

ANNIE BESANT

ESOTERIC CHRISTIANITY,
OR THE LESSER
MYSTERIES

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In proceeding to the contemplation of the mysteries of knowledge, we shall adhere to the celebrated and venerable rule of tradition, commencing from the origin of the universe, setting forth those points of physical contemplation which are necessary to be premised, and removing whatever can be an obstacle on the way; so that the ear may be prepared for the reception of the tradition of the Gnosis, the ground being cleared of weeds and fitted for the planting of the vineyard; for there is a conflict before the conflict, and mysteries before the mysteries.

– S. Clement of Alexandria.

Let the specimen suffice to those who have ears. For it is not required to unfold the mystery, but only to indicate what is sufficient.

– Ibid.

He that hath ears to hear, let him hear.

– S. Matthew.

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

¹ S. Mark xvi. 15.

² S. Matt vii. 6.

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,

³ Clarke's Ante-Nicene Christian Library, Vol. IV. Clement of Alexandria. *Stromata*, bk. I., ch. xii.

from the divine Spirit whose temple we are⁴ 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.

⁴ I. Cor. iii. 16.

⁵ *Ibid.*, ii. 14, 16.

⁶ S. John, i. 9.

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

⁷ Psalms, xlii. 1.

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

⁸ 1 Cor. xv. 28.

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 bye-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,

⁹ Ante-Nicene Library, Vol. XII. Clement of Alexandria. *Stromata*, bk. V., ch. xi.

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

¹⁰ See Article on "Mysteries," *Encyc. Britannica* ninth edition.

¹¹ Psellus, quoted in *Iamblichus on the Mysteries*. T. Taylor, p. 343, note on p. 23, second edition.

¹² *Iamblichus*, as *ante*, p. 301.

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

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁴ The article on "Mysticism" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica* has the following on the teaching of Plotinus (204-206 A.D.): "The One [the Supreme God spoken of above] is exalted above the *nous* and the 'ideas'; it transcends existence altogether and is not cognisable by reason. Remaining itself in repose, it rays out, as it were, from its own fulness, an image of itself, which is called *nous*, and which constitutes the system of ideas of the intelligible world. The soul is in turn the image or product of the *nous*, and the soul by its motion begets corporeal matter. The soul thus faces two ways – towards the *nous*, from which it springs, and towards the material life, which is its own product. Ethical endeavour consists in the repudiation of the sensible; material existence is itself estrangement from God... To reach the ultimate goal, thought itself must be left behind; for thought is a form of motion, and the desire of the soul is for the motionless rest which belongs to the One. The union with transcendent deity is not so much knowledge or vision as ecstasy, coalescence, *contact*." Neo-Platonism is thus "first of all a system of complete rationalism; it is assumed, in other words, that reason is capable of mapping out the whole system of things. But, inasmuch as a God is affirmed beyond reason, the mysticism becomes in a sense the necessary complement of the would-be all-embracing rationalism. The system culminates in a mystical act."

¹⁵ *Iamblichus*, as *ante*, p. 73.

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

¹⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 55, 56.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 118, 119.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p. 118, 119.

¹⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 95, 100.

²⁰ *Ibid*, p. 101.

²¹ *Ibid*, p. 330.

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

²² G. R. S. Mead. *Plotinus*, p. 42.

²³ *Iamblichus*, p. 364, note on p. 134.

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

²⁴ G. R. S. Mead. *Orpheus*, pp. 285, 286.

²⁵ *Iamblichus*, p. 364, note on p. 134.

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

²⁶ *Iamblichus*, p. 285, *et seq.*

²⁷ G. R. S. Mead. *Orpheus*, p. 59.

²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 30.

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

²⁹ *Ibid*, pp. 263, 271.

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

³⁰ G. R. S. Mead. *Plotinus*, p. 20.

³¹ *Shvetâshvataropaniṣhat*, vi., 22.

³² *Kâthopaniṣṣhat*, iii., 14.

³³ I. Cor. xiii. 1.

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 Samuel³⁷ 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

³⁴ *Kāthopaniṣhat*, vi. 17.

³⁵ *Muṇḍakopaniṣhat*, II., ii. 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, III., i. 3.

³⁷ I Sam. xix. 20.

³⁸ II. Kings ii. 2, 5.

³⁹ Under "School."

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.

⁴⁰ Dr. Wynn Westcott. *Sepher Yetzirah*, p. 9.

Chapter II.

THE HIDDEN SIDE OF CHRISTIANITY

(a) The Testimony of the Scriptures

Having seen that the religions of the past claimed with one voice to have a hidden side, to be custodians of "Mysteries," and that this claim was endorsed by the seeking of initiation by the greatest men, we must now ascertain whether Christianity stands outside this circle of religions, and alone is without a Gnosis, offering to the world only a simple faith and not a profound knowledge. Were it so, it would indeed be a sad and lamentable fact, proving Christianity to be intended for a class only, and not for all types of human beings. But that it is not so, we shall be able to prove beyond the possibility of rational doubt.

And that proof is the thing which Christendom at this time most sorely needs, for the very flower of Christendom is perishing for lack of knowledge. If the esoteric teaching can be re-established and win patient and earnest students, it will not be long before the occult is also restored. Disciples of the Lesser Mysteries will become candidates for the Greater, and

with the regaining of knowledge will come again the authority of teaching. And truly the need is great. For, looking at the world around us, we find that religion in the West is suffering from the very difficulty that theoretically we should expect to find. Christianity, having lost its mystic and esoteric teaching, is losing its hold on a large number of the more highly educated, and the partial revival during the past few years is co-incident with the re-introduction of some mystic teaching. It is patent to every student of the closing forty years of the last century, that crowds of thoughtful and moral people have slipped away from the churches, because the teachings they received there outraged their intelligence and shocked their moral sense. It is idle to pretend that the wide-spread agnosticism of this period had its root either in lack of morality or in deliberate crookedness of mind. Everyone who carefully studies the phenomena presented will admit that men of strong intellect have been driven out of Christianity by the crudity of the religious ideas set before them, the contradictions in the authoritative teachings, the views as to God, man, and the universe that no trained intelligence could possibly admit. Nor can it be said that any kind of moral degradation lay at the root of the revolt against the dogmas of the Church. The rebels were not too bad for their religion; on the contrary, it was the religion that was too bad for them. The rebellion against popular Christianity was due to the awakening and the growth of conscience; it was the conscience that revolted, as well as the intelligence, against teachings dishonouring to God

and man alike, that represented God as a tyrant, and man as essentially evil, gaining salvation by slavish submission.

