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Occultism and the Crisis of our Time
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In more advanced societies occultism has thriven roughly in proportion to the favouring concordance of disrupting elements in a more or less socially disorganised situation. A deviation from a true life-principle will tend to show itself by an attachment to its opposites. Thus a deviation from religion will tend to manifest first by an attachment to diabolism and other forms of occultism, then to materialism, atheistic humanism and other similar expedients, and then again to a renewed interest in occultism and religion. Indeed, man adopts various temporary expedients or, to use Maritain's felicitous term, "masks" in his quest for certainty, for re-integration and re-equilibration.

But speaking of more advanced societies: In some countries and at some times the traces of occultism are few and scattered; in other countries and other times the traces are many and pregnant with significance. In earlier, rather than in more recent times, Egypt, Mesopotamia, India and Tibet have been rich in occult practices. This is no doubt partly due to the other-worldly orientation of these Eastern countries. On the other hand, in the West there has been a comparatively weaker addiction (apart from recent times) to occultism because of the this-worldly, materialistic outlook which has characterised the West to an increasing extent for the last few hundred years. But the acute general crisis from which the West has been of late suffering, or to phrase it differently, the disruption of the European soul and the disintegration, of the European personality, have resulted not only in a renewed interest in religion, but also in an occultistic recrudescence. Some evidence of this recrudescence is the increasing number of newspaper articles these days on the so-called occult sciences and occult phenomena; Cornelius Tabori's enumeration and description of a variety of occult phenomena and practices in Europe during the last forty years in his book, *My Occult Diary*; and the widespread interest which focused itself in England upon Aleister

Crowley, poet, mountaineer, debauchee and Ipsissimus or high-priest of magic.

When one concentrates attention, however, on the connotation and denotation of the term "occultism", one is driven to the conclusion that it has all the semblance of a vague generalization. G. R. S. Meade for instance, points out that occultism "aspires to embrace so vast a field of such varied phenomena that it has all the appearance of being a vague generalization of no scientific value." He also adds that popular usage is tending to give it both a general and a special meaning. And Esther Singleton considers occultism as pre- or juxta-scientific. It is, therefore necessary at this juncture to attempt disentangling the sociopsychological foundations of the term, and thus making it more scientific.

Etymologically, the derivation of the word "occultism" can be traced to French and Latin; both *occulere* and *occultum* mean "to hide." According to the dictionary the word "occult" means covered over: escaping observation: hidden: not discovered without test or experiment: secret, unknown, transcending the bounds of natural knowledge; "occultism" means the doctrine or study of things hidden or mysterious; and the occult sciences are alchemy, astrology, magic, theosophy, etc.

Joseph Macabe's explanation of the term is interesting, but one-sided. He writes of occultism as follows: "Any system of thought or propaganda which pretends to provide to a select few a wisdom which is 'hidden' from the mass. The information is generally said to have been handed down from earlier ages, when gifted men had a marvelous insight into life and its problems." Macabe thinks that occultism is charlatanism and adventurism, its successful existence being dependent upon the patronage of "a very large body of wealthy, idle, and often neuro-pathic women in the United States."

J. P. Arendzen, confining attention to magic as the most basic of occult practices, writes: "In a restricted sense magic is understood to be an interference with the usual course of physical nature by apparently inadequate means (recitation of formularies, gestures, mixing of incongruous elements, and other mysterious actions), the knowledge of which is obtained through secret communication with the force underlying the universe (God, the Devil, the soul of the world, etc.); it is the attempt to work miracles not by the power of God, gratuitously communicated to man, but by the use of hidden forces beyond man's control Its advocates, despairing to move the Deity by supplication, seek the desired result by evoking powers ordina-

rily reserved to the Deity. It is a corruption of religion, not a preliminary stage of it, as Rationalists maintain, and it appears as an accompaniment of decadent rather than of rising civilization. There is nothing to show that in Babylon, Greece and Rome the use of magic decreased as these nations progressed; on the contrary, it increased as they declined. It is not true that 'religion is the despair of magic', in reality, magic is but a disease of religion."

