

THE WHY AND HOW OF ECSTASY

“There is a land of pure delight,
Where saints immortal reign.”

So used some of us to sing in our childhood. And we used to think of this land as far away, farther even than death that in those days seemed so far.

But I know this now: that land is not so far as my flesh is from my bones! It is even Here and Now.

If there is one cloud in this tranquil azure, it is this thought; that conscious beings exist who are not thus infinitely happy, masters of ecstasy.

So to remove this cloud have I cheerfully dedicated all I have and all I am.

That I do not overvalue ecstasy is shown by this, that I am not one who denies himself the good things of this world. There are too many mystics going about like the fox who lost his brush.

They cannot enjoy life, and so make believe to have something better.

But I dine at the Cafe Royal, instead of munching nuts and “sirloin of carrots.” I make expeditions to the great mountains of the Himalayas, and hunt buffalo and tiger in the jungles of the Terai; I love beauty in painting and sculpture; I love poetry and music; and I love flesh and blood.

There is nothing that you enjoy that I do not enjoy as much as you do ; and I bear witness that nothing is worthy to be compared with ecstasy.

What is the path to this immortal land ?

To the Oriental, whose mind is, so to say, static, meditation offers the best path, a path which to us seems (and indeed is) intolerably irksome and tedious.

To the Western, whose mind is active and dynamic, there is no road better than ceremonial.

For ecstasy is caused by the sudden combination of two ideas, just as hydrogen and oxygen unite explosively.

A similar instance in a higher kingdom will occur to every one.

But this religious ecstasy takes place in the highest centres of the human organism ; it is the soul itself that is united to its God ; and for this reason the rapture is more overpowering, the joy more lasting, and the resultant energy more pure and splendid, than in aught earthly.

In ritual, therefore, we seek continually to unite the mind to some pure idea by an act of will. This we do again and again more and more passionately, with more and more determination, until at last the mind accepts the domination of the Will, and rushes of its own accord toward the desired object. This surrender of the mind to its Lord gives the holy ecstasy which we seek. It is spoken of in all religions, usually under the figure of the bride going forth to meet the bridegroom. It is the attainment of this which makes the saint and the artist.

Now in our ceremonies we endeavour to help everybody present to experience this. We put the mind of the spectator in tune with the pure idea of austerity and melancholy which we call Saturn, or with the idea of force and fire which we call Mars, or with the idea of nature and love which we call Venus, and so for the others, if he becomes identified with this idea the union is one of ecstatic bliss, and its only imperfection is due to the fact that the idea in question, whatever it may be, is only partial.

Ecstasy is therefore progressive. Gradually the adept unites himself with holier and higher ideas until he becomes one with the Universe itself, and even with That which is beyond the Universe. To him there is no more Death; time and space are annihilated; nothing is, save the intense rapture that knows no change for ever.

Then what of the body? The body of such an one continues subject to the laws of its own plane. Yet his friends find him calmer, happier, healthier, his eyes bright and his skin clear even when he is old. But he has this, which they have not, the power of slipping instantly out of this changeful consciousness into the Eternal, and then abiding, supremely single and complete, bathed in unutterable bliss, one with the All. And he knows that this body subject to disease and Death is not himself, but only as it were the instrument of his pleasure, a sort of houseboat that he has taken for the summer.

The present series of ceremonies is designed for beginners, for those who have as yet no experience at all.

Only the simplest formulas will be used, so that even those who are quite unfamiliar with the methods and aims of ritual may obtain the result, and

comprehend the method. Yet they will be profound and perfect, so that even those who are already skilful may obtain further success.

Let us add a short analysis of the present series of rites; they may be taken as illustrating Humanity, its fate both good and evil.

Man, unable to solve the Riddle of Existence, takes counsel of Saturn, extreme old age. Such answer as he can get is the one word "Despair."

Is there more hope in the dignity and wisdom of Jupiter? No; for the noble senior lacks the vigour of Mars the warrior. Counsel is in vain without determination to carry it out.

Mars, invoked, is indeed capable of victory: but he has already lost the controlled wisdom of age; in the moment of conquest he wastes the fruits of it, in the arms of luxury.

It is through this weakness that the perfected man, the Sun, is of dual nature, and his evil twin slays him in his glory. So the triumphant Lord of Heaven, the beloved of Apollo and the Muses is brought down into the dust, and who shall mourn him but his Mother Nature, Venus, the lady of love and sorrow? Well is it if she bears within her the Secret of Resurrection!

But even Venus owes all her charm to the swift messenger of the Gods, Mercury, the joyous and ambiguous boy whose tricks first scandalize and then delight Olympus.

But Mercury, too, is found wanting. Not in him alone is the secret cure for all the woe of the human

race. Swift as ever, he passes, and gives place to the youngest of the Gods, to the Virginal Moon.

Behold her, Madonna-like, throned and crowned, veiled, silent, awaiting the promise of the Future.

She is Isis and Mary, Istar and Bhavani, Artemis and Diana.

But Artemis is still barren of hope until the spirit of the Infinite All, great Pan, tears asunder the veil and displays the hope of humanity, the Crowned Child of the Future. All this is symbolized in the holy rites which we have recovered from the darkness of history, and now in the fullness of time disclose that the world may be redeemed.

For the corruptible shall put on incorruptibility, the mortal shall put on immortality; my adepts shall walk crowned in the Gardens of the World, enjoying the breeze and the sunlight, plucking the roses and filling their mouths with ripe grapes. They shall dance in the moonlight before Dionysus, and delight under the stars with Aphrodite; yet they shall also dwell beyond all these things in the unchanged Heaven—Here and Now.