The reason for this revolt lay in the gradual descent of Christian teaching into so-called simplicity, so that the most ignorant might be able to grasp it. Protestant religionists asserted loudly that nothing ought to be preached save that which every one could grasp, that the glory of the Gospel lay in its simplicity, and that the child and the unlearned ought to be able to understand and apply it to life. True enough, if by this it were meant that there are some religious truths that all can grasp, and that a religion fails if it leaves the lowest, the most ignorant, the most dull, outside the pale of its elevating influence. But false, utterly false, if by this it be meant that religion has no truths that the ignorant cannot understand, that it is so poor and limited a thing that it has nothing to teach which is above the thought of the unintelligent or above the moral purview of the degraded. False, fatally false, if such be the meaning; for as that view spreads, occupying the pulpits and being sounded in the churches, many noble men and women, whose hearts are half-broken as they sever the links that bind them to their early faith, withdraw from the churches, and leave their places to be filled by the hypocritical and the ignorant. They pass either into a state of passive agnosticism, or – if they be young and enthusiastic – into a condition of active aggression, not believing that that can be the highest which outrages alike intellect and conscience, and preferring the honesty of open unbelief to the drugging of

the intellect and the conscience at the bidding of an authority in which they recognise nothing that is divine.

In thus studying the thought of our time we see that the question of a hidden teaching in connection with Christianity becomes of vital importance. Is Christianity to survive as *the* religion of the West? Is it to live through the centuries of the future, and to continue to play a part in moulding the thought of the evolving western races? If it is to live, it must regain the knowledge it has lost, and again have its mystic and its occult teachings; it must again stand forth as an authoritative teacher of spiritual verities, clothed with the only authority worth anything, the authority of knowledge. If these teachings be regained, their influence will soon be seen in wider and deeper views of truth; dogmas, which now seem like mere shells and fetters, shall again be seen to be partial presentments of fundamental realities. First, Esoteric Christianity will reappear in the "Holy Place," in the Temple, so that all who are capable of receiving it may follow its lines of published thought; and secondly, Occult Christianity will again descend into the Adytum, dwelling behind the Veil which guards the "Holy of Holies," into which only the Initiate may enter. Then again will occult teaching be within the reach of those who qualify themselves to receive it, according to the ancient rules, those who are willing in modern days to meet the ancient demands, made on all those who would fain know the reality and truth of spiritual things.

Once again we turn our eyes to history, to see whether

Christianity was unique among religions in having no inner teaching, or whether it resembled all others in possessing this hidden treasure. Such a question is a matter of evidence, not of theory, and must be decided by the authority of the existing documents and not by the mere *ipse dixit* of modern Christians.

As a matter of fact both the "New Testament" and the writings of the early Church make the same declarations as to the possession by the Church of such teachings, and we learn from these the fact of the existence of Mysteries – called the Mysteries of Jesus, or the Mystery of the Kingdom – the conditions imposed on candidates, something of the general nature of the teachings given, and other details. Certain passages in the "New Testament" would remain entirely obscure, if it were not for the light thrown on them by the definite statements of the Fathers and Bishops of the Church, but in that light they became clear and intelligible.

It would indeed have been strange had it been otherwise when we consider the lines of religious thought which influenced primitive Christianity. Allied to the Hebrews, the Persians, and the Greeks, tinged by the older faiths of India, deeply coloured by Syrian and Egyptian thought, this later branch of the great religious stem could not do other than again re-affirm the ancient traditions, and place in the grasp of western races the full treasure of the ancient teaching. "The faith once delivered to the saints" would indeed have been shorn of its chief value if, when delivered to the West, the pearl of esoteric teaching had been

withheld.

The first evidence to be examined is that of the "New Testament." For our purpose we may put aside all the vexed questions of different readings and different authors, that can only be decided by scholars. Critical scholarship has much to say on the age of MSS., on the authenticity of documents, and so on. But we need not concern ourselves with these. We may accept the canonical Scriptures, as showing what was believed in the early Church as to the teaching of the Christ and of His immediate followers, and see what they say as to the existence of a secret teaching given only to the few. Having seen the words put into the mouth of Jesus Himself, and regarded by the Church as of supreme authority, we will look at the writings of the great apostle S. Paul; then we will consider the statements made by those who inherited the apostolic tradition and guided the Church during the first centuries A.D. Along this unbroken line of tradition and written testimony the proposition that Christianity had a hidden side can be established. We shall further find that the Lesser Mysteries of mystic interpretation can be traced through the centuries to the beginning of the 19th century, and that though there were no Schools of Mysticism recognised as preparatory to Initiation, after the disappearance of the Mysteries, yet great Mystics, from time to time, reached the lower stages of exstasy, by their own sustained efforts, aided doubtless by invisible Teachers.

The words of the Master Himself are clear and definite, and

were, as we shall see, quoted by Origen as referring to the secret teaching preserved in the Church. "And when he was alone, they that were about Him with the twelve asked of Him the parable. And He said unto them, 'Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God, but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables.'" And later: "With many such parables spake He the word unto them, as they were able to hear it. But without a parable spake He not unto them; and when they were alone He expounded all things to His disciples."⁴¹ Mark the significant words, "when they were alone," and the phrase, "them that are without." So also in the version of S. Matthew: "Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house; and His disciples came unto Him." These teachings given "in the house," the innermost meanings of His instructions, were alleged to be handed on from teacher to teacher. The Gospel gives, it will be noted, the allegorical mystic explanation, that which we have called The Lesser Mysteries, but the deeper meaning was said to be given only to the Initiates.

Again, Jesus tells even His apostles: "I have yet many things to say to you, but ye cannot bear them now."⁴² Some of them were probably said after His death, when He was seen of His disciples, "speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."⁴³ None of these have been publicly recorded, but who can believe

⁴¹ S. Mark iv. 10, 11, 33, 34. See also S. Matt. xiii. 11, 34, 36, and S. Luke viii. 10.

⁴² S. John xvi. 12.

⁴³ Acts i. 3.

that they were neglected or forgotten, and were not handed down as a priceless possession? There was a tradition in the Church that He visited His apostles for a considerable period after His death, for the sake of giving them instruction – a fact that will be referred to later – and in the famous Gnostic treatise, the *Pistis Sophia*, we read: "It came to pass, when Jesus had risen from the dead, that He passed eleven years speaking with His disciples and instructing them."⁴⁴ Then there is the phrase, which many would fain soften and explain away: "Give not that which is holy to the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine"⁴⁵ – a precept which is of general application indeed, but was considered by the early Church to refer to the secret teachings. It should be remembered that the words had not the same harshness of sound in the ancient days as they have now; for the words "dogs" – like "the vulgar," "the profane" – was applied by those within a certain circle to all who were outside its pale, whether by a society or association, or by a nation – as by the Jews to all Gentiles.⁴⁶ It was sometimes used to designate those who were outside the circle of Initiates, and we find it employed in that sense in the early Church; those who, not having been initiated into the Mysteries, were regarded as being outside "the kingdom of God," or "the spiritual Israel," had this name applied to them.

⁴⁴ *Loc. cit.* Trans. by G. R. S. Mead. I. i. 1.

⁴⁵ S. Matt. vii. 6.

⁴⁶ As to the Greek woman: "It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it unto the dogs." – S. Mark vii. 27.