Finally, seeking to elucidate the meaning and significance of the word, Cornelius Tabori, in a conversation with Sigmund Freud, pointed out that it meant 'hidden' but the sense was really 'mysterious.' Again in an interview with Thomas Mann he reports Mann as saying: "When metaphysics becomes empirical, experimental, we find ourselves with the occult phenomena." Lastly, a note in Tabori's diary dated 13th September, 1942 runs thus: "The starting point of the new occultists seems to be the idea that there are no mysteries, no magic powers; that everything has a natural scientific explanation; the only question is whether the detailed and exact analysis of certain phenomena has supplied an answer to the 'riddle' or whether work must still be done in these respects." This note that we have quoted last here serves to draw attention to the widening claims of occultism, and to the attempts at making a scientific study of some occult phenomena of which the work of the University of London Council for Psychical Research and of men like F. W. H. Myers, Sir Oliver Lodge, H. Price, J. W. Dunne and J. B. Rhine are examples.

In seeking to reduce the term to scientific clarity these then are the points that must be examined; 1. G. R. S. Meade's pointer that it is a vague term, 2. The dictionary's stress on its hidden, mysterious and secret character, 3. Joseph Macabe's rationalistic attitude and his reference to neuropathology, 4. J. P. Arendzen's explanation of magic as a corruption of religion, 5. Cornelius Tabori's distinction between its meaning as hidden and as mysterious, and his reference to the modern tendency to displace mysteries and magic powers by the application of scientific methods to occult phenomena.

Hence, emphasising motivations and manifestations and concentrating on the psychological and sociological significance of occultism, one can re-define the term as follows: A mainly secret and largely ineffective attempt at individual or group re-integration and re-equilibration through the pursuit of hidden, mysterious and often evil powers, either real or unreal, at work or believed to be at work in the universe.

The crux of this definition lies in the words "re-integration" and "re-equilibration." They have both psychological and sociological implications; for, these processes involve mental activity, whether conscious or unconscious, directed towards a reconstruction or stabilisation of a previously disintegrating personality or social environment. The disintegration of personality may not go very far; or it may reach the stage of the neuropathological. At any rate it is the disturbed mentality that is essentially the matrix of the occult; and both occultism and, as C. G. Jung points out, one form of neurosis are conditioned by the predominance of secrets. Sociology enters here because personality, as Maclver puts it, is a synthesis of sociality and individuality, and because the disintegration will have been caused directly or indirectly by disrupting elements in the social or total environment within which the occultistically oriented individual or group ekes out its existence. The modern attempt at applying the methods of the natural sciences to occult phenomena need not detain us here. It raises other problems not directly related to a socio-psychological analysis of occult phenomena.

We propose next to illustrate our definition and disentangle some of the disrupting factors that favour the emergence of occultism by a reference to the following: 1. Goethe's *Faust*; 2. Aleister Crowley's occultism; 3. S. F. Nadel's study of four African societies; and 4. D. H. Lawrence's *The Plumed Serpent*.

In taking both Goethe (1749-1832) and his masterpiece, *Faust*, as material for an illustrative commentary on the socio-psychology of occultism, one can do no better, as a start, than to allow Goethe himself to speak. Goethe writes: "The most significant can be complete if he works within the limits of his capacities, innate and acquired; but even fine talents can be obscured, neutralised, and destroyed by the lack of the indispensable requirement of symmetry. This is a mischief which will often occur in modern times; for who will be able to come up to the claims of an age so full and intense as this, and one, too, that moves so rapidly." Thus Goethe realized the necessity of personality integration on various levels; and admitted the difficulty of arriving at such integration in times that move rapidly. Of the age in which Goethe lived it can be said that it was characterised by war and ferment. "His age," says Philip Wayne, "was as sceptical as ours." And again "In ages of scepticism like our own, men disowning religion have been impatient with all barriers of convention, and have sought to satisfy their vague hunger by grasping at occult powers that seemed to lie beyond the ken of pedant authority." The impact of an age full of war,

