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THE PYTHAGOREAN PROSPECT

An Address by HOBART HUSON

On the eve of the Pythagorean Congresses which are to take place at Brussels and at Athens and are to culminate in a pilgrimage to Samos on the occasion of the 2500th Anniversary of the founding there of Pythagoras' School, circa 545 B. C. : it gives me profound honor and great pleasure to greet in majestic London, the Pythagoreans of Britain and others who are interested in Greek philosophy and classical culture.

It is providentially coincidental that such sequence of events should take place in the very lands which, in the time of Pythagoras, cradled Greek philosophy, the Gaulic Druids, and the holy race of Hyperboreans. It is, further, significant they should, in a measure, begin here in the mystic land of the Hyperborean *Abaroi* (or Bards), which Pythagoras himself is said to have visited ; and which in the early centuries of the present era knew such virtuous lovers of Pythagorean philosophy as the then future Caesar Titus, and the noble Roman consul Agricola, who had studied at the Pythagorean School at Marseilles¹.

It might not be inappropriate to briefly outline somewhat the background, purposes, and objects of these conferences which within the next few weeks will become historic.

It will be recollected by most of you that Pythagoras, the First Philosopher, not only founded the pursuit which he called, and which we know today as *philosophy* ; but at the same time promulgated a Way of Life, by which the philosophy might become a living principle and thereby raise those who embraced it to divine Goodness, Truth, and Beauty.

Without dwelling at any length upon the tenets of his sublime philosophy or upon the mathematical disciplines prescribed for the translation of ideals and words into lofty thoughts and godly deeds, it might be explained that Pythagoras regarded his own mission in this life to be *the moral regeneration of mankind through Education* of the individual. He declared that one good man raises the level of the entire human race.

The instrumentality or vehicle devised by the Sage for effecting the raising of a human animal to a man, and from a man to an *illuminati* was a novel and peculiar institution combining the essentials of a lay university of general sciences, and a confraternity, to which the sexes were admitted on terms of equality. The university, or institute of higher learning, became famous as the

Pythagorean School of Philosophy, of which Plato's Academy became the eventual successor. Its counterpart the freemasonic confraternity is known as The Pythagorean Order, or sometimes as the Pythagorean Mysteries. The university had about the same basic curriculum as Cambridge, Oxford, Harvard, and Yale. It offered learning in Mathematics, music and Medicine, Astronomy, in Physics, and Science, Philosophy, Psychology, and Physical Education, in Political Science, Law and Oratory, - - - these among others. The primary purpose of this erstwhile academic curriculum was to enable the student to *Know Himself* ; rather than to excel in the useful or fine arts.

Man, in Pythagoras' concept, is a *mikrokosmos*, a small world, containing in less degree every element and power which make up the constituency of the *Kosmos*. The philosophy directed man's attention, examination, and study, to his own constituency, his own *Self*. He taught that by knowing the whole extant world, one is brought to a knowledge of *Self* — what it is, whence it comes, and whither it goes, — and when one comes to know *Self* he will come to *know God* ; and in knowing is enabled to attune *Self* with the Divine Harmony of the Divine *Self* and the Goodness, Truth, and Beauty of the Divine Order. This attunement, or *harmonia*, as he termed it, is what he calls « Following God ». « The supreme happiness », according to him, « belongs only to the Soul which has learned how to recover itself, by its intimate union with the intelligence, whose essence, changing its nature, has become entirely spiritual. It is necessary that this soul be raised to the knowledge of universal truths, and that it should have found, as far as it is possible for it, the Principle and the end of all things. Then having attained to this high degree of perfection, being drawn into this immutable region whose ethereal element is no more subjected to the descending movement of generation, it can be united by its knowledge to the Universal All, and reflect in all its being the ineffable light with which the Being of beings, God himself, fills unceasingly the Immensity ».

The more familiar language of the Bard, states the practical application of « attunement », thusly : « There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune ; omitted, all the voyage of their life is bound in shallows and in miseries ; and we must take the current when it serves, or lose our ventures. » (Parenthetically there is a great deal of Pythagoras in Shakespeare).