There were several names, exclusive of the term "The Mystery," or "The Mysteries," used to designate the sacred circle of the Initiates or connected with Initiation: "The Kingdom," "The Kingdom of God," "The Kingdom of Heaven," "The Narrow Path," "The Strait Gate," "The Perfect," "The Saved," "Life Eternal," "Life," "The Second Birth," "A Little One," "A Little Child." The meaning is made plain by the use of these words in early Christian writings, and in some cases even outside the Christian pale. Thus the term, "The Perfect," was used by the Essenes, who had three orders in their communities: the Neophytes, the Brethren, and the Perfect – the latter being Initiates; and it is employed generally in that sense in old writings. "The Little Child" was the ordinary name for a candidate just initiated, *i. e.*, who had just taken his "second birth."

When we know this use, many obscure and otherwise harsh passages become intelligible. "Then said one unto Him: Lord, are there few that be saved? And He said unto them: Strive to enter in at the strait gate; for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in and shall not be able."⁴⁷ If this be applied in the ordinary Protestant way to salvation from everlasting hell-fire, the statement becomes incredible, shocking. No Saviour of the world can be supposed to assert that many will seek to avoid hell and enter heaven, but will not be able to do so. But as applied to the narrow gateway of Initiation and to salvation from rebirth, it is perfectly true and natural. So again: "Enter

⁴⁷ S. Luke xiii. 23, 24.

ye in at the strait gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate and narrow is the way which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it."⁴⁸ The warning which immediately follows against the false prophets, the teachers of the dark Mysteries, is most apposite in this connection. No student can miss the familiar ring of these words used in this same sense in other writings. The "ancient narrow way" is familiar to all; the path "difficult to tread as the sharp edge of a razor,"⁴⁹ already mentioned; the going "from death to death" of those who follow the flower-strewn path of desires, who do not know God; for those men only become immortal and escape from the wide mouth of death, from ever repeated destruction, who have quitted all desires.⁵⁰ The allusion to death is, of course, to the repeated births of the soul into gross material existence, regarded always as "death" compared to the "life" of the higher and subtler worlds.

This "Strait Gate" was the gateway of Initiation, and through it a candidate entered "The Kingdom." And it ever has been, and must be, true that only a few can enter that gateway, though myriads – an exceedingly "great multitude, which no man could number,"⁵¹ not a few – enter into the happiness of

⁴⁸ S. Matt. vii. 13, 14.

⁴⁹ *Kāthopanīṣhat* II. iv. 10, 11.

⁵⁰ *Bṛihadāraṇyakopanīṣhat*. IV. iv. 7.

⁵¹ Rev. vii. 9.

the heaven-world. So also spoke another great Teacher, nearly three thousand years earlier: "Among thousands of men scarce one striveth for perfection; of the successful strivers scarce one knoweth me in essence."⁵² For the Initiates are few in each generation, the flower of humanity; but no gloomy sentence of everlasting woe is pronounced in this statement on the vast majority of the human race. The saved are, as Proclus taught,⁵³ those who escape from the circle of generation, within which humanity is bound.

In this connection we may recall the story of the young man who came to Jesus, and, addressing Him as "Good Master," asked how he might win eternal life – the well-recognised liberation from rebirth by knowledge of God.⁵⁴ His first answer was the regular exoteric precept: "Keep the commandments." But when the young man answered: "All these things have I kept from my youth up;" then, to that conscience free from all knowledge of transgression, came the answer of the true Teacher: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." "If thou wilt be perfect," be a member of the Kingdom, poverty and obedience must be embraced. And then to His own disciples Jesus explains that a rich man can hardly

⁵² *Bahgavad Gîtâ*, vii. 3.

⁵³ *Ante*, p. 26.

⁵⁴ It must be remembered that the Jews believed that all imperfect souls returned to live again on earth.

enter the Kingdom of Heaven, such entrance being more difficult than for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle; with men such entrance could not be, with God all things were possible.⁵⁵ Only God in man can pass that barrier.

This text has been variously explained away, it being obviously impossible to take it in its surface meaning, that a rich man cannot enter a post-mortem state of happiness. Into that state the rich man may enter as well as the poor, and the universal practice of Christians shows that they do not for one moment believe that riches imperil their happiness after death. But if the real meaning of the Kingdom of Heaven be taken, we have the expression of a simple and direct fact. For that knowledge of God which is Eternal Life⁵⁶ cannot be gained till everything earthly is surrendered, cannot be learned until everything has been sacrificed. The man must give up not only earthly wealth, which henceforth may only pass through his hands as steward, but he must give up his inner wealth as well, so far as he holds it as his own against the world; until he is stripped naked he cannot pass the narrow gateway. Such has ever been a condition of Initiation, and "poverty, obedience, chastity," has been the vow of the candidate.

The "second birth" is another well-recognised term for Initiation; even now in India the higher castes are called "twice-born," and the ceremony that makes them twice-born is a

⁵⁵ S. Matt. xix. 16-26.

⁵⁶ S. John xvii. 3.

ceremony of Initiation – mere husk truly, in these modern days, but the "pattern of things in the heavens."⁵⁷ When Jesus is speaking to Nicodemus, He states that "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God," and this birth is spoken of as that "of water and the Spirit;"⁵⁸ this is the first Initiation; a later one is that of "the Holy Ghost and fire,"⁵⁹ the baptism of the Initiate in his manhood, as the first is that of birth, which welcomes him as "the Little Child" entering the Kingdom.⁶⁰ How thoroughly this imagery was familiar among the mystic of the Jews is shown by the surprise evinced by Jesus when Nicodemus stumbled over His mystic phraseology: "Art thou a master of Israel, and knowest not these things?"⁶¹

Another precept of Jesus which remains as "a hard saying" to his followers is: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."⁶² The ordinary Christian knows that he cannot possibly obey this command; full of ordinary human frailties and weaknesses, how can he become perfect as God is perfect? Seeing the impossibility of the achievement set before him, he quietly puts it aside, and thinks no more about it. But seen as the crowning effort of many lives of steady

⁵⁷ Heb. ix. 23.

⁵⁸ S. John. iii. 3, 5.

⁵⁹ S. Matt. iii. 11.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* xviii. 3.

⁶¹ S. John iii. 10.

⁶² S. Matt. v. 48.

improvement, as the triumph of the God within us over the lower nature, it comes within calculable distance, and we recall the words of Porphyry, how the man who achieves "the paradigmatic virtues is the Father of the Gods,"⁶³ and that in the Mysteries these virtues were acquired.

S. Paul follows in the footsteps of his Master, and speaks in exactly the same sense, but, as might be expected from his organising work in the Church, with greater explicitness and clearness. The student should read with attention chapters ii. and iii., and verse 1 of chapter iv. of the First Epistle to the Corinthians, remembering, as he reads, that the words are addressed to baptised and communicant members of the Church, full members from the modern standpoint, although described as babes and carnal by the Apostle. They were not catechumens or neophytes, but men and women who were in complete possession of all the privileges and responsibilities of Church membership, recognised by the Apostle as being separate from the world, and expected not to behave as men of the world. They were, in fact, in possession of all that the modern Church gives to its members. Let us summarise the Apostle's words:

"I came to you bearing the divine testimony, not alluring you with human wisdom but with the power of the Spirit. Truly 'we speak wisdom among them that are perfect,' but it is no human wisdom. 'We speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world' began,

⁶³ *Ante*, p.24

and which none even of the princes of this world know. The things of that wisdom are beyond men's thinking, 'but God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit ... the deep things of God,' 'which the Holy Ghost teacheth.'⁶⁴ These are spiritual things, to be discerned only by the spiritual man, in whom is the mind of Christ. 'And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ... Ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal.' 'As a wise master-builder⁶⁵ I have laid the foundation,' and 'ye are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwelleth in you.' 'Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the Mysteries of God.'"