ferment and scepticism upon a high-keyed and sensitive personality like that of Goethe's resulted in his studying some aspects of occultism and thinking about religion at an early age. He was unintegrated in an environment in which war, ferment and scepticism predominated. His series of love-affairs indicate the absence of internal stability and concord. He took to writing, driven by discord both internal and external, to the satisfactions of self-expression. But if art is self-projection, Goethe is in part Faust. Why then does Faust make a pact with the devil? The opening lines of the tragedy are self-explanatory: The time—Night; the place—Faust's study. In a high-vaulted, narrow, Gothic chamber, Faust is discovered restless at his desk:

Faust. Philosophy have I digested,
The whole of Law and Medicine,
From each its secrets I have wrested,
Theology, alas, thrown in.
Poor fool, with all this sweated lore,
I stand no wiser than I was before.
Master and Doctor are my titles;
For ten years now, without repose,
I've held my erudite recitals
And led my pupils by the nose.
And round we go, on crooked ways or straight,
And well I know that ignorance is our fate,
And this I hate.
I have, I grant, outdistanced all the others;
Doctors, pedants, clergy and lay brothers;
All plague of doubts and scruples I can quell,
And have no fear of devil or of hell,
And in return am destitute of pleasure,
Knowing that knowledge tricks us beyond measure.
That man's conversion is beyond my reach,
Knowing the emptiness of what I teach.
Meanwhile I live in penury,
No worldly honour falls to me
No dog would linger on like this,
And so I turn to the abyss
Of necromancy, try if art
Can voice or power of spirits start,
To do me service and reveal
The things of Nature's secret seal
And save from the weary dance
Of holding forth in ignorance.

Then shall I see with vision clear,
How secret elements cohere,
And what the universe engirds
And give up huckstering with words.

To Aleister Crowley we turn next. Both Goethe and Crowley are individual and conspicuous instances of attempts at re-integration in terms of occultism. Both were high-keyed, imaginative and spiritually oriented at bottom. But while Goethe's interest in the occult manifested itself primarily in literary composition, Crowley's manifested itself as a life-interest, conditioning and influencing his behaviour. Aleister Crowley (1875—1947) was born of parents who belonged to a sect called Plymouth Brethren. This, says John Symonds, is the all-important fact of Crowley's youth and up-bringing. Son of religious enthusiasts Crowley was drilled day in and day out in the forms and formularies of a sectarian religion which he accordingly came to abhor, but from the conditioning of which he could not quite escape. Within this environment of Crowley's, surcharged, as it was, by religiosity, came the disrupting factor of his high sexuality. These then were the factors which combined to propel the Great Beast towards a course of life which led the press to describe him as "The wickedest man in the world". "The king of depravity", "A cannibal at large", etc. 1. The religious ardour of his early environment; 2. His imaginative and high-keyed personality; 3. His high sexuality. The high-water mark of Crowley's career was the establishment of the Abbey of Thelema in Sicily. The abbey was dedicated to the study of occultism and the performance of occult rites, particularly of a type which Crowley called sex-magic. When he died in 1947 his friends and followers cremated his body to the accompaniment of occult rites and the recitation of his *Hymn to Pan*, two extracts from which serve to illustrate his poetic power and his over-sexed imagination:

Thrill with lissome lust of light,
O man ! My man ! Come
careering out of the night Of
Pan! Io Pan!

And again:

Give me the sign of the Open Eye, And
the token erect of thorny thigh, And the
word of madness and mystery...

