

EFFECT OF THE MYSTERIES OF ELEUSIS UPON SUBSEQUENT RELIGIOUS THOUGHT.¹

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THERE remain some points which may be stated as scholia to the propositions of my papers in the October and November *Open Courts* for 1900. The first is the Eleusis of ancient Egypt, the second point is a modern attempt to revive Eleusis, and the third is the effect of the Mysteries of Eleusis upon the development of Christian thought.

In a work recently published Mr. Adams of New College, Oxford, maintains that the ancient and marvellous work of Egyptian centuries commonly known as the *Book of the Dead* should be called by its correct and inscribed title *The Book (or Scroll) of the Master of the Secret House*: that this secret house is none other than the great pyramid of Khufu at Ghizeh, which was used to initiate into the sublime mysteries of truth, viz., the spiritual being of God, the order of the universe, the Trinity, the manner of the existence of God, the Incarnation, (which was shown also at Denderah in the ancient temple of Hathor, the Virgin Mother of God,) the resurrection, the certainty of continued personal conscious existence after physical death and the retribution which is implied in perfect goodness of the divine world-order, God Himself. The pyramid and temple, each was taught the initiate to be an image of the house eternal in the heavens.

These Egyptian mysteries were intended also to prepare a man to conduct himself rightly upon his entrance into the other life. Taken in this sense, *The Scroll of the Master of the Secret House* could be laid beside the Bible with most interesting results. Remembering always that *The Scroll of the Master of the Secret*

¹ Conclusion of the series "Certain Aspects of the Eleusinian Problem."

House is a liturgy or ritual of Mysteries of a primitive Church, in which the primordial customs and folkfaiths of the savage became systematised and his spirituality began to find definite expression.

The Zionitic Brotherhood of mystics who settled at Ephrata, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, and built a Chapter-House for themselves in 1738, has left a description of the ordeal through which its neophytes were supposed to pass,—the initiation itself being also intended to promote a physical and spiritual regeneration, and presumably an introduction to immortality. Fastings, prayings, dietings, accompanied by study of esoteric problems, followed by the taking of a grain of “*materia prima*” or substantial immortality, and a few drops of the life-elixir, were supposed, in forty days, to reduce the initiate to the state of the primal innocence and deathlessness enjoyed by man before the Fall. The Chapter-House itself was built in three stories. The second floor was a circular chamber, with blind walls, lighted only by a lamp set on a pedestal in the middle of the room. Says J. F. Sachse in his account of the Ephrata cloister :

“Around this pedestal were arranged thirteen cots or pallets, like the radiating spokes of a wheel. This chamber was used by the secluded votaries as their sleeping-room, and was known as ‘Ararat,’ typifying that heavenly rest which is vouchsafed by the Almighty exclusively to his chosen few, visibly instanced when the Ark of Noah settled down on the mount of that name, there to rest forever. The third or upper story was the mystical chamber where the arcana of the rite were unfolded to the secluded. It was a plain room measuring exactly eighteen feet square, with a small oval window on each side, opening to the four cardinal points of the compass; access to the chamber was attained through a trap-door in the floor.”

It is worth mentioning that the Mormon church of to-day is modelled so far as can be inferred upon the Eleusinian Mysteries. The temple is never seen to be entered by any one but the president or high officials, through the doors. The entrance is gained through an adjacent building standing some yards away. There the candidates enter, receive their baptismal robes and proceed through an underground tunnel to the lowest part of the temple where they are baptised. Their advance to higher degrees in these mysteries is supposed to be contingent.

We shall now turn our attention to some of the apparent effects of the Eleusinian Mysteries upon the form and evolution of Christian thought.

Some of the special or technical terms used in the Mysteries of Eleusis were: *μύσται*, initiates; *τέλετη*, the ceremony of perfecting; *τελείοι*, the perfect, the initiated; *μύησις*, initiation to secrecy;

ἐπόπται, those who have seen, who look upon the ceremonies of the Mysteries; πειράσμος, the test in initiation; δόκιμον and δόκιμος, approval and approved, he who passed the trial in the initiation; and σοφία, the wisdom, or esoteric doctrine of the Mysteries. The casual occurrence of one or two of these terms in any writings would not be remarkable, but the cumulative and pointed use of them all cannot be regarded as without significance.

