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As Above, So Below

STRAY THOUGHTS ON THEOSOPHY

BY

G. R. S. MEAD

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Heaven above, heaven below ; stars above, stars below ; all that is above, thus also below ; understand this and be blessed.

KIRCHER, *Prodrom. Copt.*, pp. 193 and 275.

“As above, so below”—a “great word,” a sacramental phrase, a saying of wisdom, an aphorism, a mystic formula, a fundamental law—or a two-edged sword of word-fence, that will probably do the wielder serious damage if he is not previously put through careful training in its handling?

Whether this famous “word” is of Hermetic origin or no, we will not stay formally to enquire. In essence it is probably as old as human thought itself. And as probably, the idea lying underneath it has been turned topsy-turvy more frequently than any other of the immortal company.

“As above, so below” doubtless enshrines some vast idea of analogical law, some basis of true reason, which would sum up the manifold appearances of things into one single verity ; but the understanding

¹ Reprinted from *The Theosophical Review*, Vol. XXXIV.

of the nature of this mystery of manifoldness from the one—all one and one in all—is not to be attained by careless thinking, or by some lucky guess, or by the pastime of artificial correspondencing. Indeed, if the truth must out, in ninety-nine cases of a hundred, when one uses this phrase to clinch an argument, we find that we have begged the question from the start, ended where we began, and asserted the opposite of our logion. Instead of illumining, not only the subject we have in hand, but all subjects, by a grasp of the eternal verity concealed within our saying, we have reversed it into the ephemeral and false proposition: "As below, so above." *Deus*, verily, *inversus est demon*; and there's the devil to pay. But fortunately there is some compensation even in this in an illogical age; for, as all the mystic world knows, *Demon* is nothing else but *deus inversus*.

Yes, even along our most modern lines of thought, even in propositions and principles that are, with every day, coming more and more into favour in the domain of practical philosophising, we find our ageless aphorism stood upon its head with scantiest ceremony.

In the newest theology, in the latest philosophy, we find a strong tendency to revive the ancient idea that man is the measure of the universe—whether we call this concept pragmatism or by any other name that sounds "as sweet". "As below," then, "so above." In fact we do not seem to be able to get away from this inversion. We like it thus turned upside down; and I am not altogether sure that,

even for the keenest-minded of us, it is not an excellent exercise thus to anthropomorphise¹ the universe, and to fling the shadow of his best within on to the infinite screen of the appearance of the things without. For is not man kin really with all these—worlds, systems, elements, and spaces, infinitudes, and times and timelessness?

But this way of looking at the thing does not as a rule bother the beginner in mystic speculation. Fascinated with some little-known fact of the below, marvelling at some striking incident that has come under his notice—striking, fascinating for him, of course—he usually puts a weight upon it that it cannot bear, exaggerates a particular into a universal, and with a desperate plunge of joy images that he has finally arrived at truth—taking his topsy-turvy “as below” for the eternal “as above”. He does not yet realise that, had he truly reached to that “above,” he would know not only the solitary below that has come dazzlingly into his cosmos, but every other “below” of the same class.

But again from this height of “philosophising” let us come down to mystic commonplace. Of things physical we have certain definite knowledge, summed up in the accurate measurement, and observations, and general mechanical art of modern science. Beyond this domain, for mechanical science there is x ; for the “seeing” mystic there is not x , but an indefinite series of phases of subtler and subtler sensations. Now, as every intelligent

¹ In the sense of *Anthropos* of course, and not of his carcase.

reader knows, it is just the nature of these extra normal impressions that is beginning to be critically investigated on the lines of the impersonal method so justly belauded by all scientific workers.

In this domain, of such intense interest to many students of Theosophy, how shall we say our "as above" applies? And here let us start at the beginning; that is to say, the first discrete degree beyond the physical—the psychic or so-called "astral". What constitutes this a discrete degree? Is it in reality a discrete degree? And by discrete I mean: is it discontinuous with the physical? That is to say, is there some fundamental change of kind between the two? "East is east, and West is west"; Astral is astral, and Physical is physical. But how? Sensationally only, or is it also rationally to be distinguished?

