

THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY OF THE HERCULUS MYTH

(The following material was prepared by Dorothea Cochran at Mrs. Bailey's request and was found among her papers. This excerpt seems to provide an appropriate concluding note for the Hercules series.)

The first scriptures for the human race were written by God on the Earth and Heavens. The reading of these Scriptures is Science. Familiarity with the grass and trees, the insects and the infusoria, teaches us deeper lessons of love and faith than we can glean from the writings of Fénelon and Augustine. The great Bible of God is ever open before mankind.

- *Albert Pike.*

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handywork.

- *Psalm 19, 1.*

The progress of a world disciple is illustrated in the heavens by the Labours of Hercules through the zodiacal signs. It is as though God had pictured in space his Plan for the working out of the evolution of the human spirit back to its source.

The intense interest evinced at this time in the spiritual life is, in itself, the warrant for such a study as the Labours of Hercules. Academic, dogmatic and theological religion has no longer its ancient appeal but, in spite of a widespread revolt against organized, or ecclesiastical religion, the urge towards the spiritual realities has never been more keen than it is today. The period of empirical experience on a large scale is with us. Men and women everywhere are refusing any longer to believe the authoritative pronouncements of the churches or to accept blindly the dicta of any theology. They are determined to know for themselves the facts of the inner mystical experience, if such facts can be ascertained, and to grasp for themselves the nature of that identity which we call the soul.

The world setting is ripe for a renewal of a living faith and religion, which will be based upon personal knowledge and not upon the pronouncements and the interpretations of limited minds. Dr. Rufus Jones, the great Quaker leader, calls attention to this fact in words, which are worth noting:

"...an outbreak of mysticism is always a sign that the soul of man is uttering a vigorous protest against the encroachment of some organized system of life ... which threatens to leave scant scope and area for its own free initiative and its spontaneous creative activity. It is a proclamation that the soul has certain inherent rights and capacities, a dominion of its own, which must be respected and held sacred. Sometimes mysticism has been the protest of man's spirit against the hardening crust of dogma, sometimes a revolt against ecclesiasticism."

In days of darkness and apparent spiritual deadness, this revival of interest in the higher realities inevitably appears, guaranteeing that the spirit of man is on its way, and that the reality remains unchanged behind the changing surface of material events. The very need of the hour calls for the sounding of a clear note and to the newly emerging mystic and knower is given the task of this sounding. "What we find in the mystic is an intensified organ for the affirmation of the reality of God and for the richer interpretation of His character." With these clear words, Dr. Jones calls our attention to the work eternally done in the spiritual field by the awakened seeker.

Truth is, phoenix-like, emerging anew in the field of human experience, but it will be the truth, which is felt and known and not the truth, which is enforced through authoritarianism and ancient tradition; for truth, as Bernard Shaw tells us, is "what you know by your experience to be true and feel in your soul to be true". Such renewals of the spiritual life of the race are [207] recurrent and cyclic; they can be of an emotional or an intellectual nature but they serve to lead the subjective life of the race into a new and richer phase of experience, and to offset, and sometimes to interpret, the more material and scientific paralleling trends which can be seen.

The problem of every writer and teacher today is to discover new ways in which to express the same foundational truths, and so to present the ancient formulas and rules of the road, which will lead man to the next stage in his spiritual development. The old truths will then acquire new meanings

and vibrate with fresh life. There have been many books written upon the subject of the Path of Discipleship. Restatement of the problems to be encountered upon the universal Path, and analysis of the difficulties to be faced whilst treading it is not warranted, unless the application can be general, practical and couched in such terms that meets the need of the modern student. A study of the Twelve Labours of Hercules, covering as they do every aspect of the disciple's life, may enable us to achieve a different attitude and release us into that joy on the Path and that freedom in service which is a more than adequate compensation for the temporary losses and momentary distresses which may try the lower nature.

One of the great revelations which has come almost unnoticed to humanity during the past century has been the slow dawning upon our consciousness of the fact of our own inherent essential divinity. Men are recognizing that they are in very truth "made in the image of God", and are one in nature with their Father in Heaven. Today also, the purposes and plans underlying God's creative work are being studied widely from both the scientific and religious angles, bringing definite changes in man's attitude to life as a whole. It is this unfolding plan for man, individual and racial, that is revealed in the story of this ancient Son of God. We are given a synthetic and complete picture of the progress of the soul from ignorance to wisdom, [208] from material desire to spirit aspiration, and from the blindness of infant humanity to the pure vision of those who see God. A point is reached in the story where intelligent cooperation with soul purpose takes the place of blind endeavour and struggle, and Hercules, who is a Son of God as well as a son

of man, can proceed upon the Way with his face turned towards the light, irradiated by the joy of those who know.

