

CHRISTIAN ESOTERISM

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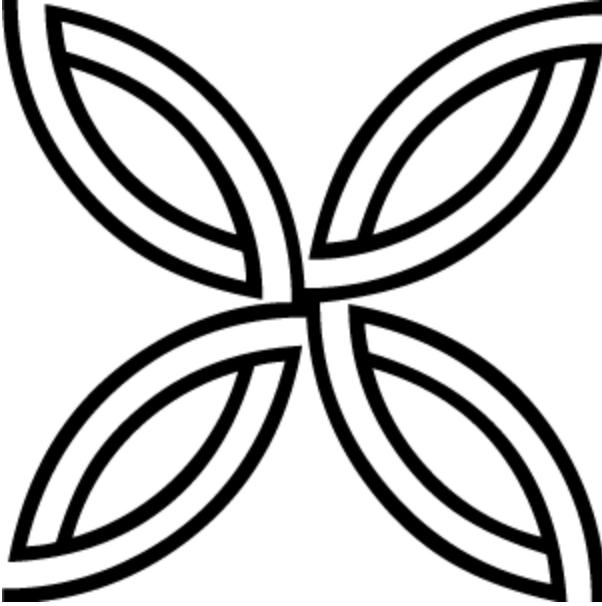
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Annie Besant



FOREWORD.

The object of this book is to suggest certain lines of thought as to the deep truths underlying Christianity, truths generally overlooked, and only too often denied. The generous wish to share with all what is precious, to spread broadcast priceless truths, to shut out none from the illumination of true knowledge, has resulted in a zeal without discretion that has vulgarised Christianity, and has presented its teachings in a form that often repels the heart and alienates the intellect. The command to "preach the Gospel to every creature"[1]—though admittedly of doubtful authenticity—has been interpreted as forbidding the teaching of the Gnosis to a few, and has apparently erased the less popular saying of the same Great Teacher: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine."[2]

This spurious sentimentality—which refuses to recognise the obvious inequalities of intelligence and morality, and thereby reduces the teaching of the highly developed to the level attainable by the least evolved, sacrificing the higher to the lower in a way that injures both—had no place in the virile common sense of the early Christians. S. Clement of Alexandria says quite bluntly, after alluding to the Mysteries: "Even now I fear, as it is said, 'to cast the pearls before swine, lest they tread them underfoot, and turn and rend us.' For it is difficult to exhibit the really pure and transparent words respecting the true Light to swinish and untrained hearers."[3]

If true knowledge, the Gnosis, is again to form a part of

Christian teachings, it can only be under the old restrictions, and the idea of levelling down to the capacities of the least developed must be definitely surrendered. Only by teaching above the grasp of the little evolved can the way be opened up for a restoration of arcane knowledge, and the study of the Lesser Mysteries must precede that of the Greater. The Greater will never be published through the printing-press; they can only be given by Teacher to pupil, "from mouth to ear." But the Lesser Mysteries, the partial unveiling of deep truths, can even now be restored, and such a volume as the present is intended to outline these, and to show the nature of the teachings which have to be mastered. Where only hints are given, quiet meditation on the truths hinted at will cause their outlines to become visible, and the clearer light obtained by continued meditation will gradually show them more fully. For meditation quiets the lower mind, ever engaged in thinking about external objects, and when the lower mind is tranquil then only can it be illuminated by the Spirit. Knowledge of spiritual truths must be thus obtained, from within and not from without, from the divine Spirit whose temple we are[4] and not from an external Teacher. These things are "spiritually discerned" by that divine indwelling Spirit, that "mind of Christ," whereof speaks the Great Apostle,[5] and that inner light is shed upon the lower mind.