The first difficulty that confronts us is this: that, however keen a man's subtler senses may be, no matter how highly "clear-seeing" he may have become—I speak, of course, only of what has come under my own personal observation and from the general literature of the subject,¹ he seems unable to convey his own immediate experience clearly to a second person, unless, of course, that second person can "see" with the first. Try how he may, he is apparently compelled to fall back on physical terms in which to explain; nay, it is highly probable that all that has been written on the "astral" has produced

¹ Of vision and apocalyptic proper, of course, and not of the subjective seeing or recalling of *physical* scenes.

no other impression on non-psychic readers than that it is a subtler phase of the physical. And this presumably, because the very seer himself, in explaining the impressions he registers to himself, that is, to his physical consciousness, has to translate them into the only forms that consciousness can supply, namely physical forms. Indeed, there seems to be a gulf fixed between psychic and physical, so that those impressions which would pass from thence to us, cannot. In other words, they cannot, in the very nature of things, come naked into this world; they must be clothed.

Now if this is true, if this is an unavoidable fact in nature, then the very nature of the astral is removed from the nature of the physical by an unbridgeable gulf: "East is east, and West is west." But *is* it really true? Is it only that, so far, no one is known who can bridge the gulf perfectly? Or supposing even that there be those who can so bridge it, is it that they are unable to make their knowledge known to others simply because these others cannot bridge the gulf in their *own* personal consciousness, and therefore cannot follow the *continuum* of their more gifted brethren?

But even supposing there is a continuity from physical to astral, it would seem that we must, so to speak, go there, and that it cannot come here. In other words, the astral cannot be precisely registered in the physical, the image cannot exactly reproduce the prototype; for if it could, the one would be the other. What then is the nature of the difference of

quality or of degree? How, again, we ask, does astral really differ from physical? Can we in this derive any satisfaction from speculations concerning the so-called "fourth dimension" of matter?

This is a subject of immense difficulty, and I do not propose to enter into anything but its outermost court; in fact, I am incapable of doing so. All that I desire to note for the present is that all analogies between "flatland" and our three-dimensional space, and between the latter and the presupposed fourth-dimensional state, are based upon the most flagrant *petitio principii*. It is a case of "As below, so above," *in excelsis*. "Flatland"—space of two dimensions, *plus* the further gratuitous assumption of two-dimensional beings who have their being and their moving therein—is inconceivable as *matter* of any kind. A superficies is—an idea; it is not a thing of the sensible world. We can conceive a superficies in our minds; it is a mental concept, it is not a sensible reality. We can't see it, nor taste it, nor hear it, nor smell it, nor touch it. Our two-dimensional beings are not only figments of the imagination, they are absolutely inconceivable as entities; they can't be conscious of one another, for *in* the abstract concept called a surface, there can be no position from the standpoint of itself and things like it, but only from the standpoint of another. Even the most primitive sense of touch would be non-existent for our "flatlanders," for there would be nothing to touch. And so on, and so forth.

Therefore, to imagine how three-dimensional things would appear to the consciousness of a flatlander, and

from this by analogy to try to construct four-dimensional things from a series of three-dimensional phenomena, is, apparently, a very vicious circle indeed. We can't get at it that way; we have to seek another way, a very different "other way," apparently, by means of which we may get out of three dimensions into—what? Into—two, either way or every way? Who knows?

Anyway, the later Platonic School curiously enough called the "astral" the "plane"; basing themselves on one of the so-called Chaldæan Oracles: "Do not soil the spirit nor turn the plane into the solid"; where the "spirit" corresponds apparently to what modern Theosophical terminology calls the "etheric," and the "plane" to the "astral". As Psellus says, in commenting on this logion: "The Chaldæans clothed the soul in two vestures: the one they called the spirituous, which is woven for it (as it were) out of the sensible body; the other the radiant, subtle and impalpable, which they call the plane."¹

Higher than this were the "lines" and "points," all of which pertained presumably to the region of mind.