Can any one read this passage – and all that has been done in the summary is to bring out the salient points – without recognising the fact that the Apostle possessed a divine wisdom given in the Mysteries, that his Corinthian followers were not yet able to receive? And note the recurring technical terms: the "wisdom," the "wisdom of God in a mystery," the "hidden wisdom," known only to the "spiritual" man, spoken of only among the "perfect," wisdom from which the non-"spiritual," the "babes in Christ," the "carnal," were excluded, known to the "wise master-builder," the "steward of the Mysteries of God."

⁶⁴ Note how this chimes in with the promise of Jesus in S. John xvi. 12-14: "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth... He will show you things to come... He shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you."

⁶⁵ Another technical name in the Mysteries.

Again and again he refers to these Mysteries. Writing to the Ephesian Christians he says that "by revelation," by the unveiling, had been "made known unto me the Mystery," and hence his "knowledge in the Mystery of Christ"; all might know of the "fellowship of the Mystery."⁶⁶ Of this Mystery, he repeated to the Colossians, he was "made a minister," "the Mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to His saints"; not to the world, nor even to Christians, but only to the Holy Ones. To them was unveiled "the glory of this Mystery"; and what was it? "Christ *in you*" – a significant phrase, which we shall see, in a moment, belonged to the life of the Initiate; thus ultimately must every man learn the wisdom, and become "perfect in Christ Jesus."⁶⁷ These Colossians he bids pray "that God would open to us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ,"⁶⁸ a passage to which S. Clement refers as one in which the apostle "clearly reveals that knowledge belongs not to all."⁶⁹ So also he writes to his loved Timothy, bidding him select his deacons from those who hold "the Mystery of the faith in a pure conscience," that great "Mystery of Godliness," that he

⁶⁶ Eph. iii. 3, 4, 9.

⁶⁷ Col i. 23, 25-28. But S. Clement, in his *Stromata*, translates "every man," as "the whole man." See Bk. V., ch. x.

⁶⁸ Col. iv. 3.

⁶⁹ Ante-Nicene Library, Vol. XII. Clement of Alexandria. *Stromata*, bk. V. ch. x. Some additional sayings of the Apostles will be found in the quotations from Clement, showing what meaning they bore in the minds of those who succeeded the apostles, and were living in the same atmosphere of thought.

had learned,⁷⁰ knowledge of which was necessary for the teachers of the Church.

Now S. Timothy holds an important position, as representing the next generation of Christian teachers. He was a pupil of S. Paul, and was appointed by him to guide and rule a portion of the Church. He had been, we learn, initiated into the Mysteries by S. Paul himself, and reference is made to this, the technical phrases once more serving as a clue. "This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee,"⁷¹ the solemn benediction of the Initiator, who admitted the candidate; but not alone was the Initiator present: "Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, by the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery,"⁷² of the Elder Brothers. And he reminds him to lay hold of that "eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses"⁷³— the vow of the new Initiate, pledged in the presence of the Elder Brothers, and of the assembly of Initiates. The knowledge then given was the sacred charge of which S. Paul cries out so forcibly: "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust"⁷⁴— not the knowledge commonly possessed by Christians, as to which no

⁷⁰ I. Tim. iii. 9, 16.

⁷¹ I. Tim. i. 18.

⁷² *Ibid.*, iv. 14.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, vi. 13.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

special obligation lay upon S. Timothy, but the sacred deposit committed to his trust as an Initiate, and essential to the welfare of the Church. S. Paul later recurs again to this, laying stress on the supreme importance of the matter in a way that would be exaggerated had the knowledge been the common property of Christian men: "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard of me... That good thing which was committed unto thee, keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us"⁷⁵ – as serious an adjuration as human lips could frame. Further, it was his duty to provide for the due transmission of this sacred deposit, that it might be handed on to the future, and the Church might never be left without teachers: "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses" – the sacred oral teachings given in the assembly of Initiates, who bore witness to the accuracy of the transmission – "the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."⁷⁶

The knowledge – or, if the phrase be preferred, the supposition – that the Church possessed these hidden teachings throws a flood of light on the scattered remarks made by S. Paul about himself, and when they are gathered together, we have an outline of the evolution of the Initiate. S. Paul asserts that though he was already among the perfect, the initiated – for he says: "Let us, therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded" – he had not yet "attained," was indeed not yet

⁷⁵ II. Tim. i. 13, 14.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, ii. 2.

wholly "perfect," for he had not yet won Christ, he had not yet reached the "high calling of God in Christ," "the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death;" and he was striving, he says, "if by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead."⁷⁷ For this was the Initiation that liberated, that made the Initiate the Perfect Master, the Risen Christ, freeing Him finally from the "dead," from the humanity within the circle of generation, from the bonds that fettered the soul to gross matter. Here again we have a number of technical terms, and even the surface reader should realise that the "resurrection of the dead" here spoken of cannot be the ordinary resurrection of the modern Christian, supposed to be inevitable for all men, and therefore obviously not requiring any special struggle on the part of any one to attain to it. In fact the very word "attain" would be out of place in referring to a universal and inevitable human experience. S. Paul could not avoid *that* resurrection, according to the modern Christian view. What then was the resurrection to attain which he was making such strenuous efforts? Once more the only answer comes from the Mysteries. In them the Initiate approaching the Initiation that liberated from the cycle of rebirth, the circle of generation, was called "the suffering Christ;" he shared the sufferings of the Saviour of the world, was crucified mystically, "made conformable to His death," and then attained the resurrection, the fellowship of the glorified Christ, and, after,

⁷⁷ Phil. iii. 8, 10-12, 14, 15.

that death had over him no power.⁷⁸ This was "the prize" towards which the great Apostle was pressing, and he urged "as many as be perfect," *not the ordinary believer*, thus also to strive. Let them not be content with what they had gained, but still press onwards.

This resemblance of the Initiate to the Christ is, indeed, the very groundwork of the Greater Mysteries, as we shall see more in detail when we study "The Mystical Christ." The Initiate was no longer to look on Christ as outside himself: "Though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we Him no more."⁷⁹

The ordinary believer had "put on Christ;" "as many of you as have been baptised into Christ have put on Christ."⁸⁰ Then they were the "babes in Christ" to whom reference has already been made, and Christ was the Saviour to whom they looked for help, knowing Him "after the flesh." But when they had conquered the lower nature and were no longer "carnal," then they were to enter on a higher path, and were themselves to become Christ. This which he himself had already reached, was the longing of the Apostle for his followers: "My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed *in you*."⁸¹ Already he was

⁷⁸ Rev. i. 18. "I am He that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive for evermore. Amen."

