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OF AN UNKNOWN TEACHING

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Centre for Esoteric Christian Studies

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I

To speak of Ouspensky, is to speak of Gurdjieff. And to speak of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, is to speak of the esoteric Tradition that was divulged in a fragmentary form by the one with the substantial help of the other (1).

The great difficulty in dealing with esoteric problems lies in the fact that our highly analytical civilization, with its endless specialization in all branches, has managed to create a very cultured elite, but with this particularity: the intellectual possesses only an infinitely small degree of Knowledge. He may be a great specialist in his branch, but have only very summary notions on the rest. Now, as this rest includes the whole of life which is becoming more and more complex and feverish, the slicing up of Knowledge has been accompanied by the creation of a whole system of "buttons", so that, by just pressing them, the individual may obtain all the desired effects, without going through the study and work - but paying what is necessary, of course.

Thus, the art of living actually boils down to the acquisition of thorough knowledge in a narrow sector of the Whole - which already gives access to riches and honour - and to the clever utilization of the "press-button" system which meets all our requirements in the other sectors. Of course, the same thing existed at the time of the Greeks and the Romans, but, as the ancient world did not know what excessive specialization was, the "press-button" sector was very limited, whereas the sector of thorough knowledge included almost all the Knowledge of that epoch.

The system of specialization which, in studies and in practice, is only a judicious division of work, is responsible for the marvels of progress. But, on another hand, it has made man lose the habit of thinking deeply, except in his own branch.

This, in turn, has led to the unbalanced formation of the man belonging to the contemporary élite: besides a highly critical turn of mind, he has subconsciously developed a certain naïvety regarding anything that overlaps his speciality or its neighbouring sectors.

(1) Fragments of an Unknown Teaching, by P.D. Ouspensky. Ed. Stock, 1950.

In the Editor's Note, one may read the following lines: A vast cosmogonical system... an entirely unknown psychology and physiology (in Occident, B.M.).. a whole group of different techniques enabling man to acquire real freedom by working on himself. This is what the reader will find ⁱⁿ this work.

The study of the esoteric Tradition - and the conquest of the objectives it pursues - demand prudent circumspection, and, above all, thorough reflexion. Nothing can be obtained in this domain by pressing "buttons". On the contrary, this credulity with which, for example, we dial a telephone - number, being sure of getting our correspondent at the other end of the wire, can be disastrous when applied to esoteric studies.

A critical mind, discernment and clear judgement are required here, even more than in the study of positive science. All said and done, the risk is not great in the latter. It is merely limited to a lack of success, the object studied being outside the student. But, in esoteric research, the student and the object of his studies are one and the same thing. Whereas positive philosophy studies man under his abstract aspect, esoteric philosophy studies man himself, especially the one who undertakes this research. The method of introspection practised in all esoteric schools, including the exercises that follow, inevitably endanger the Personality of the student - and this, right from the beginning. For, he is called upon to concentrate his efforts on his own Personality, and not on theoretical notions or on the Personalities of others. This is precisely in view of obtaining his transformation. A wicked or cruel man can make a scientific discovery. This is impossible in esoterism. For, before undertaking any constructive work, the student is obliged to discipline and balance his psychicism, that is, his own personality.

This does not present any danger if the work is done correctly, and carried through successfully. But, if it is abandoned half - way, or carried out under the direction of an incompetent, or still worse, a calculating professor, it can lead to the worst catastrophes. A disintegration of the Personality is the usual result in such cases. A certain uneasiness, moral depression and pessimism accompanied by persecution - mania, are the symptoms of this progressive disintegration. In serious cases, it can lead to a complete unbalance which can reach the very denial of Self, and end up in suicide.

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Critical analysis, which is the basic method of positive science, plays the same role in esoteric studies. Thus, the scientific value of these two branches of knowledge is absolutely equal. But there is a difference in application which should be pointed out.

In positive science, a postulate can be explained and proved publicly, as the savant's object of study is not one with him. Subjected to a severe critical analysis by other savants, his thesis is scientifically acknowledged only if it stands the test. In esoteric studies, the essential part of the work takes place introspectively, in the inner world of the seeker. And, as the latter and the object of his research are one and the same thing, it is materially impossible to submit his inner experiences to an academic examination.