What, then, again we ask, is the "astral" proper as compared with the physical? How do things appear to themselves on the astral proper; for so far, in the very nature of things, whenever we talk "down here" of the astral we have to talk of it in terms of the physical? In what, to use a famous term of

¹ See my *Orpheus*, p. 283 (London, 1896).

ancient philosophising, consists its "otherness"? Is "otherness" in this to be thought of and distinguished by a gulf in matter, a gap—which seems to be an absurdity, for "nature does not leap"; she also "abhors a vacuum," *und so weiter*, along this line of aphorism. Here again we are confronted with the other side of the shield, with the unavoidable intuition that there is a *continuum* in matter; that if it were possible magically to propel a human entity into space, he would successively leave his various "vehicles"¹ in the spheres of the atmosphere and elements, while, as in the case of John Brown, his soul would "go marching on" until it arrived at the last limit—whenever or wherever that may be, in a universe that ever at every point enters into itself.

However this may be, there is no doubt but that the idea of a cosmic "stuff" or "matter"—whatever such terms may mean—rolled up continuously into itself, as in the diagram of the atom so familiar to students of Modern Theosophy—is exceedingly illuminative, if thought of as a *symbol* of force-systems. All things, then, would appear to be solidified down here by the "sky's being rolled up carpet-wise," to paraphrase the Upaniṣat. The "above" has thus been "involved" into the "below"; and if we could only follow the process, perchance we should then be able faintly to understand the truth underlying our aphorism. Then, and then only, in the most serious and literal meaning of it, and not in the sarcastic

¹ Or rather, to speculate more precisely, the molecules of some, the atoms of others, the electrons of others, and so on and so forth.

sense of the writer, or rather singer, of the *Shvetāshvataropaniṣat*: "When, carpet-wise, the sky, men shall roll up; then (only, not till then) shall end of sorrow be, without men knowing God,"¹ for then, perchance, they would be God.

Now as a matter of fact this *continuum* of matter is the ground on which all scientific thinking is based; perpetual and continuous transformation, but no sudden leaps—orderly evolution, no miraculous or uncaused, spontaneous surprises. And if this be true, it follows that *some day* the direct line of "descent" from astral to physical will be controlled mechanically by human invention, and the astral would be made visible to even the most hopelessly profane from a psychic standpoint; and not only so, but the errors of human observation, which vitiate all present psychic investigation, will be obviated, in as marvellous a fashion as the errors of physical observation are now eliminated by the wonderfully delicate instruments already devised by human ingenuity.

This seems immediately to follow from the major premise of our present speculation; but somehow or other I am by no means satisfied that this will be the case. Is our salvation to be dependent upon machines? *Dei ex machinis* indeed!

But what has all this to do with "As above, so below"? Why, this: If the sensible world rises by stages—from this gross state, familiar to us by our normal senses, through ever finer and finer grades of

¹ *Shvetāshvataropaniṣat*, vi, 20. See *The Upaniṣads* (Mead and Chatterji's Trans.), II, 97.

matter, we finally reach—ay, there is the rub ; what do we reach ? Where do we start ? The truth of the matter is—be it whispered lowly—you can't *think* it out in terms of matter. But take the “ever so thin” idea for the moment as sufficiently indefinite for any mystic who is not a metaphysician, using the latter term in the old, old way, where *physis* included all nature that is *natura*, the field of becoming.

“As above, so below”—how many stages above ? Let us say seven, to be in the fashion. The “above” will then be very nebulous presumably, a sort of “spherical” “primitive streak,” from the within without—but a “primitive streak” in its own mode and fashion, and differing presumably *toto cælo* from the primitive streak that first appears in physical embryology. There may be “correspondence,” but that correspondence must be traced through numerous orders of “matter”; the very next succeeding order to the physical already acting as force, or energy, to the matter which falls beneath our normal senses. Here we are again, at the very outset, face to face with the “astral” *x*—which, compared with the physical, should perhaps be regarded as a “system of forces,” rather than as a mould of the same fashion and form as the physical. And if this view is, at any rate, one stage nearer the reality than the interpretation of the astral by purely physical imagery and symbolism—what *can* possibly be the nature of our spherical “primitive streak” stage ; when already at the first remove we beggar all our possibilities of description ?