Turning, therefore, to the New Testament, we find such use as seems to be intended to allude to the Mysteries, and to be addressed to those who understood the allusions. For example, in the Epistle of St. James (i. 2-5) we read, "My brethren count it all joy when ye fall into divers tests (πειράσμοι), knowing this that the approving (δοκίμιον) of your faith worketh endurance (ὑπομένη). But let endurance have its perfect work (i. e., last up to the rite of perfection, τέλετη, that is through all the degrees to the final), that ye may be perfect (τελείοι) and entire (ὀλοκληροί, so to say 33° Masons), lacking nothing (i. e., having passed through all the degrees and having learned all of the secret doctrine, σοφία, of the divine Mysteries). If any of you lack wisdom (σοφία), let him ask of God who *giveth to all men liberally* and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." Here the writer contrasts God's method with man's way in the Mysteries of communicating precious and holy truths. "Happy (μακάριος, another special word used of the initiated, as may be seen in passages already quoted) is the man who endureth the test (πειράσμος, since by psychologic law only through sorrow is spiritual vision gained), for when he is approved (δόκιμος, accepted as an initiate) he shall receive the crown of life," just as the initiated at Eleusis who endured the test were crowned and robed.

It would appear that St. Paul made many allusions to the Greek Mysteries. Some of these allusions can be sufficiently indicated by indicating the words peculiar in the sense he gives them to the rites at Eleusis.

At 1 Cor. xiii. 12 we read, "Now we see through glass darkly, etc., which rendered literally would be, "Now we look upon a scratched mirror." This may well be a reference to the mirror, a polished metal disk, easily scratched, used in the ceremonies of the Mysteries of the Thesmophoria. Into this mirror the candidates were bidden to look to see the "Hidden One." At this day the shrines of the Shinto cult of Japan contain a metal mirror upon the high altar; no image.

At verse 10 of this chapter St. Paul had written, "When that

which is perfect (*τέλειον*) shall come," and "Seeing face to face," which may allude to the *ἐπίπται*, spectators, who, having reached the *τέλειον* or degree of perfection, gazed face to face upon the most occult ceremonies at Eleusis.

In the following passage from the fourth and fifth chapters of the second letter to the Corinthians the probable allusions to the Greek Mysteries are indicated by italics.

"Therefore seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not; but have renounced the *hidden things* of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by *manifestation of the truth* commending ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God. But if our gospel *be hid*, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the *light of the glorious gospel of Christ*, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus's sake. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But we have this *treasure in earthen vessels*, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

"Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; while *we look not at the things which are seen*, but at the things which are not seen: for the *things which are seen* are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. For we know that if our *earthly house* of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a *building of God*, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be *clothed upon* with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this *tabernacle* do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life."

There is another passage, in the first letter to the Corinthians, which deserves a passing notice. It begins with the fourth verse of the second chapter:

"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the *wisdom* of men, but in the power of God. Howbeit *we speak wisdom* (*σοφία*) among them that are perfect; yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the *princes* (*ἀρχόντες*, the title of the leaders of the mystic rites) *of this world* that come to naught: but we speak the wisdom of God in a *mystery*, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory: which none of the princes of this world knew: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. [This phrase is also in the spirit of the Mysteries.] But God hath

revealed them unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God."

Significant also, in this connexion, is the apostle's exclamation, 1 Cor. xv. 51: "Behold, I show you a *Mystery*." Also that other passage in the letter to the Ephesians (iii. 2-5):

"If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to youward: How that by *revelation* he *made known* unto me the *mystery*; (as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my *knowledge in the mystery of Christ*) which in other ages was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit."

St. Peter writing of the full revelation (*σοφία*) of Christ in the transfiguration, uses with *σοφία* that other term peculiar to the Mysteries, for he says, "We are eye-witnesses (*ἐπόπται*) of his majesty."