⁷⁹ II. Cor. v. 16.

⁸⁰ Gal. iii. 27.

⁸¹ Gal. iv. 19.

their spiritual father, having "begotten you through the gospel."⁸² But now "again" he was as a parent, as their mother to bring them to the second birth. Then the infant Christ, the Holy Child, was born in the soul, "the hidden man of the heart;"⁸³ the Initiate thus became that "Little Child"; henceforth he was to live out in his own person the life of the Christ, until he became the "perfect man," growing "unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."⁸⁴ Then he, as S. Paul was doing, filled up the sufferings of Christ in his own flesh,⁸⁵ and always bore "about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus,"⁸⁶ so that he could truly say: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."⁸⁷ Thus was the Apostle himself suffering; thus he describes himself. And when the struggle is over, how different is the calm tone of triumph from the strained effort of the earlier years: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness."⁸⁸ This was the crown given to "him that overcometh," of whom it is said by the ascended

⁸² I. Cor. iv. 15.

⁸³ I. S. Pet. iii. 4.

⁸⁴ Eph. iv. 13.

⁸⁵ Col. i. 24.

⁸⁶ II. Cor. iv. 10.

⁸⁷ Gal. ii. 20.

⁸⁸ II. Tim. iv. 6, 8.

Christ: "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God; and he shall go no more out."⁸⁹ For after the "Resurrection" the Initiate has become the Perfect Man, the Master, and He goes out no more from the Temple, but from it serves and guides the worlds.

It may be well to point out, ere closing this chapter, that S. Paul himself sanctions the use of the theoretical mystic teaching in explaining the historical events recorded in the Scriptures. The history therein written is not regarded by him as a mere record of facts, which occurred on the physical plane. A true mystic, he saw in the physical events the shadows of the universal truths ever unfolding in higher and inner worlds, and knew that the events selected for preservation in occult writings were such as were typical, the explanation of which would subserve human instruction. Thus he takes the story of Abraham, Sarai, Hagar, Ishmael, and Isaac, and saying, "which things are an allegory," he proceeds to give the mystical interpretation.⁹⁰ Referring to the escape of the Israelites from Egypt, he speaks of the Red Sea as a baptism, of the manna and the water as spiritual meat and spiritual drink, of the rock from which the water flowed as Christ.⁹¹ He sees the great mystery of the union of Christ and His Church in the human relation of husband and wife, and speaks of Christians as the flesh and the bones of the body of

⁸⁹ Rev. iii. 12.

⁹⁰ Gal. iv. 22-31.

⁹¹ I Cor. x. 1-4.

Christ.⁹² The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews allegorises the whole Jewish system of worship. In the Temple he sees a pattern of the heavenly Temple, in the High Priest he sees Christ, in the sacrifices the offering of the spotless Son; the priests of the Temple are but "the example and shadow of heavenly things," of the heavenly priesthood serving in "the true tabernacle." A most elaborate allegory is thus worked out in chapters iii. – x., and the writer alleges that the Holy Ghost thus signified the deeper meaning; all was "a figure for the time."

In this view of the sacred writings, it is not alleged that the events recorded did not take place, but only that their physical happening was a matter of minor importance. And such explanation is the unveiling of the Lesser Mysteries, the mystic teaching which is permitted to be given to the world. It is not, as many think, a mere play of the imagination, but is the outcome of a true intuition, seeing the patterns in the heavens, and not only the shadows cast by them on the screen of earthly time.

⁹² Eph. v. 23-32.

Chapter III.

THE HIDDEN SIDE OF CHRISTIANITY(*concluded*)

(*b*) The Testimony of the Church

While it may be that some would be willing to admit the possession by the Apostles and their immediate successors of a deeper knowledge of spiritual things than was current among the masses of the believers around them, few will probably be willing to take the next step, and, leaving that charmed circle, accept as the depository of their sacred learning the Mysteries of the Early Church. Yet we have S. Paul providing for the transmission of the unwritten teaching, himself initiating S. Timothy, and instructing S. Timothy to initiate others in his turn, who should again hand it on to yet others. We thus see the provision of four successive generations of teachers, spoken of in the Scriptures themselves, and these would far more than overlap the writers of the Early Church, who bear witness to the existence of the Mysteries. For among these are pupils of the Apostles themselves, though the most definite statements belong to those removed from the Apostles by one intermediate teacher. Now, as soon as we begin

to study the writings of the Early Church, we are met by the facts that there are allusions which are only intelligible by the existence of the Mysteries, and then statements that the Mysteries are existing. This might, of course, have been expected, seeing the point at which the New Testament leaves the matter, but it is satisfactory to find the facts answer to the expectation.

The first witnesses are those called the Apostolic Fathers, the disciples of the Apostles; but very little of their writings, and that disputed, remains. Not being written controversially, the statements are not as categorical as those of the later writers. Their letters are for the encouragement of the believers. Polycarp, Bishop of Smyrna, and fellow-disciple with Ignatius of S. John,⁹³ expresses a hope that his correspondents are "well versed in the sacred Scriptures and that nothing is hid from you; but to me this privilege is not yet granted"⁹⁴ – writing, apparently, before reaching full Initiation. Barnabas speaks of communicating "some portion of what I have myself received,"⁹⁵ and after expounding the Law mystically, declares that "we then, rightly understanding His commandments, explain them as the Lord intended."⁹⁶ Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch, a disciple of S.

⁹³ Vol. I. *The Martyrdom of Ignatius*, ch. iii. The translations used are those of Clarke's Ante-Nicene Library, a most useful compendium of Christian antiquity. The number of the volume which stands first in the references is the number of the volume in that Series.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.* *The Epistle of Polycarp*, ch. xii.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* *The Epistle of Barnabas*, ch. i.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* ch. x.

John,⁹⁷ speaks of himself as "not yet perfect in Jesus Christ. For I now begin to be a disciple, and I speak to you as my fellow-disciples,"⁹⁸ and he speaks of them as "initiated into the mysteries of the Gospel with Paul, the holy, the martyred."⁹⁹ Again he says: "Might I not write to you things more full of mystery? But I fear to do so, lest I should inflict injury on you who are but babes. Pardon me in this respect, lest, as not being able to receive their weighty import, ye should be strangled by them. For even I, though I am bound [for Christ] and am able to understand heavenly things, the angelic orders, and the different sorts of angels and hosts, the distinction between powers and dominions, and the diversities between thrones and authorities, the mightiness of the æons, and the pre-eminence of the cherubim and seraphim, the sublimity of the Spirit, the kingdom of the Lord, and above all the incomparable majesty of Almighty God – though I am acquainted with these things, yet am I not therefore by any means perfect, nor am I such a disciple as Paul or Peter."¹⁰⁰ This passage is interesting, as indicating that the organisation of the celestial hierarchies was one of the subjects in which instruction was given in the Mysteries. Again he speaks of the High Priest, the Hierophant, "to whom the holy of holies has been committed, and who alone has been entrusted

⁹⁷ *Ibid.* *The Martyrdom of Ignatius*, ch. i.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.* *Epistle of Ignatius to the Ephesians*, ch. iii.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* ch. xii.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* *to the Trallians*, ch. v.

with the secrets of God."¹⁰¹

We come next to S. Clement of Alexandria and his pupil Origen, the two writers of the second and third centuries who tell us most about the Mysteries in the Early Church; though the general atmosphere is full of mystic allusions, these two are clear and categorical in their statements that the Mysteries were a recognised institution.