For we certainly do not get much "forrarder" by simply flinging the picture of the physical, as it were, on to a series of mirrors which differ from one another only in the distance they are removed one from another. At any rate, it seems so to the reflecting mind of man; though maybe it seems quite as natural to his subtler senses so to speak of their experience when he converses physically about them.

Let it be understood once for all that I have not the slightest pretention in any way to decide between these apparently eternal oppositions—the sense and the reason; indeed, I have a private belief that it would be most unseemly and disastrous to attempt to separate the eternal spouses of this sacred marriage; not only unseemly but sacrilegious to do so—perchance even the sin against the Holy Ghost. Hand in hand, nay, in the most intimate of all unions, must they ever go together, for ever giving birth to the true Man—who is their common source.

Still, it is ever of advantage continuously to keep before our minds the question: What is a prototype; what is a paradigm; what a *logos*—a reason; what an idea? What, for instance, is the *autozōon*, the animal itself, as compared with all animals; what the ever the "same," as compared with all the "others"?

Here, to help us, the intuition of things that underlay the philosophising of the Western world at its birth in conscious reasoning—from the time of

Pythagoras onwards—comes forward with its setting of the noumenal over against the sensible or phenomenal—the mind over against the soul. The characteristic of the pure mind is that it “sees,” not another, but itself, and knows it ever “sees” itself. It is the “plane of truth”—wherever are the paradigms, and ideas, and reasons of all things—and when we say “where” we do not mean that it is a place or space, for it is the everlasting causation of these, and is not conditioned by them, but self-conditions itself.

It would be too long, it would be too difficult, for me to attempt to write on such a sublime theme in these stray thoughts. One thing alone I have desired to call attention to ; it is the careless translation of terms into consciousness, and the danger of falling too deeply into the habit of what Stallo calls the “reification of ideas”. For when you have “reified” your ideas, be it gravity, or atomicity, or vibration, you have only got the shadow and not the substance ; the appearance, the phenomenon, and not the underlying truth, the noumenon.

It will be already seen that even in this short paper I have used the same words in totally different senses ; for when I speak of the sacred marriage of mind and sense, I am using “mind” in a different sense from “the mind” of which I have just been speaking, which in this sense stands for the Self, the ātman of Hindū philosophy.

