religious eclectic can be induced to purchase. We find it difficult to believe that he actually reads it. We reproduce Mr. Sampson's typographical presentment as closely as possible. Every single page of the 383 in the volume presents similar extravagances in the use of capitals.

2. *Master*.—Define the SPIRIT, or CHRIST-WITHIN?

Disciple.—The SPIRIT, or CHRIST-WITHIN, is in every creature, according to its stage of Evolution, the DIVINE GERM of the TRUE ORGANISM, or MICROCOSM; Indissolubly and Integrally Related to the WHOLE MICROCOSM. The SPIRIT is the EMBRYONIC CENTRE OF LIFE AND ORGANIC FUNCTION IN THE BEING (owing to the fact that it is GOD, CENTRED IN EACH ONE OF HIS OFFSPRING). The SPIRIT Functions as the DIVINE BATTERY OF THOUGHT AND ACTION; Eternally Linked to the DIVINE DYNAMO OF JESUS CHRIST, THE ONLY-BEGOTTEN SON OF GOD, THE PRIME MEDIATOR BETWEEN GOD AND THE UNIVERSE, communicating the DIVINE ESSENCE AND SUB-