Yet, students are not asked to accept postulates in esoteric matters on sight. On the contrary, they are told to reject all credulous tendencies. But, seeing that the object and nature of their studies belongs to their inner world and leads them to the new or the unknown, they are advised not to demolish the postulates straight^{ta}way and accept them later on, but to try and lean on them and confirm them by their own experience, according to the methods indicated. And, if, after having applied them conscientiously and diligently, they do not obtain the promised results, they will then have the right to reject them.

The critical mind is, therefore, required in esoteric studies, just as much as in positive studies. But, whereas the latter start from the centre and try to reach all points of the circumference by the radiation of specialization, the former start from the periphery and work towards the centre.

These elementary notions should help the reader who is not familiar with this subject - matter, to understand our present study which deals with: Ouspensky, Gurdjieff and the Fragments of an Unknown Teaching.

II

My feelings were mixed when I received the volume of Fragments of an Unknown Teaching (2) in 1951. I knew Ouspensky well in the old days. Our friendship was based on the same interests - the same passion for research. In 1920 - 21, I attended his public conferences in Constantinople, and it was there that he put me in touch with G.I. Gurdjieff. It was there that I learned the latter's system as well. Ouspensky and I had long discussions about it there later on in London and in Paris.

Having settled down in London in 1921, Ouspensky started writing his Fragments. He wrote the manuscript in Russian and, later on, entrusted the work of translating it to the Baroness O.A. Rausch de Traubenberg, who was living in Paris at the time. I was asked to check up on it to see if it were all right. This work progressed slowly in 1924 and the following years - until Mrs. Rausch's death in 1928. Besides asking me to see if the translation was correct, Ouspensky wanted my criticisms on the basic subject - matter itself. I did this willingly, partly in my letters, but mainly during the long discussions we had when he came from London to Paris.

(2) P.D. Ouspensky, Fragments of an Unknown Teaching, ED Stock, Paris 1950.

I helped him with his manuscript to be of service to him, as he did not know French very well; and also because it gave me the opportunity of discussing all the elements of the system with him. We did not always agree on the interpretation of certain of its aspects, nor, sometimes, on its profound meaning. But this did not mar our friendship, our discussions being based on the principle: Amicus Plato, sed magis amica veritas.

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My last meeting with Ouspensky took place in May 1937, when I went to see him in London - in the castle of Lyne, not far from the capital, where he was living with his followers. We spoke of the Fragments of course.

I was against the idea of publishing them. It seemed to me that, because of its very nature, the esoteric doctrine could not be explained in detail through the medium of the written word alone. This is probably why the Apostle St John said:.....the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. (3).

Ouspensky ended up by sharing my point of view. The best proof of this is that he did not publish the Fragments even though the text was completed about twenty years before his death.

There were other reasons for my negative attitude. Ouspensky, - and even more so, his entourage, - did not make a clear distinction between the message and the messenger. This does not mean that the idea of separating them never occurred to him. He speaks of it in his Fragments, but in terms that betray his weakness, (4). If, in 1924 after eight years of work with Gurdjieff, he left the latter, it was only a "corporeal separation", and not a complete divorce, as it should have been. Ouspensky placed the messenger, that is, Gurdjieff at the centre of the whirlwind of events that bore him along. So much so, that, in Constantinople, in 1921, he compared Gurdjieff to Socrates, insinuating that his own role was that of Plato. But Socrates was a hero; and Gurdjieff was a bon-vivant.

Yet, one must not minimize his merit. Gurdjieff only had a primary education and, in spite of it, delivered his message without making any glaring contradictions. One can realize the magnitude of his effort if one recalls that Ouspensky, who was a talented writer and philosopher, took at least ten years to explain this versame message, and another ten years to make all the necessary corrections.

(3) John, XXI, 25

(4) Fragments, p. 519 and foll.

A journalist by profession, he unintentionally wrote the Fragments like a twentieth-century newspaper report, that is, with a strong personal bias. In short, the Fragments are nothing more than "Gurdjieff, as seen by Ouspensky".