This is the way of the Divine Wisdom, the true Theosophy. It is not, as some think, a diluted version of Hinduism, or Buddhism, or Taoism, or of any special religion. It is Esoteric Christianity as truly as it is Esoteric Buddhism, and belongs equally to all religions, exclusively to none. This is the source of the suggestions made in this little volume, for the helping of those who seek the Light—that "true Light which lighteth every man that cometh into the

world,"[6] though most have not yet opened their eyes to it. It does not bring the Light. It only says: "Behold the Light!" For thus have we heard. It appeals only to the few who hunger for more than the exoteric teachings give them. For those who are fully satisfied with the exoteric teachings, it is not intended; for why should bread be forced on those who are not hungry? For those who hunger, may it prove bread, and not a stone.

Chapter I. THE HIDDEN SIDE OF RELIGIONS.

Many, perhaps most, who see the title of this book will at once traverse it, and will deny that there is anything valuable which can be rightly described as "Esoteric Christianity." There is a wide-spread, and withal a popular, idea that there is no such thing as an occult teaching in connection with Christianity, and that "The Mysteries," whether Lesser or Greater, were a purely Pagan institution. The very name of "The Mysteries of Jesus," so familiar in the ears of the Christians of the first centuries, would come with a shock of surprise on those of their modern successors, and, if spoken as denoting a special and definite institution in the Early Church, would cause a smile of incredulity. It has actually been made a matter of boast that Christianity has no secrets, that whatever it has to say it says to all, and whatever it has to teach it teaches to all. Its truths are supposed to be so simple, that "a way-faring man, though a fool, may not err therein," and the "simple Gospel" has become a stock phrase.

It is necessary, therefore, to prove clearly that in the Early Church, at least, Christianity was no whit behind other great religions in possessing a hidden side, and that it guarded, as a priceless treasure, the secrets revealed only to a select few in its Mysteries. But ere doing this it will be well to consider the whole question of this hidden side of religions, and to see why such a side must exist if a religion is to be strong and stable; for thus its existence in Christianity will appear as a foregone conclusion, and the references to it in the writings of the Christian Fathers will

appear simple and natural instead of surprising and unintelligible. As a historical fact, the existence of this esotericism is demonstrable; but it may also be shown that intellectually it is a necessity.

The first question we have to answer is: What is the object of religions? They are given to the world by men wiser than the masses of the people on whom they are bestowed, and are intended to quicken human evolution. In order to do this effectively they must reach individuals and influence them. Now all men are not at the same level of evolution, but evolution might be figured as a rising gradient, with men stationed on it at every point. The most highly evolved are far above the least evolved, both in intelligence and character; the capacity alike to understand and to act varies at every stage. It is, therefore, useless to give to all the same religious teaching; that which would help the intellectual man would be entirely unintelligible to the stupid, while that which would throw the saint into ecstasy would leave the criminal untouched. If, on the other hand, the teaching be suitable to help the unintelligent, it is intolerably crude and jejune to the philosopher, while that which redeems the criminal is utterly useless to the saint. Yet all the types need religion, so that each may reach upward to a life higher than that which he is leading, and no type or grade should be sacrificed to any other. Religion must be as graduated as evolution, else it fails in its object.

Next comes the question: In what way do religions seek to quicken human evolution? Religions seek to evolve the moral and intellectual natures, and to aid the spiritual nature to unfold itself. Regarding man as a complex being, they seek to meet him at every point of his constitution, and therefore to bring messages suitable for each,

teachings adequate to the most diverse human needs. Teachings must therefore be adapted to each mind and heart to which they are addressed. If a religion does not reach and master the intelligence, if it does not purify and inspire the emotions, it has failed in its object, so far as the person addressed is concerned.