Perhaps no one of our own generation had a clearer insight into the Pythagorean concept, than the late beloved and consecrated Dean William Ralph Inge, whose writings on Pythagorean-Neo-Platonism I recommend heartily to those who would like to gain the same insight.

Pythagoras teaches that mortal man is tripartite, being composed of body, soul, and mind, and that these are the products of evolution and aspiration : the several states of which are represented and evidenced by the primordial

1. Tacitus, *Agricola* 4.— Smith, *Dict. Biol.* I, 76.

elements of which he in his present form is composed, — mineral, vegetable, pisiform, animal, and human, each level of evolution carrying with it its corresponding level of intelligence, which the Sage calls Soul. Psychologically, there is represented in man's constituency, nonconscious, unconscious, sub-conscious, conscious, super-conscious levels of Soul, or natural intelligence. Ascending to his theory, in each upsurge of the evolutionary processes, all precedent elementary natures and levels of Soul are carried forward and retained, (like the chains around Marley's ghost) ; thereby resulting in the apparent conflicts and discordances in man's nature, his desires, and emotions.

Using the words of the Sage himself,

« Man is a microcosm, because he is a compendium of the universe ; not because, like other animals, (even the least), he is constituted by the five elements, but because he contains all the powers of the universe.

« The world contains God, and the five elements, the animals and plants, which emanated from God. All of these powers are contained in man. However, in each of these he is inferior to the others. Containing God, he is inferior to God ; and having less of each of the elements, is inferior to any one of them.

« Constituted, therefore, of different powers, man has a difficult life to live. While all things are ruled by one nature only, man is ruled by many. Man is drawn by all the different powers which he contains. But he who, like a vigilant and expert charioteer, within himself cultivates the Divine Element, will be able to utilize the other powers by a mingling of the elements just as far as may be necessary »¹.

For each level or degree of Soul, or natural intelligence, there is a peculiar, appropriate, kind of perfecting discipline, or form of education, which raises the whole man in virtue. Recognizing this, Pythagoras devised a philosophical system which would develop and perfect all the latent powers of man's nature, according to their respective peculiar needs. Hence, the system was divided into two grand branches, the *exoteric*, or open, and *esoteric*, or the secret ; or the Lesser mysteries and the Greater mysteries.

The exoteric branch of the Pythagoric system, which included the academic university as its highest category, was directed to the body, soul, and human mind of man, to raise him in the virtues forming the foundation of the transition from a terrestrial to a spiritual level. The transition was accomplished by endeavoring to live the philosophy while undergoing the cathartic disciplines (sometimes termed « mathematical ») imposed by the *esoteric* branch, the instrumental vehicle of which was the confraternity known as *The Pythagorean Order*. For the purpose of the present dissertation, it will suffice that the Order consisted of a *Noviciate* and four *esoteric* degrees, of all which only the

1. Pythagoron, 49.

Noviciate and the first, or *mathematikê* degree were possible of being conferred ; the others being attainable *only* by actually becoming that which the degrees hold and symbolize. The four degrees are the *Mathematikê*, *Theoretikê*, *Sophia*, and *Epiphanê* ; the ideals of which, respectively, are *Beauty*, *Truth*, *Goodness*, and *Beatitude*. Few there are who attain the two highest. In our own generation we know of one who appeared to exemplify the third degree, — I refer with loving respect to the late Mahatma Gandhi. Perhaps Dr. Albert Schweitzer is another.

By the time Pythagoras came to pass the Veil, his philosophical system had spread throughout the world. The School and confraternity flourished, besides Greece and Italy, in Egypt, Arabia, Palestine, Syria, Thrakê, Dacia, Carthage, Etruria, Gaul, Iberia, Britain, and, it is claimed, in Scandinavia. The Jewish Essene and Therapeutic sects were said to be Pythagorean. There was a Pythagorean School at Tarsus. There were others at Marseilles, Bordeaux, and Cadiz. Agricola, I have stated, attended the one at Marseilles.

The historians of Pythagoreanism tell us that after the passing of the generation of pupils who heard the Master himself, the successors failed to grasp the original concept of the system, that is, « Religion, Science, and Philosophy as an essential unit the combined purpose of which was to enable man to become the likeness of God »¹.