The essential thing was to transplant the message in what was its native soil, so that it could spread its roots and yield fruit.

It was soon clear to me that, for this purpose, it would have been necessary to place the message in its historical context. If not, it was condemned to stay a dead letter, or worse still, to engender dangerous deviations.

Ouspensky did not adopt a clear stand towards Gurdjieff. He should have taken care of the message, and left the messenger, with all his qualities and faults, to his life of adventure. But he was prevented from doing this because he was under the latter's personal spell.

He was incapable of resisting this influence for several reasons. Firstly, because of his character - Though subject to fits of temper, he was charming, and amiable, very clever in dialectics, but not a strong man. And then, he was a self-taught person. He had not even completed his secondary schooling. Good-hearted, full of ideas, and a talented writer, he was, nevertheless, not inwardly protected by that precious armour which is the scientific method. Everything about him was irresolute, unanchored, and therefore, open to outside influences. He has been a lone man all his life, and suffered many disappointments and frustrations. (5) Gurdjieff, on the contrary, was a strong-character ed man, even though his horizon was rather limited. He managed to impose himself on Ouspensky.

The latter dreamed of the marvellous (6), and rather naïvely believed that Gurdjieff had some sort of secret that was behind all the ideas, postulates, and schemata that, together, formed the message. He used to say that it was necessary to know how to "pump" Gurdjieff in order to obtain this famous secret. But, as we will see further on, there was nothing at all of this sort. There was nothing but hollowness and "magic".

(5) Ouspensky's The Cinemodrama is nothing more than his own biography, and concerns the first part of his life. Here, we learn how and why he never received a higher intellectual formation, nor, for that matter, even a secondary one.

(6) Ref. Fragments, pages 45, 369, 370.

Ouspensky hoped for "deeds" (7), and, in spite of a few fits of depression, he looked forward to these acts with pure, naïve faith.

He was, thus, subject to hypnotic ^tsuggestions, and this was precisely what enabled Gurdjieff to furnish the "desired deeds". He bound Ouspensky to him in this way, and made use of him for several years: especially to find the necessary funds for his various "Institutes" (8). One may even say that, without Ouspensky, Gurdjieff's career in the West would probably have been limited to endless meetings in cafés.

Gurdjieff's hold over Ouspensky was cleverly calculated and established right from the beginning. In the Fragments (9), Ouspensky relates how he was ~~drawn~~ drawn towards Gurdjieff, and how the latter consolidated this tie.

We ^{know} that a normal, healthy individual can easily resist the hypnotiser's efforts if he does not wish to be hypnotised. This is why professional hypnotisers try to create an "atmosphere" first. Gurdjieff found Ouspensky's case all the more easy, as the latter longed for "acts", and looked for the "miraculous" with all the ~~the~~ strength of his fresh credulity, even though he thought himself very realistic.

The hold over him was established already in Moscow, and later on, in Finland. It was so strong that, several years later, when ~~had~~ ^{was} writing his Fragments, he related very simply, how Gurdjieff had told him that he understood nothing (10) of his remarkable treatise, Tertiu Organum (11).

We know that, when a patient desires to submit to the hypnotiser's will, it is almost impossible for a third person to de - hypnotise him. This was ^{why} it was pointless to try and make Ouspensky recognize the absurdity of such an assertion, without mentioning Gurdjieff's insolence. The hypnosis had its redoubtable effects. Arguments based on simple common sense left him cold in this case. He used to get irritated, and say that I was the one who did not understand anything... He did not know - and this is paradoxal - that higher knowledge of any kind never runs counter to common sense.

(7) Ibid., pages 45, 369.

(8) Ouspensky says it himself. He had this idea as soon as he met Gurdjieff (Ibid., p. 31). Was it the latter who suggested it to him?

(9) Op. quot., p. 31 and passim.

(10) Op. quot., p. 41. Pretentious title. Ouspensky chose it to place his work in the same line of succession as Aristotle's Organon and Bacon's Novum Organum.

(11) Ibid.