Not only does it thus direct itself to the intelligence and the emotions, but it seeks, as said, to stimulate the unfoldment of the spiritual nature. It answers to that inner impulse which exists in humanity, and which is ever pushing the race onwards. For deeply within the heart of all—often overlaid by transitory conditions, often submerged under pressing interests and anxieties—there exists a continual seeking after God. "As the hart panteth after the water-brooks, so panteth"[7] humanity after God. The search is sometimes checked for a space, and the yearning seems to disappear. Phases recur in civilisation and in thought, wherein this cry of the human Spirit for the divine—seeking its source as water seeks its level, to borrow a simile from Giordano Bruno—this yearning of the human Spirit for that which is akin to it in the universe, of the part for the whole, seems to be stilled, to have vanished; none the less does that yearning reappear, and once more the same cry rings out from the Spirit. Trampled on for a time, apparently destroyed, though the tendency may be, it rises again and again with inextinguishable persistence, it repeats itself again and again, no matter how often it is silenced; and it thus proves itself to be an inherent tendency in human nature, an ineradicable constituent thereof. Those who declare triumphantly, "Lo! it is dead!" find it facing them again with undiminished vitality. Those who build without allowing for it find their well-constructed edifices riven as by an earthquake. Those who hold it to be outgrown find the wildest superstitions succeed its denial. So much is it

an integral part of humanity, that man will have some answer to his questionings; rather an answer that is false, than none. If he cannot find religious truth, he will take religious error rather than no religion, and will accept the crudest and most incongruous ideals rather than admit that the ideal is non-existent.

Religion, then, meets this craving, and taking hold of the constituent in human nature that gives rise to it, trains it, strengthens it, purifies it and guides it towards its proper ending—the union of the human Spirit with the divine, so "that God may be all in all." [8]

The next question which meets us in our enquiry is: What is the source of religions? To this question two answers have been given in modern times—that of the Comparative Mythologists and that of the Comparative Religionists. Both base their answers on a common basis of admitted facts. Research has indisputably proved that the religions of the world are markedly similar in their main teachings, in their possession of Founders who display superhuman powers and extraordinary moral elevation, in their ethical precepts, in their use of means to come into touch with invisible worlds, and in the symbols by which they express their leading beliefs. This similarity, amounting in many cases to identity, proves—according to both the above schools—a common origin.

But on the nature of this common origin the two schools are at issue. The Comparative Mythologists contend that the common origin is the common ignorance, and that the loftiest religious doctrines are simply refined expressions of the crude and barbarous guesses of savages, of primitive

men, regarding themselves and their surroundings. Animism, fetishism, nature-worship, sun-worship—these are the constituents of the primeval mud out of which has grown the splendid lily of religion. A Kṛiṣṇa, a Buddha, a Lao-tze, a Jesus, are the highly civilised but lineal descendants of the whirling medicine-man of the savage. God is a composite photograph of the innumerable Gods who are the personifications of the forces of nature. And so forth. It is all summed up in the phrase: Religions are branches from a common trunk—human ignorance.

The Comparative Religionists consider, on the other hand, that all religions originate from the teachings of Divine Men, who give out to the different nations of the world, from time to time, such parts of the fundamental verities of religion as the people are capable of receiving, teaching ever the same morality, inculcating the use of similar means, employing the same significant symbols. The savage religions—animism and the rest—are degenerations, the results of decadence, distorted and dwarfed descendants of true religious beliefs. Sun-worship and pure forms of nature-worship were, in their day, noble religions, highly allegorical but full of profound truth and knowledge. The great Teachers—it is alleged by Hindus, Buddhists, and by some Comparative Religionists, such as Theosophists—form an enduring Brotherhood of men who have risen beyond humanity, who appear at certain periods to enlighten the world, and who are the spiritual guardians of the human race. This view may be summed up in the phrase: "Religions are branches from a common trunk—Divine Wisdom."

This Divine Wisdom is spoken of as the Wisdom, the Gnosis, the Theosophia, and some, in different ages of the world,

have so desired to emphasise their belief in this unity of religions, that they have preferred the eclectic name of Theosophist to any narrower designation.