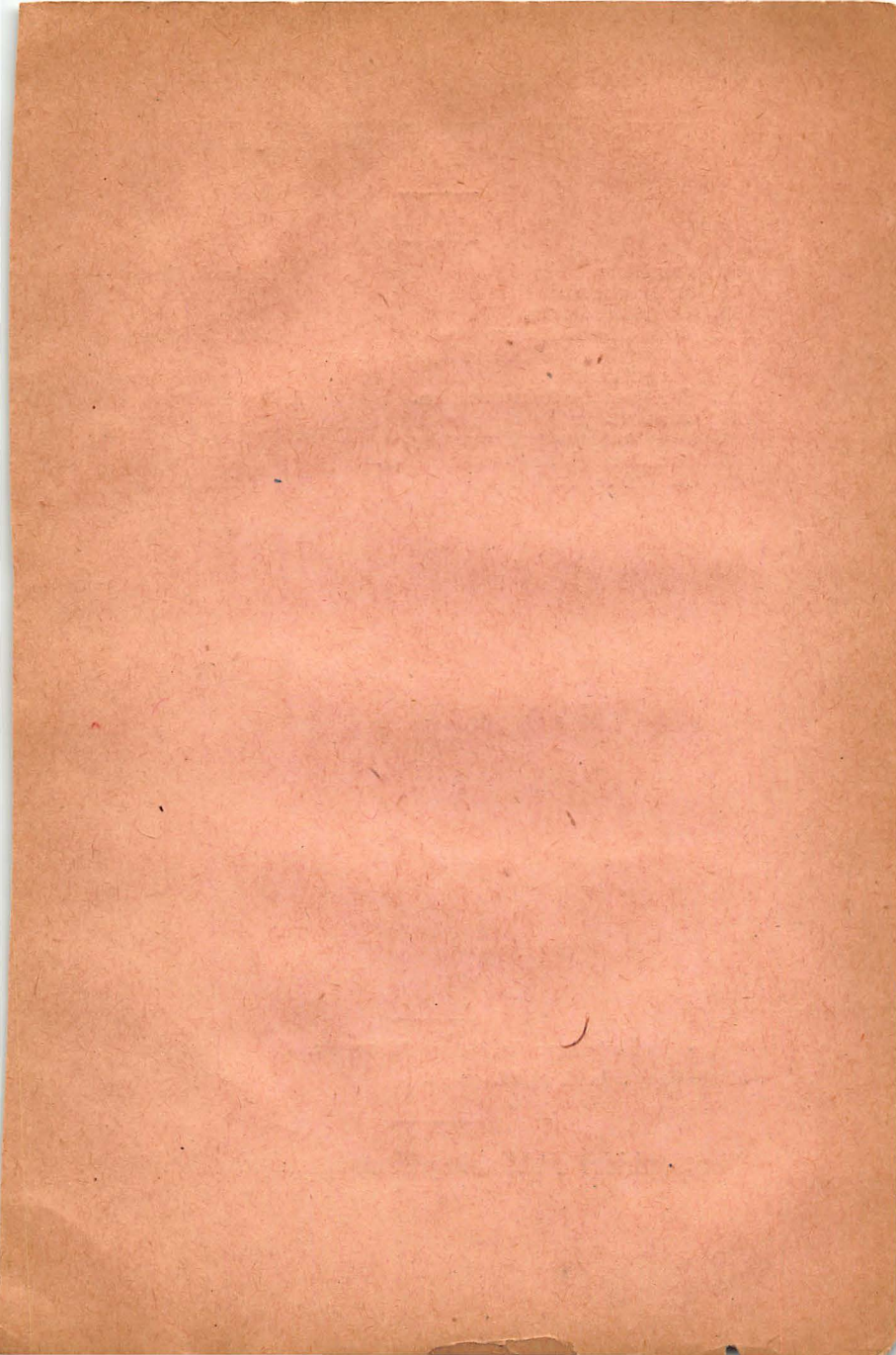
But no matter how we use our words—and who that loves wisdom is so foolish as to quarrel about

words?—it seems to be an inexpugnable position in right reason, that that “sight” which reveals to man the “reasons” of things is a higher and more divine possession than that “sight” which sees the sensible forms of things, no matter how exquisitely beautiful and grandiose such forms may be. And when I say “sees” the “reasons” of things, do I mean the intellectual grasping of some single explanation, some formula, some abstraction? By no means; I mean by “reason” *logos*—I mean that when we “see” the “reasons” of things, we see our “selves” in all things; for our true selves are the true ground of our being, the that in us which constitutes us “Sons of God”—*logoi* as He is *Logos*, kin to Him.

“As above, so below.” What, then, is the “above” where there is no place, no direction, no dimension and no time? And *is* the “above” superior to the “below”? Ah, that is where the mind breaks down, unable to grasp it. Is Eternity greater than Time? Is the Same mightier than the Other? Of course it is, we say, as so many in so many schools have said before. But is it really so? Are we not still in the region of the opposites; neither of which can exist without the other, and each of which is co-equal with the other? We are still in the region of words—words in this case, not reasons; though the same word does duty for both in Greek—*logos*; showing yet once again that in verity *demon est deus inversus*.

No words indeed can tell of Him, or of That if you so prefer, though the neuter gender is as little

appropriate as the masculine. "Thou that art to be worshipped in silence alone!" As Thou art above, so art Thou below; as Thou art in Thyself, so art Thou in Man; as Thyself is in Thee, so is Thy Man in Thyself —now and for ever.



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