One day, Ouspensky and I met at Mrs. Rausch's house. She had invited us to dinner; and, when leaving the table, her son, a boy of twelve at the time, brought out his album and asked us to write something in it. He held it out to me first. I wrote: Whatever happens to you in life, never forget that twice times two never makes four...

A witticism? - Of course! But it applies wholly to Ouspensky when regarded from the angle that interests us at the moment...

He smiled and glanced at me mischievously. Alek read what we had written, and showed it to his mother. The latter, who knew Ouspensky well, shrugged her shoulders, looked at each of us in turn, and said:

- I recognize both of you so well in your maxims!

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Gurdjieff used Ouspensky and the system, for that matter, to draw people to him so that he could exercise his direct influence over them. Ouspensky was not the only decoy; others, after him, played the same role. But at the time I was making my observations, Ouspensky was, without a doubt, the principal figure.

Gurdjieff exercised his influence within his orbit in a very simple but brutal manner. Apart from the contents of the message, there was what he called the Work. Without taking into account the "conversations" and "exercises", this "work" consisted in persuading his disciples that they were literally nothing. Without beating about the bush, he used to tell them that they were nothing more than garbage. And people accepted this. Towards the end, when he left Fontainebleau - Avon for Paris, his expressions became even cruder, and he told those who approached him in the hope of a revelation that they were just "dung".

We must not, however, be over-astonished by these facts. Cagliostro, "Maître Philippe", and Raspoutine provide us with even more striking examples in this line. It is a common fallacy to think that this sort of phenomenon is specifically Russian, or typical of the so-called "Slav spirit". But "Maître Philippe" was a Frenchman; and though Raspoutine was a Russian, one must not forget that the imperial family was of German extraction. During the one and a half centuries of their reign, ^{the} ~~of~~ Dukes of Holstein Gottorp chose German princesses as their Empresses, and the Russian Court ended up by being strongly Germanized. Yet, Raspoutine, who was an almost illiterate peasant, exercised a very strong influence over the Empress (nee Alice of Darmstadt), and over Nicholas II. Besides, it did not stop there... many courtiers, ministers, statesmen and deputies were also under his spell.

What goal was Gurdjieff seeking? Nobody knows. As in Raspoutine's case, it is difficult to decipher it through his acts. In the Fragments, Ouspensky tells us

that he asked Gurdjieff this question in the beginning, and that the latter replied:

-I certainly have a goal, but do not ask me to talk of it, for my goal cannot mean anything to you yet. What counts for you now, is to be able to define your own goal. As for the teaching itself, it cannot have a goal. It only shows men the best way to attain their goal, whatever that may be (12).

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Another question arises quite naturally: where did he find the contents of the message - this system, which definitely bears traces of some ancient wisdom? Ouspensky, who was obsessed by the idea of esoteric schools (of which he drew a very personal picture), had looked for them in the "Orient", but without any result. But he was convinced that Gurdjieff knew nearly everything and, one day, he asked the latter to enlighten him on the subject. He obtained the following reply:

- In the Orient, today, you will find only specialized schools; there are no general schools. Every master, or guru, is a specialist in some subject. One is an astronomer, another a sculptor, a third a musician; and before all, the student should study the subject that is his master's speciality. After that, he can go on to another subject, and so on. In this way, it would take him a million years to study everything.

- But how did you study?

- I was not alone. There were all kinds of specialists amongst us. Each ~~one~~ studied according to the methods prescribed for his particular science. After that, when we met, we used to inform each other of the ¹⁵results we had obtained.

- And where are your companions now?

Gurdjieff was silent for a while; then, with a faraway look, he said:

- Some of them are dead; others are pursuing their work; and still others are in monastic seclusion.

This last phrase from the monastic vocabulary, continues Ouspensky, heard at a moment when I least expected it, made me feel strangely awkward. And, suddenly, I realized that Gurdjieff was leading me on, and deliberately ~~showing~~ me a word, from time to time, that would interest me and orientate my

(12) Fragments, p. 149. The italics are ours.

thoughts in a definite direction (13). When I tried to ask him more clearly, where he had learned what he knew, from which source it had come, and the extent of his knowledge, he would not give me a direct reply (14).