The relative value of the contentions of these two opposed schools must be judged by the cogency of the evidence put forth by each. The appearance of a degenerate form of a noble idea may closely resemble that of a refined product of a coarse idea, and the only method of deciding between degeneration and evolution would be the examination, if possible, of intermediate and remote ancestors. The evidence brought forward by believers in the Wisdom is of this kind. They allege: that the Founders of religions, judged by the records of their teachings, were far above the level of average humanity; that the Scriptures of religions contain moral precepts, sublime ideals, poetical aspirations, profound philosophical statements, which are not even approached in beauty and elevation by later writings in the same religions—that is, that the old is higher than the new, instead of the new being higher than the old; that no case can be shown of the refining and improving process alleged to be the source of current religions, whereas many cases of degeneracy from pure teachings can be adduced; that even among savages, if their religions be carefully studied, many traces of lofty ideas can be found, ideas which are obviously above the productive capacity of the savages themselves.

This last idea has been worked out by Mr. Andrew Lang, who—judging by his book on *The Making of Religion*—should be classed as a Comparative Religionist rather than as a Comparative Mythologist. He points to the existence of a common tradition, which, he alleges, cannot have been evolved by the savages for themselves, being men whose

ordinary beliefs are of the crudest kind and whose minds are little developed. He shows, under crude beliefs and degraded views, lofty traditions of a sublime character, touching the nature of the Divine Being and His relations with men. The deities who are worshipped are, for the most part, the veriest devils, but behind, beyond all these, there is a dim but glorious over-arching Presence, seldom or never named, but whispered of as source of all, as power and love and goodness, too tender to awaken terror, too good to require supplication. Such ideas manifestly cannot have been conceived by the savages among whom they are found, and they remain as eloquent witnesses of the revelations made by some great Teacher—dim tradition of whom is generally also discoverable—who was a Son of the Wisdom, and imparted some of its teachings in a long by-gone age.

The reason, and, indeed, the justification, of the view taken by the Comparative Mythologists is patent. They found in every direction low forms of religious belief, existing among savage tribes. These were seen to accompany general lack of civilisation. Regarding civilised men as evolving from uncivilised, what more natural than to regard civilised religion as evolving from uncivilised? It is the first obvious idea. Only later and deeper study can show that the savages of to-day are not our ancestral types, but are the degenerated offsprings of great civilised stocks of the past, and that man in his infancy was not left to grow up untrained, but was nursed and educated by his elders, from whom he received his first guidance alike in religion and civilisation. This view is being substantiated by such facts as those dwelt on by Lang, and will presently raise the question, "Who were these elders, of whom traditions are everywhere found?"

Still pursuing our enquiry, we come next to the question: To what people were religions given? And here we come at once to the difficulty with which every Founder of a religion must deal, that already spoken of as bearing on the primary object of religion itself, the quickening of human evolution, with its corollary that all grades of evolving humanity must be considered by Him. Men are at every stage of evolution, from the most barbarous to the most developed; men are found of lofty intelligence, but also of the most unevolved mentality; in one place there is a highly developed and complex civilisation, in another a crude and simple polity. Even within any given civilisation we find the most varied types—the most ignorant and the most educated, the most thoughtful and the most careless, the most spiritual and the most brutal; yet each one of these types must be reached, and each must be helped in the place where he is. If evolution be true, this difficulty is inevitable, and must be faced and overcome by the divine Teacher, else will His work be a failure. If man is evolving as all around him is evolving, these differences of development, these varied grades of intelligence, must be a characteristic of humanity everywhere, and must be provided for in each of the religions of the world.

We are thus brought face to face with the position that we cannot have one and the same religious teaching even for a single nation, still less for a single civilisation, or for the whole world. If there be but one teaching, a large number of those to whom it is addressed will entirely escape its influence. If it be made suitable for those whose intelligence is limited, whose morality is elementary, whose perceptions are obtuse, so that it may help and train them, and thus enable them to evolve, it will be a religion utterly unsuitable for those men, living in the same nation, forming

part of the same civilisation, who have keen and delicate moral perceptions, bright and subtle intelligence, and evolving spirituality. But if, on the other hand, this latter class is to be helped, if intelligence is to be given a philosophy that it can regard as admirable, if delicate moral perceptions are to be still further refined, if the dawning spiritual nature is to be enabled to develop into the perfect day, then the religion will be so spiritual, so intellectual, and so moral, that when it is preached to the former class it will not touch their minds or their hearts, it will be to them a string of meaningless phrases, incapable of arousing their latent intelligence, or of giving them any motive for conduct which will help them to grow into a purer morality.