Accordingly, they divided into two branches, one which stressed mysticism and disregarded science, and the other which devoted itself to science to the exclusion of the philosophy. Socrates and Plato appear to have tried to adhere to the original theory, without stressing the Way of Life. Too late, in the last hours of Freedom of Intellect, Plotinos and Porphyry nearly restored the original concept, as Dean Inge points out in his winged *Philosophy of Plotinus*.

With the suppression of the Academy and the philosophical schools in the 6th century of the present era, and the extirpating of teaching and study of philosophy, Pythagorean Schools and lodges vanished from view. What was left of the philosophical branch seems to have been taken over and preserved by the Arabians and the Persians ; while the confraternity might be said to have been taken over by freemasonry ; and to more than an inconsiderable extent by the Christian Church. Nevertheless, there has been no time since its founding, 2500 years ago, that some form of the original Pythagorean system has not existed at some place on the face of the earth. The philosophy seems to be deathless, and to be persistent in springing forth in every age.

Students of church history will recall that most of the principal heresies were gravamented on a return to Pythagoric philosophy. This is understand-

1. Watters, *The Pythagorean Way of Life*.

able when it is considered that the teachings of Jesus and Paul when considered Pythagorically, are practically Pythagorean philosophy. In fact, the best in Christian philosophy is infused with esoteric Pythagoreanism. Compare the General Confession in the *Book of Common Prayer* with the Pythagorean theory and formula of Self Examination. Say the *Book* : « We have left undone those things which we ought to have done ; and we have done those things which we ought not to have done » (p. 6). What say the *Golden Verses* ? « Do those things which shall not harm thee, and reflect before thou act. On the moment of awakening, consider calmly what are thy duties, and what thou shouldst accomplish. Never let thy eyes close in sleep, till thou has reasoned over each deed of the day. Wherein have I transgressed ? What have I done ? What have I omitted that I ought to have done ? Beginning from the first do thou proceed, and for the evil deeds rebuke thyself ; but for good rejoice ». (*Golden Verses* 39-44). Pythagoras adds, however, that repentance without reparation is empty. If self-examination develops that a wrong has been done, the system demands that one rise from his bed and right it before he goes to sleep if it is at all practicable. (*Pythagoron* 86-87, 134).

It is possible, perhaps, to trace a continuous, unbroken, succession of some Pythagorean organizations existing today to the original confraternity ; probably through the Arabic Order, which was brought by the Moors into Europe. This possibility is being explored, but no definite conclusion yet has been reached. We know from Dean Inge and others, that there existed in Florence in the middle ages a Pythagorean Academy. Tuscany, incidentally, is replete with Pythagorean lore and legend. We have it that Dante, Petrarch, Ficcin, Cavalcante, Boccaccio, and Paleziano, were fraters. Pythagoras himself was a favorite subject of Etrurian art, *vide*, bas reliefs on the campanile and the Paradise doors, and, also, the mosaics at Siena.

In short there are at present scores of Pythagorean societies and organizations of various kinds in practically every country of the civilized world. There are such groups in Britain.

A principal purpose of the Congresses of 1955 is to seek out and bring into common notice all Pythagorean societies in the world, and to establish an international secretariat, and a mother *thiasos*, or educational community. Another principal purpose is to reconstruct historically and dogmatically, as nearly as may be, and revive, as an international order, the confraternity founded by Pythagoras, on Samos, 2500 years ago. The Pythagorean Order was provisionally formed in the United States in 1947, and since that time has extended its membership into most of the countries. The revived The Pythagorean Order is not intended to supersede or displace any existing local or regional society ; but to form a bond between the members of all independent societies.

Another major project of the Congresses is to form a foundation, or com-

mission, to plan and consummate a world celebration in 1970-1971 of the 2500th anniversary of the founding of Pythagoras School at Krotona in Southern Italy circa B. C. 531-529. The School on Samos was founded first and existed for some 15 years before it was removed to Italy.

We ask the blessings of God on these projects, and paraphrasing the words of Sokrates,

Now may all the good spirits which light this place, give us beauty in the inward soul ; and may the outward and inward man be at one. May we reckon the wise to be the wealthy, and may we have such worldly goods as a temperate man, and he only can bear and carry — *Amen*.