Now S. Clement was a disciple of Pantænus, and he speaks of him and of two others, said to be probably Tatian and Theodotus, as "preserving the tradition of the blessed doctrine derived directly from the holy Apostles, Peter, James, John, and Paul,"¹⁰² his link with the Apostles themselves consisting thus of only one intermediary. He was the head of the Catechetical School of Alexandria in A.D. 189, and died about A.D. 220. Origen, born about A.D. 185, was his pupil, and he is, perhaps, the most learned of the Fathers, and a man of the rarest moral beauty. These are the witnesses from whom we receive the most important testimony as to the existence of definite Mysteries in the Early Church.

The *Stromata*, or Miscellanies, of S. Clement are our source of information about the Mysteries in his time. He himself speaks of these writings as a "miscellany of Gnostic notes, according to the true philosophy,"¹⁰³ and also describes them as memoranda

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* to the Philadelphians, ch. ix.

¹⁰² Vol. IV. Clement of Alexandria *Stromata*, bk. I. ch. i.

¹⁰³ Vol. IV. *Stromata*, bk. I. ch. xxviii.

of the teachings he had himself received from Pantænus. The passage is instructive: "The Lord . . . allowed us to communicate of those divine Mysteries, and of that holy light, to those who are able to receive them. He did not certainly disclose to the many what did not belong to the many; but to the few to whom He knew that they belonged, who were capable of receiving and being moulded according to them. But secret things are entrusted to speech, not to writing, as is the case with God. And if one say¹⁰⁴ that it is written, 'There is nothing secret which shall not be revealed, nor hidden which shall not be disclosed,' let him also hear from us, that to him who hears secretly, even what is secret shall be manifested. This is what was predicted by this oracle. And to him who is able secretly to observe what is delivered to him, that which is veiled shall be disclosed as truth; and what is hidden to the many shall appear manifest to the few... The Mysteries are delivered mystically, that what is spoken may be in the mouth of the speaker; rather not in his voice, but in his understanding... The writing of these memoranda of mine, I well know, is weak when compared with that spirit, full of grace, which I was privileged to hear. But it will be an image to recall the archetype to him who was struck with the Thyrsus." The Thyrsus, we may here interject, was the wand borne by Initiates, and candidates were touched with it during the ceremony of Initiation. It had a mystic significance, symbolising the spinal

¹⁰⁴ It appears that even in those days there were some who objected to any truth being taught secretly!

cord and the pineal gland in the Lesser Mysteries, and a Rod, known to Occultists, in the Greater. To say, therefore, "to him who was struck with the Thyrsus" was exactly the same as to say, "to him who was initiated in the Mysteries." Clement proceeds: "We profess not to explain secret things sufficiently – far from it – but only to recall them to memory, whether we have forgot aught, or whether for the purpose of not forgetting. Many things, I well know, have escaped us, through length of time, that have dropped away unwritten... There are then some things of which we have no recollection; for the power that was in the blessed men was great." A frequent experience of those taught by the Great Ones, for Their presence stimulates and renders active powers which are normally latent, and which the pupil, unassisted, cannot evoke. "There are also some things which remained unnoted long, which have now escaped; and others which are effaced, having faded away in the mind itself, since such a task is not easy to those not experienced; these I revive in my commentaries. Some things I purposely omit, in the exercise of a wise selection, afraid to write what I guarded against speaking; not grudging – for that were wrong – but fearing for my readers, lest they should stumble by taking them in a wrong sense; and, as the proverb says, we should be found 'reaching a sword to a child.' For it is impossible that what has been written should not escape [become known], although remaining unpublished by me. But being always revolved, using the one only voice, that of writing, they answer nothing to him that makes enquiries beyond

what is written; for they require of necessity the aid of some one, either of him who wrote, or of some one else who has walked in his footsteps. Some things my treatise will hint; on some it will linger; some it will merely mention. It will try to speak imperceptibly, to exhibit secretly, and to demonstrate silently."¹⁰⁵

This passage, if it stood alone, would suffice to establish the existence of a secret teaching in the Early Church. But it stands by no means alone. In Chapter xii. of this same Book I., headed, "The Mysteries of the Faith not to be divulged to all," Clement declares that, since others than the wise may see his work, "it is requisite, therefore, to hide in a Mystery the wisdom spoken, which the Son of God taught." Purified tongue of the speaker, purified ears of the hearer, these were necessary. "Such were the impediments in the way of my writing. And even now I fear, as it is said, 'to cast the pearls before swine, lest they tread them under foot 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. For scarcely could anything which they could hear be more ludicrous than these to the multitude; nor any subjects on the other hand more admirable or more inspiring to those of noble nature. But the wise do not utter with their mouth what they reason in council. 'But what ye hear in the ear,' said the Lord, 'proclaim upon the houses'; bidding them receive the secret traditions of the true knowledge, and expound them aloft and conspicuously; and as we have heard in the ear, so to deliver

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.* bk. I, ch. i.

them to whom it is requisite; but not enjoining us to communicate to all without distinction, what is said to them in parables. But there is only a delineation in the memoranda, which have the truth sown sparse and broadcast, that it may escape the notice of those who pick up seeds like jackdaws; but when they find a good husbandman, each one of them will germinate and will produce corn."

Clement might have added that to "proclaim upon the houses" was to proclaim or expound in the assembly of the Perfect, the Initiated, and by no means to shout aloud to the man in the street.

Again he says that those who are "still blind and dumb, not having understanding, or the undazzled and keen vision of the contemplative soul ... must stand outside of the divine choir... Wherefore, in accordance with the method of concealment, the truly sacred Word, truly divine and most necessary for us, deposited in the shrine of truth, was by the Egyptians indicated by what were called among them *adyta*, and by the Hebrews by the veil. Only the consecrated ... were allowed access to them. For Plato also thought it not lawful for 'the impure to touch the pure.' Thence the prophecies and oracles are spoken in enigmas, and the Mysteries are not exhibited incontinently to all and sundry, but only after certain purifications and previous instructions."¹⁰⁶ He then descants at great length on Symbols, expounding Pythagorean, Hebrew, Egyptian,¹⁰⁷ and

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* bk. V., ch. iv.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.* ch. v. – viii.