Looking, then, at these facts concerning religion, considering its object, its means, its origin, the nature and varying needs of the people to whom it is addressed, recognising the evolution of spiritual, intellectual, and moral faculties in man, and the need of each man for such training as is suitable for the stage of evolution at which he has arrived, we are led to the absolute necessity of a varied and graduated religious teaching, such as will meet these different needs and help each man in his own place.

There is yet another reason why esoteric teaching is desirable with respect to a certain class of truths. It is eminently the fact in regard to this class that "knowledge is power." The public promulgation of a philosophy profoundly intellectual, sufficient to train an already highly developed intellect, and to draw the allegiance of a lofty mind, cannot injure any. It can be preached without hesitation, for it does not attract the ignorant, who turn away from it as dry, stiff, and uninteresting. But there are teachings which deal with

the constitution of nature, explain recondite laws, and throw light on hidden processes, the knowledge of which gives control over natural energies, and enables its possessor to direct these energies to certain ends, as a chemist deals with the production of chemical compounds. Such knowledge may be very useful to highly developed men, and may much increase their power of serving the race. But if this knowledge were published to the world, it might and would be misused, just as the knowledge of subtle poisons was misused in the Middle Ages by the Borgias and by others. It would pass into the hands of people of strong intellect, but of unregulated desires, men moved by separative instincts, seeking the gain of their separate selves and careless of the common good. They would be attracted by the idea of gaining powers which would raise them above the general level, and place ordinary humanity at their mercy, and would rush to acquire the knowledge which exalts its possessors to a superhuman rank. They would, by its possession, become yet more selfish and confirmed in their separateness, their pride would be nourished and their sense of aloofness intensified, and thus they would inevitably be driven along the road which leads to diabolism, the Left Hand Path, whose goal is isolation and not union. And they would not only themselves suffer in their inner nature, but they would also become a menace to Society, already suffering sufficiently at the hands of men whose intellect is more evolved than their conscience. Hence arises the necessity of withholding certain teachings from those who, morally, are as yet unfitted to receive them; and this necessity presses on every Teacher who is able to impart such knowledge. He desires to give it to those who will use the powers it confers for the general good, for quickening human evolution; but he equally desires to be no party to giving it to those who would use it for their own aggrandisement at the cost of others.

Nor is this a matter of theory only, according to the Occult Records, which give the details of the events alluded to in Genesis vi. et seq. This knowledge was, in those ancient times and on the continent of Atlantis, given without any rigid conditions as to the moral elevation, purity, and unselfishness of the candidates. Those who were intellectually qualified were taught, just as men are taught ordinary science in modern days. The publicity now so imperiously demanded was then given, with the result that men became giants in knowledge but also giants in evil, till the earth groaned under her oppressors and the cry of a trampled humanity rang through the worlds. Then came the destruction of Atlantis, the whelming of that vast continent beneath the waters of the ocean, some particulars of which are given in the Hebrew Scriptures in the story of the Noachian deluge, and in the Hindu Scriptures of the further East in the story of Vaivasvata Manu.

Since that experience of the danger of allowing unpurified hands to grasp the knowledge which is power, the great Teachers have imposed rigid conditions as regards purity, unselfishness, and self-control on all candidates for such instruction. They distinctly refuse to impart knowledge of this kind to any who will not consent to a rigid discipline, intended to eliminate separateness of feeling and interest. They measure the moral strength of the candidate even more than his intellectual development, for the teaching itself will develop the intellect while it puts a strain on the moral nature. Far better that the Great Ones should be assailed by the ignorant for Their supposed selfishness in withholding knowledge, than that They should precipitate the world into another Atlantean catastrophe.