This old tale leaves untouched no phases in the life of the aspirant and yet links him ceaselessly with cosmic enterprise. Its theme will be found to be so inclusive that all of us, immersed in the problems of life, can make application to ourselves of the tests and trials, the failures and achievements of this heroic figure, who strove, centuries ago, towards the same goal as we are striving. Through the reading of this story, fresh interest in the spiritual life may be evoked in the mind of the bewildered aspirant, and he will go forward with fresh courage as he gains a sequential picture of universal development and destiny.

We find, as we study this ancient myth that Hercules undertook certain tasks, symbolic in nature but universal in character, and that he passed through certain episodes and events which portray, for all time, the nature of the training and the attainments which should characterize a son of God, marching on towards perfection. He stands for the incarnated but not yet perfected Son of God, who, at a particular stage in the evolutionary cycle, takes his lower nature in hand and willingly subjects himself to the discipline, which will eventually bring about the emergence of his innate divinity. Out of an erring but sincerely earnest human being, intelligently aware of the work to be done, a World Saviour is created, and we see in the last two labours how that work of saving was carried out.

Three great and dramatic stories have been told constantly to mankind down the ages: those of Hercules, the Buddha and the Christ, each of them portraying one of the stages upon the Path of Divinity. In the story of Hercules, we have portrayed for us the experiences of the Path of Discipleship and the early [209] stages of the Path of Initiation. In the case of the Buddha, the story starts later than that of Hercules and we see the Buddha achieve final illumination, passing through initiations of which Hercules knew nothing. Then came the historic Christ, embodying in Himself something so ineffable that we regard Him, in a unique way, as the representative of God. These three stories progressively reveal God's plan for man's development, and call us to follow in the steps of Hercules, who trod the Path of Discipleship and attained his goal.

The oracle has spoken and down the centuries the cry has gone forth: "Know thyself". This knowledge is the outstanding attainment upon the Path of Discipleship, and it is seen how sequentially and intelligently Hercules attained this knowledge. We see him passing around the great pathway of the heavens and in each sign performing one of the twelve labours, which all disciples are called upon to perform. We see him from two viewpoints: that of the individual disciple and that of humanity as a whole, the great world disciple of which he is the prototype. It is possible to regard humanity as having reached, en masse, the stage of the aspirant, and to regard the race as standing upon the probationary path, the path of purification. If suffering is the great purifier, then the above statement is indeed true. Men today are intelligent, earnestly seeking a way out from the present material impasse and learning to coordinate their abilities and capacities, mental, emotional

and physical, in an effort to rise above all that has hitherto held them down to earth. This stage has always been expressed by the more advanced types of men, but never before has the entire human family been in this condition. Herein lies the wonder of past achievement, and herein lies the hour of our wonderful opportunity.

We find Hercules starting at this point and passing through varying experiences until he comes to the open door in Leo, through which he can pass onto the Path of Discipleship. We see him learning the lessons of equilibrium, of selflessness and [210] of victory over the desire nature until he becomes the one-pointed disciple in Sagittarius, prior to passing through the gate, which leads to the mount of initiation. Slowly and painfully, he learns the lesson that competition and selfish grasping must disappear and that the seizing of anything for the separated lower self is no part of the mission of a son of God. He finds himself as an individual only to discover that individualism must be intelligently sacrificed to the good of the group; he learns that personal greed has no place in the life of the aspirant who is seeking liberation from the ever recurring cycle of existence and constant crucifixion upon the cross of matter and form. The characteristics of the man immersed in form life and under the rule of matter are fear, individual competition and greed. These have to give place to spiritual confidence, cooperation, group awareness and selflessness. These are the lessons, which Hercules brings to us.

This is also the story of the cosmic Christ, crucified from the beginning of creation upon the fixed cross of the heavens. This is the story of the historical Christ, given us in the

gospel story and enacted for us two thousand years ago in Palestine, when our sun entered the sign of the world Savior, the sign of Pisces, the fishes. This is the story of every individual man, crucified upon the cross of matter and of existence, and discovering that he is in truth a son of God incarnated in each human being. God, incarnate in matter. Such is the story of the solar system, the story of our planet, the story of every man. As we look at the starry heavens above us, we have this great drama, eternally pictured for us. [211]