S. F. Nadel's study of witchcraft in four African societies is a study of occultism as a social phenomenon in specific primitive societies. But the conclusions to which he arrives underline the causal mechanisms at work in the generation of such phenomena in primitive groups in general. Nadel's study is confined to the Nupe and Gwari in Northern Nigeria and the Korongo and Mesakin in Central Sudan, each pair of which shows "wide cultural similarities combined with a few marked divergences, one of these being the diversity in witchcraft beliefs." An important assumption from which Nadel starts is that "witchcraft beliefs are causally related to frustrations, anxieties or other mental stresses precisely as psycho-pathological symptoms are related to mental disturbances of this nature." The study illustrates and confirms the assumption. Nadel adds; "Witches are active at night and cannot be seen or discovered by ordinary means. Everything connected with witchcraft takes place in a fantasy realm which is, almost *ex hypothesi*, intangible and beyond empirical verification." In Nupe witches are always women. This is so because the Nupe wives occupy a dominant economic position, being successful itinerant traders. Accordingly, while submitting to the domineering and independent ways of the women, the men resent their own helplessness, and nostalgically recall to mind the good old days when things were different. In this society, then, witchcraft beliefs are wishfulfillments and projections of these frustrations. The Korongo have no witchcraft beliefs; whereas the Mesakin are obsessed by fears of witchcraft and witchcraft accusations; and violent quarrels, blood revenge and assaults are frequent in their society. Both societies are matrilineal and the children grow up under the protection of the maternal uncle. In both societies the attainment of puberty is signaled by a gift of an animal from the boy's mother's brother. There is no witchcraft belief among the Korongo because this gift is made willingly and the implication of old age which it entails is not resented by the mother's brother. On the other hand in the Mesakin society witchcraft operates between the sister's son and the mother's brother, because the gift is always refused and must be taken by force, thus causing anger and resentment. The gift is refused in the Mesakin, but not in the Korongo society because of "cultural differences shaping the adult attitude towards life, and, more especially towards the fate of growing old." In the Korongo society old age is accepted without a protest; whereas in the Mesakin society it is not, for it implies the loss of much. prized youth and virility. Thus the hostility of the older men in the Mo-

sakin society "is accepted as operating in the sphere of secret as well as anti-social aims, that is, in the sphere of witchcraft." Again the Korongo have a full and explicit mythology which explains everything in the world and they have no witchcraft beliefs. The absence of such a mythological factor then "may be taken to foster anxieties and a sense of insecurity, and hence, indirectly to predispose people toward also accepting the mysterious and malevolent powers of witches."

Turning finally to D. H. Lawrence (1885-1930) and his novel *The Plumed Serpent*, we find elements of great significance for a study of the occult. Like Goethe and Crowley, D. H. Lawrence possessed a complex and imaginative nature. Throughout his life he was unintegrated in the convention-ridden environments within which he lived. This sent him travelling from country to country until he came to Mexico where he found temporary solace. He projected his restlessness and the complexities of his personality into his writings. Of these *The Plumed Serpent* depicts in vivid prose the impact of the Mexican environment on him. It also reveals that part of Lawrence's credo which is concerned with stressing the necessity of giving scope for expression to the instinctive-intuitive parts of our being. In *The Plumed Serpent* the Mexican natives, as seen through Lawrence's eyes (in the novel Lawrence projects himself into the characters of both Don Ramon Carrasco and the Mexican general, Cipriano) possess strength and passionate life but no energy. The importation of civilisation has de-energized them. Therefore Don Ramon and his eager supporter, Cipriano, endeavour to energize the natives by a sort of revivalism. This consists in reviving attachment to the dark and blood-thirsty pseudo-powers Quetzalcoate and Huitzilopotchli. In other words what Lawrence is concerned in showing is the way to a level of higher living, of higher integration through the instrumentality of these dark, pseudo-powers. An appeal to the natives can be made only through these dark, pseudo-powers because the level of their understanding and the vigour of their imagination makes them impervious to desiccated abstractions and reasoning. Hence we may conclude that the matrix of the occult is not only the religio-imaginative temperament, but also that mentality which is not ossified by the sophistications of materialism and rationalism.

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