So much of theory we lay down as bearing on the necessity of a hidden side in all religions. When from theory we turn to facts, we naturally ask: Has this hidden side existed in the past, forming a part of the religions of the world? The answer must be an immediate and unhesitating affirmative; every great religion has claimed to possess a hidden teaching, and has declared that it is the repository of theoretical mystic, and further of practical mystic, or occult, knowledge. The mystic explanation of popular teaching was public, and expounded the latter as an allegory, giving to crude and irrational statements and stories a meaning which the intellect could accept. Behind this theoretical mysticism, as it was behind the popular, there existed further the practical mysticism, a hidden spiritual teaching, which was only imparted under definite conditions, conditions known and published, that must be fulfilled by every candidate. S. Clement of Alexandria mentions this division of the Mysteries. After purification, he says, "are the Minor Mysteries, which have some foundation of instruction and of preliminary preparation for what is to come after; and the Great Mysteries, in which nothing remains to be learned of the universe, but only to contemplate and comprehend nature and things." [9]

This position cannot be controverted as regards the ancient religions. The Mysteries of Egypt were the glory of that ancient land, and the noblest sons of Greece, such as Plato, went to Saïs and to Thebes to be initiated by Egyptian Teachers of Wisdom. The Mithraic Mysteries of the Persians, the Orphic and Bacchic Mysteries and the later Eleusinian semi-Mysteries of the Greeks, the Mysteries of Samothrace, Scythia, Chaldea, are familiar in name, at least, as household words. Even in the extremely diluted

form of the Eleusinian Mysteries, their value is most highly praised by the most eminent men of Greece, as Pindar, Sophocles, Isocrates, Plutarch, and Plato. Especially were they regarded as useful with regard to post-mortem existence, as the Initiated learned that which ensured his future happiness. Sopater further alleged that Initiation established a kinship of the soul with the divine Nature, and in the exoteric Hymn to Demeter covert references are made to the holy child, Iacchus, and to his death and resurrection, as dealt with in the Mysteries.[10]

From Iamblichus, the great theurgist of the third and fourth centuries A.D., much may be learned as to the object of the Mysteries. Theurgy was magic, "the last part of the sacerdotal science,"[11] and was practised in the Greater Mysteries, to evoke the appearance of superior Beings. The theory on which these Mysteries were based may be very briefly thus stated: There is One, prior to all beings, immovable, abiding in the solitude of His own unity. From That arises the Supreme God, the Self-begotten, the Good, the Source of all things, the Root, the God of Gods, the First Cause, unfolding Himself into Light.[12] From Him springs the Intelligible World, or ideal universe, the Universal Mind, the Nous and the incorporeal or intelligible Gods belong to this. From this the World-Soul, to which belong the "divine intellectual forms which are present with the visible bodies of the Gods." [13] Then come various hierarchies of superhuman beings, Archangels, Archons (Rulers) or Cosmocratores, Angels, Daimons, &c. Man is a being of a lower order, allied to these in his nature, and is capable of knowing them; this knowledge was achieved in the Mysteries, and it led to union with God.[14] In the Mysteries these doctrines are expounded, "the progression from, and the regression of all things to, the One, and the entire domination of the One,"[15] and, further, these

different Beings were evoked, and appeared, sometimes to teach, sometimes, by Their mere presence, to elevate and purify. "The Gods," says Iamblichus, "being benevolent and propitious, impart their light to theurgists in unenvying abundance, calling upwards their souls to themselves, procuring them a union with themselves, and accustoming them, while they are yet in body, to be separated from bodies, and to be led round to their eternal and intelligible principle." [16] For "the soul having a twofold life, one being in conjunction with body, but the other being separate from all body," [17] it is most necessary to learn to separate it from the body, that thus it may unite itself with the Gods by its intellectual and divine part, and learn the genuine principles of knowledge, and the truths of the intelligible world. [18] "The presence of the Gods, indeed, imparts to us health of body, virtue of soul, purity of intellect, and, in one word, elevates everything in us to its proper nature. It exhibits that which is not body as body to the eyes of the soul, through those of the body." [19] When the Gods appear, the soul receives "a liberation from the passions, a transcendent perfection, and an energy entirely more excellent, and participates of divine love and an immense joy." [20] By this we gain a divine life, and are rendered in reality divine. [21]