then remarks that the ignorant and unlearned man fails in understanding them. "But the Gnostic apprehends. Now then it is not wished that all things should be exposed indiscriminately to all and sundry, or the benefits of wisdom communicated to those who have not even in a dream been purified in soul (for it is not allowed to hand to every chance comer what has been procured with such laborious efforts); nor are the Mysteries of the Word to be expounded to the profane." The Pythagoreans and Plato, Zeno, and Aristotle had exoteric and esoteric teachings. The philosophers established the Mysteries, for "was it not more beneficial for the holy and blessed contemplation of realities to be concealed?"¹⁰⁸ The Apostles also approved of "veiling the Mysteries of the Faith," "for there is an instruction to the perfect," alluded to in Colossians i. 9-11 and 25-27. "So that, on the one hand, then, there are the Mysteries which were hid till the time of the Apostles, and were delivered by them as they received from the Lord, and, concealed in the Old Testament, were manifested to the saints. And, on the other hand, there is 'the riches of the glory of the mystery in the Gentiles,' which is faith and hope in Christ; which in another place he has called the 'foundation.'" He quotes S. Paul to show that this "knowledge belongs not to all," and says, referring to Heb. v. and vi., that "there were certainly among the Hebrews, some things delivered unwritten;" and then refers to S. Barnabas, who speaks of God, "who has put into our hearts wisdom and the understanding of

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.* ch. ix.

His secrets," and says that "it is but for few to comprehend these things," as showing a "trace of Gnostic tradition." "Wherefore instruction, which reveals hidden things, is called illumination, as it is the teacher only who uncovers the lid of the ark."¹⁰⁹ Further referring to S. Paul, he comments on his remark to the Romans that he will "come in the fulness of the blessing of Christ,"¹¹⁰ and says that he thus designates "the spiritual gift and the Gnostic interpretation, while being present he desires to impart to them present as 'the fulness of Christ, according to the revelation of the Mystery sealed in the ages of eternity, but now manifested by the prophetic Scriptures'¹¹¹... But only to a few of them is shown what those things are which are contained in the Mystery. Rightly, then, Plato, in the epistles, treating of God, says: 'We must speak in enigmas; that should the tablet come by any mischance on its leaves either by sea or land, he who reads may remain ignorant.'¹¹²

After much examination of Greek writers, and an investigation into philosophy, S. Clement declares that the Gnosis "imparted and revealed by the Son of God, is wisdom... And the Gnosis itself is that which has descended by transmission

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* bk. V., ch. x.

¹¹⁰ *Loc. Cit.* xv. 29.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* xvi. 25, 26; the version quoted differs in words, but not in meaning, from the English Authorised Version.

¹¹² *Stromata*, bk. V., ch. x.

to a few, having been imparted unwritten by the Apostles."¹¹³ A very long exposition of the life of the Gnostic, the Initiate, is given, and S. Clement concludes it by saying: "Let the specimen suffice to those who have ears. For it is not required to unfold the mystery, but only to indicate what is sufficient for those who are partakers in knowledge to bring it to mind."¹¹⁴

Regarding Scripture as consisting of allegories and symbols, and as hiding the sense in order to stimulate enquiry and to preserve the ignorant from danger.¹¹⁵ S. Clement naturally confined the higher instruction to the learned. "Our Gnostic will be deeply learned,"¹¹⁶ he says. "Now the Gnostic must be erudite."¹¹⁷ Those who had acquired readiness by previous training could master the deeper knowledge, for though "a man can be a believer without learning, so also we assert that it is impossible for a man without learning to comprehend the things which are declared in the faith."¹¹⁸ "Some who think themselves naturally gifted, do not wish to touch either philosophy or logic; nay more, they do not wish to learn natural science. They demand bare faith alone... So also I call him truly learned who brings everything to bear on the truth – so that, from geometry,

¹¹³ *Ibid.* bk. VI., ch. vii.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* bk. VII., ch. xiv.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.* bk. VI., ch. xv.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* bk. VI. x.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.* bk. VI. vii.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* bk. I. ch. vi.

and music, and grammar, and philosophy itself, culling what is useful, he guards the faith against assault... How necessary is it for him who desires to be partaker of the power of God, to treat of intellectual subjects by philosophising."¹¹⁹ "The Gnostic avails himself of branches of learning as auxiliary preparatory exercises."¹²⁰ So far was S. Clement from thinking that the teaching of Christianity should be measured by the ignorance of the unlearned. "He who is conversant with all kinds of wisdom will be pre-eminently a Gnostic."¹²¹ Thus while he welcomed the ignorant and the sinner, and found in the Gospel what was suited to their needs, he considered that only the learned and the pure were fit candidates for the Mysteries. "The Apostle, in contradistinction to Gnostic perfection, calls the common faith *the foundation*, and sometimes *milk*,"¹²² but on that foundation the edifice of the Gnosis was to be raised, and the food of men was to succeed that of babes. There is nothing of harshness nor of contempt in the distinction he draws, but only a calm and wise recognition of the facts.

Even the well-prepared candidate, the learned and trained pupil, could only hope to advance step by step in the profound truths unveiled in the Mysteries. This appears clearly in his comments on the vision of Hermas, in which he also throws out

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* ch. ix.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.* bk. VI. ch. x.

¹²¹ *Ibid.* bk. I. ch. xiii.

¹²² Vol XII. *Stromata*, bk. V. ch. iv.

some hints on methods of reading occult works. "Did not the Power also, that appeared to Hermas in the Vision, in the form of the Church, give for transcription the book which she wished to be made known to the elect? And this, he says, he transcribed to the letter, without finding how to complete the syllables. And this signified that the Scripture is clear to all, when taken according to base reading; and that this is the faith which occupies the place of the rudiments. Wherefore also the figurative expression is employed, 'reading according to the letter,' while we understand that the gnostic unfolding of Scriptures, when faith has already reached an advanced state, is likened to reading according to the syllables... Now that the Saviour has taught the Apostles the unwritten rendering of the written (scriptures) has been handed down also to us, inscribed by the power of God on hearts new, according to the renovation of the book. Thus those of highest repute among the Greeks dedicate the fruit of the pomegranate to Hermes, who they say is speech, on account of its interpretation. For speech conceals much... That it is therefore not only to those who read simply that the acquisition of the truth is so difficult, but that not even to those whose prerogative the knowledge of the truth is, is the contemplation of it vouchsafed all at once, the history of Moses teaches; until accustomed to gaze, as the Hebrews on the glory of Moses, and the prophets of Israel on the visions of angels, so we also become able to look the splendours of truth in the face."¹²³

¹²³ *Ibid.* bk. VI. ch. xv.

Yet more references might be given, but these should suffice to establish the fact that S. Clement knew of, had been initiated into, and wrote for the benefit of those who had also been initiated into, the Mysteries in the Church.

The next witness is his pupil Origen, that most shining light of learning, courage, sanctity, devotion, meekness, and zeal, whose works remain as mines of gold wherein the student may dig for the treasures of wisdom.

In his famous controversy with Celsus attacks were made on Christianity which drew out a defence of the Christian position in which frequent references were made to the secret teachings.¹²⁴

Celsus had alleged, as a matter of attack, that Christianity was a secret system, and Origen traverses this by saying that while certain doctrines were secret, many others were public, and that this system of exoteric and esoteric teachings, adopted in Christianity, was also in general use among philosophers. The reader should note, in the following passage, the distinction drawn between the resurrection of Jesus, regarded in a historical light, and the "mystery of the resurrection."