The curious reader may compare with these passages St. Mark iv. 11, 33, 34, and St. Matthew x. 27. The cumulative evidence of all this is forceful.

Now, the use of these terms and allusions produced a profound impression upon the mind of the early Church. This impression was the wider for several reasons. In the first place, the beginning of the Christian era was coeval with a climax of magic. Everywhere magic, thaumaturgy, and necromancy were tried. Satanism was more open than in Paris, London, or Berlin of to-day. The psychological conditions which had brought this about, it is aside from my present purpose to discuss. At that same time the emotional element of Neo-Platonism was carried over into the Church both directly and through Hellenistic rabbinism. Therefore it came about that Christianity, which had begun by being a teaching (*μάθησις*), ended shortly after the Eutychian controversy in becoming a mystery (*μυσταγωγία*) or *mystagogy*, a system of ceremonies regarded as magical in their effects as those, say, of the great pyramid and of the Hall of the Initiated at Eleusis had been regarded.

The Abyssinian Church, which was founded in the sixth century and by reason of its isolation has probably changed hardly at all, represents the *mystagogic* character of the Eastern Church of the sixth century. From that age the images, the sacraments, even the creed and prayers, became objective charms, amulets, and magical cults. The various grades of Church membership were

modeled after the system of Eleusis. The cosmic cross, the chalice of life, the liturgic dance, in short, the entire mystagogic conception of Christianity, was brought in upon the Church. Hence mysterious mutterings of the mass were heard, and curtains were drawn about the priest as he sacrificed upon the altar. Only the *ἐπόπται* were allowed to remain to hear the "blessed mutter of the mass" and see the lights dimly shining through the curtains. Even doctrine, as in the case of the elements of the Eucharist, comes in time to be a sacred object, to be assented to reverently, even though not understood. It is no longer *μάθησις*, it has become *δόγμα*, to be worn as the Jews wear their phylacteries, as the modern Syrian wears prayers illuminated upon parchment, like present-day scapulars, for mere amulets, or magic safeguards. Even beginning with the fourth century as *τέλεται*, mystic rites, sacraments were established. And the sacraments became systematised after a century into the mysteries of the Church.

The terminology of sacramental doctrine was borrowed from Eleusis. Dionysius the Areopagite, like the Master of the Secret House beforehand, taught that these mysteries of the Church were images and types of mysteries in heavenly places, and therefore *termini ad quos* of worship. No doubt the Gnostics had some hand in transferring this set of ideas and words from Memphis and Eleusis to Alexandria, to Athanasius and the Greek Church of Constantinople. In the end the Church was regarded in a mystagogic and even magical sense as steward of the Mysteries, i. e., mystic rites, mystic things, instinct with a material force of God, mystic and occult ideas in themselves saving by making the hearer *σόφος*, wise unto salvation, and Gnostic, *γνώστικος*, understanding the hidden things of God.

In brief, the influence of the Ancient Mysteries has led many to conceive of the Church as an organisation for the perpetuation of ceremonies, forms of words, and other sacred objects committed to the care of a unique class of *ιεροφάντες* and *μυσταγῶγοι*, themselves able to bind by the use of fixed formulas of words the presence and operation of the Infinite Life of the Universe. So much for the influence of Eleusis upon the writers of the New Testament and the early Church.

The later development of religious thought was forcibly influenced by the pseudo-Dionysios, whose writings carried over into Christian theology the mysteriosophy of the Alexandrian Neo-Platonists, and this mysteriosophy they probably derived in most part from Eleusis.

In conclusion, it is antecedently probable that the Greek drama, explicating as it did the spiritual and ethical aspects of the Mysteries at Eleusis, prepared the minds of men for the religion of Christ, for the divine tragedy of Calvary.

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My *envoi* is an apology. In the *Midsummer Night's Dream* Hippolyta says :

“This is the silliest stuff I ever heard.”

Theseus rejoins :

“The best in this kind are but shadows, and the worst are no worse if imagination mend them.”