The culminating point of the Mysteries was when the Initiate became a God, whether by union with a divine Being outside himself, or by the realisation of the divine Self within him. This was termed ecstasy, and was a state of what the Indian Yogî would term high Samâdhi, the gross body being entranced and the freed soul effecting its own union with the Great One. This "ecstasy is not a faculty properly so called, it is a state of the soul, which transforms it in such a way that it then perceives what was previously hidden from it. The state will not be permanent until our

union with God is irrevocable; here, in earth life, ecstasy is but a flash.... Man can cease to become man, and become God; but man cannot be God and man at the same time." [22] Plotinus states that he had reached this state "but three times as yet."

So also Proclus taught that the one salvation of the soul was to return to her intellectual form, and thus escape from the "circle of generation, from abundant wanderings," and reach true Being, "to the uniform and simple energy of the period of sameness, instead of the abundantly wandering motion of the period which is characterised by difference." This is the life sought by those initiated by Orpheus into the Mysteries of Bacchus and Proserpine, and this is the result of the practice of the purificatory, or cathartic, virtues.[23]

These virtues were necessary for the Greater Mysteries, as they concerned the purifying of the subtle body, in which the soul worked when out of the gross body. The political or practical virtues belonged to man's ordinary life, and were required to some extent before he could be a candidate even for such a School as is described below. Then came the cathartic virtues, by which the subtle body, that of the emotions and lower mind, was purified; thirdly the intellectual, belonging to the Augöeides, or the light-form of the intellect; fourthly the contemplative, or paradigmatic, by which union with God was realised. Porphyry writes: "He who energises according to the practical virtues is a worthy man; but he who energises according to the purifying virtues is an angelic man, or is also a good daimon. He who energises according to the intellectual virtues alone is a God; but he who energises according to the paradigmatic virtues is the Father of the Gods." [24]

Much instruction was also given in the Mysteries by the archangelic and other hierarchies, and Pythagoras, the great teacher who was initiated in India, and who gave "the knowledge of things that are" to his pledged disciples, is said to have possessed such a knowledge of music that he could use it for the controlling of men's wildest passions, and the illuminating of their minds. Of this, instances are given by Iamblichus in his *Life of Pythagoras*. It seems probable that the title of *Theodidaktos*, given to Ammonius Saccas, the master of Plotinus, referred less to the sublimity of his teachings than to this divine instruction received by him in the Mysteries.

Some of the symbols used are explained by Iamblichus,[25] who bids Porphyry remove from his thought the image of the thing symbolised and reach its intellectual meaning. Thus "mire" meant everything that was bodily and material; the "God sitting above the lotus" signified that God transcended both the mire and the intellect, symbolised by the lotus, and was established in Himself, being seated. If "sailing in a ship," His rule over the world was pictured. And so on.[26] On this use of symbols Proclus remarks that "the Orphic method aimed at revealing divine things by means of symbols, a method common to all writers of divine lore." [27]

The Pythagorean School in Magna Græcia was closed at the end of the sixth century B.C., owing to the persecution of the civil power, but other communities existed, keeping up the sacred tradition.[28] Mead states that Plato intellectualised it, in order to protect it from an increasing profanation, and the Eleusinian rites preserved some of its

forms, having lost its substance. The Neo-Platonists inherited from Pythagoras and Plato, and their works should be studied by those who would realise something of the grandeur and the beauty preserved for the world in the Mysteries.