"Moreover, since he [Celsus] frequently calls the Christian doctrine a secret system [of belief], we must confute him on this point also, since almost the entire world is better acquainted with what Christians preach than with the favourite opinions of philosophers. For who is ignorant of the statement that Jesus

¹²⁴ Book I. of *Against Celsus* is found in Vol. X. of the Ante-Nicene Library. The remaining books are in Vol. XXIII.

was born of a virgin, and that He was crucified, and that His resurrection is an article of faith among many, and that a general judgment is announced to come, in which the wicked are to be punished according to their deserts, and the righteous to be duly rewarded? And yet the Mystery of the resurrection, not being understood, is made a subject of ridicule among unbelievers. In these circumstances, to speak of the Christian doctrine as a *secret* system, is altogether absurd. But that there should be certain doctrines, not made known to the multitude, which are [revealed] after the exoteric ones have been taught, is not a peculiarity of Christianity alone, but also of philosophic systems, in which certain truths are exoteric and others esoteric. Some of the hearers of Pythagoras were content with his *ipse dixit*; while others were taught in secret those doctrines which were not deemed fit to be communicated to profane and insufficiently prepared ears. Moreover, all the Mysteries that are celebrated everywhere throughout Greece and barbarous countries, although held in secret, have no discredit thrown upon them, so that it is in vain he endeavours to calumniate the secret doctrines of Christianity, seeing that he does not correctly understand its nature."¹²⁵

It is impossible to deny that, in this important passage, Origen distinctly places the Christian Mysteries in the same category as those of the Pagan world, and claims that what is not regarded as a discredit to other religions should not form a subject of attack

¹²⁵ Vol. X. *Origen against Celsus*, bk. I. ch. vii.

when found in Christianity.

Still writing against Celsus, he declares that the secret teachings of Jesus were preserved in the Church, and refers specifically to the explanations that He gave to His disciples of His parables, in answering Celsus' comparison of "the inner Mysteries of the Church of God" with the Egyptian worship of animals. "I have not yet spoken of the observance of all that is written in the Gospels, each one of which contains much doctrine difficult to be understood, not merely by the multitude, but even by certain of the more intelligent, including a very profound explanation of the parables which Jesus delivered to 'those without,' while reserving the exhibition of their full meaning for those who had passed beyond the stage of exoteric teaching, and who came to Him privately in the house. And when he comes to understand it, he will admire the reason why some are said to be 'without,' and others 'in the house.'"¹²⁶

And he refers guardedly to the "mountain" which Jesus ascended, from which he came down again to help "those who were unable to follow Him whither His disciples went." The allusion is to "the Mountain of Initiation," a well-known mystical phrase, as Moses also made the Tabernacle after the pattern "showed thee in the mount."¹²⁷ Origen refers to it again later, saying that Jesus showed himself to be very different in his real appearance when on the "Mountain," from what those saw who

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Ex. xxv. 40, xxvi. 30, and compare with Heb. viii. 5, and ix. 25.

could not "follow Him on high."¹²⁸

So also, in his commentary on the Gospel of Matthew, Chap. xv., dealing with the episode of the Syro-Phœnician woman, Origen remarks: "And perhaps, also, of the words of Jesus there are some loaves which it is possible to give to the more rational, as to children, only; and others as it were crumbs from the great house and table of the well-born, which may be used by some souls like dogs."

Celsus complaining that sinners were brought into the Church, Origen answers that the Church had medicine for those that were sick, but also the study and the knowledge of divine things for those who were in health. Sinners were taught not to sin, and only when it was seen that progress had been made, and men were "purified by the Word," "then and not before do we invite them to participation in our Mysteries. For we speak wisdom among them that are perfect."¹²⁹ Sinners came to be healed: "For there are in the divinity of the Word some helps towards the cure of those who are sick... Others, again, which to the pure in soul and body exhibit the 'revelation of the Mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, but now is made manifest by the Scriptures of the prophets,' and 'by the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ,' which 'appearing' is manifested to each one of those who are perfect, and which enlightens the reason in the

¹²⁸ *Origen against Celsus*, bk. IV. ch. xvi.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.* bk. III. ch. lix.

true knowledge of things."¹³⁰ Such appearances of divine Beings took place, we have seen, in the Pagan Mysteries, and those of the Church had equally glorious visitants. "God the Word," he says, "was sent as a physician to sinners, but as a Teacher of Divine Mysteries to those who are already pure, and who sin no more."¹³¹ "Wisdom will not enter into the soul of a base man, nor dwell in a body that is involved in sin;" hence these higher teachings are given only to those who are "athletes in piety and in every virtue."

Christians did not admit the impure to this knowledge, but said: "Whoever has clean hands, and, therefore, lifts up holy hands to God ... let him come to us ... whoever is pure not only from all defilement, but from what are regarded as lesser transgressions, let him be boldly initiated in the Mysteries of Jesus, which properly are made known only to the holy and the pure." Hence also, ere the ceremony of Initiation began, he who acts as Initiator, according to the precepts of Jesus, the Hierophant, made the significant proclamation "to those who have been purified in heart: He, whose soul has, for a long time, been conscious of no evil, especially since he yielded himself to the healing of the Word, let such a one hear the doctrines which were spoken in private by Jesus to His genuine disciples." This was the opening of the "initiating those who were already

¹³⁰ *Ibid.* ch. lxi.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* ch. lxii.

purified into the sacred Mysteries."¹³² Such only might learn the realities of the unseen worlds, and might enter into the sacred precincts where, as of old, angels were the teachers, and where knowledge was given by sight and not only by words. It is impossible not to be struck with the different tone of these Christians from that of their modern successors. With them perfect purity of life, the practice of virtue, the fulfilling of the divine Law in every detail of outer conduct, the perfection of righteousness, were – as with the Pagans – only the beginning of the way instead of the end. Nowadays religion is considered to have gloriously accomplished its object when it has made the Saint; then, it was to the Saints that it devoted its highest energies, and, taking the pure in heart, it led them to the Beatific Vision.

The same fact of secret teaching comes out again, when Origen is discussing the arguments of Celsus as to the wisdom of retaining ancestral customs, based on the belief that "the various quarters of the earth were from the beginning allotted to different superintending Spirits, and were thus distributed among certain governing Powers, and in this way the administration of the world is carried on."¹³³

Origen having animadverted on the deductions of Celsus, proceeds: "But as we think it likely that some of those who are accustomed to deeper investigation will fall in with this treatise, let us venture to lay down some considerations of a profounder

¹³² *Ibid.*, ch. lx.

¹³³ Vol. XXIII. *Origen against Celsus*, bk. V. ch. xxv.

kind, conveying a mystical and secret view respecting the original distribution of the various quarters of the earth among different superintending Spirits."¹³⁴

¹³⁴ *Ibid.* ch. xxviii.

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