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In esoteric matters, the lie cannot cover and, indeed, does not cover all possible human relationships. There are sectors where no one can lie, or at least, lie completely. Ouspensky's last question lay within this sector, but he did not know the law we have just mentioned, and this is certainly the reason why he did not ask the question in the right way.

One day, while sitting with Gurdjieff in the Cafe de la paix in Paris, I asked him point - blank:

-I think that the Christian doctrine is at the root of the system. What do you say ?

- It is the A.B.C., he replied. But they -they do not understand anything!

- Is this system yours ?

- No....

- Where did you find it ? - Where did you learn it ?

- Maybe, I stole it.... (15).

My relationship with Gurdjieff was rather special. I met him several times in Constantinople, Fontainebleau and Paris, but was never a member of his "Institutes". In other words, I was never dependent on him at any time. Hence, unlike his immediate entourage, I was outside the zone of his personal influence. And the reader must know that the hypnotic influence, like any other natural influence, is inversely proportionate to the square of the distance: that is, physical or psychical distance, or both. The effects of Gurdjieff's influence over his entourage were visible. He could suggest any absurdity, nay, monstrosity to his disciples, and be sure that they would accept it enthusiastically as though it were a revelation. People do not reason any more in the psychological condition that is created in this way. Everything was right and good, because thus spake Zarathustra (16).

(13) This is how one may exercise the hypnotic influence without sending the subject into a trance.

(14) Fragments, pages 35 - 36.

(15) Compare with p. 83 of Fragments, second paragraph, lines 6 and 7.

(16) Compare this phenomenon with the one described in Dostoievsky's Village of Stepantchikovo.

They did not know that it was a method - and a method that is well-known everywhere in the Orient, where the teaching tending towards the truth is, sometimes, enveloped in a corset of the most shocking contradictions. This is done with the final aim of finding some resistance; and with the immediate aim of placing the disciple between two groups of forces: of attraction and of repulsion. This is to provoke a certain anxiety in him, and through it, an intense inner struggle of affirmation and negation, or, in technical terms, that friction which should produce the heat that will light the fire (17). For the Christian doctrine teaches us that the road towards the truth passes through doubt. By multiplying the doubts in the student's mind and heart, one offers him the opportunity of going through the preliminary stage more rapidly.

Allusions to this very efficacious method may be found in the four Gospels, the Epistles, and in other writings of the Doctors of the oecumenical Church, but it has the following drawback: too strongly, it unbalances the subject completely. One does not have too many scruples about this in the Orient; where unbalanced people are usually looked upon as a sort of waste-product. For, they say, our life is not ourselves, and does not belong to us; it is loaned to us precisely for this major experience, and if it is not a success, so much the worse... Does not the parable of the talents tell us so explicitly? (18)

We must not forget to mention that, while creating this atmosphere around him - with a great deal of savoir-faire - Gurdjieff warned his followers several times. He used to repeat that people long to be fooled, and that they love to believe believe the tales they make up themselves. These warnings, however, were not needed. Some thought the Master was just joking; others, while taking these maxims seriously, applied them only to their neighbours; still others said that they should be interpreted in a more elevated sense....

It is easy to understand that, when some one from the outside, like myself, tried to raise his voice against the idolatry that ended up by making a sort of Cagliostro or Rasputin of Gurdjieff, they looked at me with condescension, or even compassion.

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(17) This inner fire is necessary to produce the alloy, after which, the man becomes complete and permanent.

(18) Matthew, XXV, 24-30

From the beginning, it seemed clear to me that, before this system could be brought to Moscow or Petrograd, it would be necessary to cover a long historical road - through the laic ^{and} religious centres of Egypt, ancient Greece, and Asia Minor, to end up finally in the heart of the Oriental Orthodoxy on Russian soil - the last survivor of the ancient world. These were the indications I was able to glean from the research made in this domain by Andrew Mouravieff during the latter part of the XIX th. century. He consecrated a great part of his life to voyages in the Near East, and travelled in Egypt, the Holy Land, Asia Minor (right up to Armenia and Kurdistan) in search of ancient manuscripts and traditions. Court Chamberlain and Member of the Holy Synod, he founded the Saint Andrew monastery at Mount Athos, with a guest-house for pilgrims at Constantinople. When he died in Kiev in 1874, he left to his favourite followers, the mission of continuing his research in the region of Kars, the Ourmiah and Van lakes, Azerbaidjan in Persia, and finally, Central Asia (19).