The Pythagorean School itself may serve as a type of the discipline enforced. On this Mead gives many interesting details,[29] and remarks: "The authors of antiquity are agreed that this discipline had succeeded in producing the highest examples, not only of the purest chastity and sentiment, but also a simplicity of manners, a delicacy, and a taste for serious pursuits which was unparalleled. This is admitted even by Christian writers." The School had outer disciples, leading the family and social life, and the above quotation refers to these. In the inner School were three degrees—the first of Hearers, who studied for two years in silence, doing their best to master the teachings; the second degree was of Mathematici, wherein were taught geometry and music, the nature of number, form, colour, and sound; the third degree was of Physici, who mastered cosmogony and metaphysics. This led up to the true Mysteries. Candidates for the School must be "of an unblemished reputation and of a contented disposition."

The close identity between the methods and aims pursued in these various Mysteries and those of Yoga in India is patent to the most superficial observer. It is not, however, necessary to suppose that the nations of antiquity drew from India; all alike drew from the one source, the Grand Lodge of Central Asia, which sent out its Initiates to every land. They all taught the same doctrines, and pursued the same methods, leading to the same ends. But there was much intercommunication between the Initiates of all

nations, and there was a common language and a common symbolism. Thus Pythagoras journeyed among the Indians, and received in India a high Initiation, and Apollonius of Tyana later followed in his steps. Quite Indian in phrase as well as thought were the dying words of Plotinus: "Now I seek to lead back the Self within me to the All-self." [30]

Among the Hindus the duty of teaching the supreme knowledge only to the worthy was strictly insisted on. "The deepest mystery of the end of knowledge ... is not to be declared to one who is not a son or a pupil, and who is not tranquil in mind." [31] So again, after a sketch of Yoga we read: "Stand up! awake! having found the Great Ones, listen! The road is as difficult to tread as the sharp edge of a razor. Thus say the wise." [32] The Teacher is needed, for written teaching alone does not suffice. The "end of knowledge" is to know God—not only to believe; to become one with God—not only to worship afar off. Man must know the reality of the divine Existence, and then know—not only vaguely believe and hope—that his own innermost Self is one with God, and that the aim of life is to realise that unity. Unless religion can guide a man to that realisation, it is but "as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal." [33]

So also it was asserted that man should learn to leave the gross body: "Let a man with firmness separate it [the soul] from his own body, as a grass-stalk from its sheath." [34] And it was written! "In the golden highest sheath dwells the stainless, changeless Brahman; It is the radiant white Light of lights, known to the knowers of the Self." [35] "When the seer sees the golden-coloured Creator, the Lord, the Spirit, whose womb is Brahman, then, having thrown away merit and demerit, stainless, the wise one reaches the highest union." [36]

Nor were the Hebrews without their secret knowledge and their Schools of Initiation. The company of prophets at Naioth presided over by Samuel[37] formed such a School, and the oral teaching was handed down by them. Similar Schools existed at Bethel and Jericho,[38] and in Cruden's Concordance[39] there is the following interesting note: "The Schools or Colleges of the prophets are the first [schools] of which we have any account in Scripture; where the children of the prophets, that is, their disciples, lived in the exercises of a retired and austere life, in study and meditation, and reading of the law of God.... These Schools, or Societies, of the prophets were succeeded by the Synagogues." The Kabbala, which contains the semi-public teaching, is, as it now stands, a modern compilation, part of it being the work of Rabbi Moses de Leon, who died A.D. 1305. It consists of five books, Bahir, Zohar, Sepher Sephiroth, Sepher Yetzirah, and Asch Metzareth, and is asserted to have been transmitted orally from very ancient times—as antiquity is reckoned historically. Dr. Wynn Westcott says that "Hebrew tradition assigns the oldest parts of the Zohar to a date antecedent to the building of the second Temple;" and Rabbi Simeon ben Jochai is said to have written down some of it in the first century A.D. The Sepher Yetzirah is spoken of by Saadjah Gaon, who died A.D. 940, as "very ancient." [40] Some portions of the ancient oral teaching have been incorporated in the Kabbala as it now stands, but the true archaic wisdom of the Hebrews remains in the guardianship of a few of the true sons of Israel.

Brief as is this outline, it is sufficient to show the existence of a hidden side in the religions of the world outside Christianity, and we may now examine the question

whether Christianity was an exception to this universal rule.