Taking all this into account, I pursued my own research with comparative studies of the original elements of Russian culture and the sources of the Oriental Orthodoxy. And thus, I finally managed to situate Gurdjieff's message in its historical context. But, in order to do this, I was obliged to go back to the ancient pre-Christian Slav beliefs, and to establish their relationship with those of the Scythians, the ancient Indians and Egyptians. I was also forced to study such monumental works as the Philokalia, and then, the Gospels, with the keys thus obtained; and finally, King David's CXVIIIth. Psalm which contains this very same system in a compact form.

The result of this research was, that the message no longer seemed a heap of "fragments" nor an "unknown teaching" to me. Placed with in its historical framework and on its native soil, it lost its sensational character and "exotic" touch, and appeared as a groundwork of symbols, parables and allusions that are found everywhere and known by everyone. It was also the basis of the ancient beliefs of the Scythians and the Slavs which are to be found in the Byzantine-Russian Orthodoxy.

I was also able to establish that the "fragments" were known in the Occident towards the latter half of the Middle Ages. As in the Orient, they were probably inherited from the esoteric teachings of the ancient world and handed down through primitive Christianity.

Certain traces still exist, and constitute the clue that awaits explorers.

(19) We will come back to this in another work that is being prepared actually by Boris Mouravieff.

III

Katherine Mansfield's death at the "Institute" (20) came as a great shock to Ouspensky, and made him take the decision to break with Gurdjieff. But he was even more impressed when he heard of Gurdjieff's accident at the national highway crossing where the Paris - Fontainebleau road (No 7) meets the Versailles - Choisy-le-Roi road (No 168).

Gurdjieff was driving alone from Paris to the Priory. It was at night. No one knows the exact cause of this accident, but the fact remains, that at a speed of about sixty kms. an hour, he drove straight into a tree, and was badly hurt. Having heard about the accident, Ouspensky came from London to Paris, and we visited the site of the accident together.

Prostrate and overwhelmed, he was silent for a long time; then, he said:

- I am afraid...It's terrible...George Ivanovitch's Institute was created in order to help us escape from the law of chance which governs our lives; and now, he has fallen under the sway of this law himself...

He continued:

- I am still wondering if it was really fortuitous? - Gurdjieff always mocked at honesty and the human personality as a rule. Hasn't he overstepped the limits? I'm telling you, I am terribly afraid!

We returned in silence. At Fontainebleau, we stopped at a restaurant for lunch. He asked me to telephone to the Priory (21) and talk to his daughter-in-law who was one of the "philosophers of the forest"; but she was not there.

During the course of the lunch, Ouspensky could not stop discussing the real value of honesty. It was obviously an important problem for him, and this seemed to be a turning-point in his life. Through an association of ideas that I found incomprehensible, he seemed to connect the question of honesty with the accident that had befallen Gurdjieff.

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However, as we have already said, Ouspensky's separation from Gurdjieff was purely physical. After that, he never liked to return to the analysis of the "Gurdjieff phenomenon" - at least, never in his conversations with me. I noticed his reluctance, and asked him why he avoided talking about a subject which, in my opinion, could be instructive for both of us.

(20) Fragments, pp. 534, 535.

(21) Ouspensky did not let anyone know that he was at Fontainebleau.

It was late at night, in a bar in Montmartre. Ouspensky had wanted to round off the evening there, after a good dinner at a restaurant on the Place St-Michel.

Suddenly, his expression changed. I had the impression that the man in front of me was a different person from the one with whom I had spent such an interesting and agreeable evening. He turned on me brusquely and said in a strangled voice:

- Suppose some one in the family had committed a crime; one would not speak of it in the family !

It was my turn to be afraid. I had a feeling that Ouspensky could not refer to this subject; as soon as he tried to touch upon it, he seemed to come up against an obstacle - an interdiction. Was it a hypnotic effect ? I repeat, I felt a cold shiver run down my spine at that moment.

+ + +

It was clear that Ouspensky was still tied to Gurdjieff, in spite of the distance that lay between them; and it was clear that this tie was forced upon him.

Once again, I thought that this curious phenomenon was due to the fact that Ouspensky had not had the advantage of a solid academical formation. Though applied in a slightly different manner, the positive scientific method is essential in esoteric research, and is the only guarantee an intellectual can have when he ~~undertakes~~ undertakes this kind of study. This is exactly what Ouspensky did not have.

His wife, who was strong-willed and domineering, was one of Gurdjieff's fervent disciples - before, and after the rupture. She belonged to the group of ~~lecturers~~ instructors. The latter gave one a strange impression.

I had the privilege of approaching them from the outside, and after long intervals, during which, they certainly forgot what they had told me on the previous occasions.

When they spoke of their work, it was always the same refrain, copied from the master's formula. Without realizing it, they sometimes even imitated Gurdjieff's Caucasian accent when they repeated his expressions, explanations, and impositions.

- When you come here, they used to say condescendingly, you enter into an atmosphere that makes you transparent. You are standing there as though you were completely naked under a bell-glass. We can observe you from all angles, and on all sides !

Years later, this reference to the "bell-glass" was still brought back on to the carpet, accompanied by the same smiles, the same expressions and the same gestures. They were like robots, repeating the same records over and over again (22).

(22) Fragments, pag. 384, 385 and 371.

They were plunged in a deep hypnotic sleep, while they sincerely believed that they were wide awake. It was the master's will that acted in them, ~~making~~ ~~them recite the lesson they had learned by~~

~~heart...~~ In 1937, Ouspenskaya told me at Lyne:

- When I saw George Ivanovitch for the first time, I said to him: "George Ivanovitch, I see something great in you!"

It was about the ~~time~~ tenth time she was repeating the same phrase to me! The first must have been in Constantinople in 1921.

- Always the same phrase, the same intonations, the same gestures, the same condescending smile....

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The thing that baffled most people was that these words were true. Esoteric ~~studies~~ studies, when conducted as they should be, very soon reveal the mechanical side of our psychism, and the absence of a stable, permanent I in ourselves. They indicate the impossibility of doing something in our actual condition; for everything happens to us. But, words and acts, or to appear and to be, are not one and the same thing. Verbosity and "records" are not sufficient. The efforts one has to make are considerable; they must be permanent, and above all, conscious. This is the only way one can learn to know oneself first, and then, conquer this human mechanicalness to become a consistent man who is the master of one self.

But Gurdjieff, or rather, the members of his entourage, were distorting these ideas and giving them unhealthy undertones: they were no longer related to an object of study or deep research to find, if possible, an outlet to the labyrinth of our lie-ridden personality. But they were calculated to strip the neophyte of the little that remained of his free will, or of the few vestiges of consciousness and simple common sense he possessed.

As for Gurdjieff, he had consideration for only those who offered some ~~resistance~~ resistance. He respected them. For the others, including the automatons he had as instructors, he displayed a profound disdain. He had the same attitude towards the "workers" who lived with him, with board and lodging at his expense. Among these whom I met at the "Institutes" in Constantinople and Fontainebleau, there was not a single one who was sufficiently prepared. Ouspensky, of course, was the only exception; but, for the reasons we have just mentioned, he was neutralized.

Gurdjieff impressed Ouspensky to such an extent that he left his stamp on him for life. This was due to the fact that Ouspensky learned the message at a time when he was not apt to assimilate it properly.

This was not Gurdjieff's message, and he never pretended that it was. It was a part of the esoteric Oriental Orthodox Tradition, which can be traced back to ancient Egypt and throught it, to times immemorial.

Ouspensky was well-versed in the Gospels; but he did not know the Doctrine, that is, the sum of commentaires left by the Doctors of the oecumenical Church. As far as I know, he was not initiated in the oral Tradition either, except by Gurdjieff. The latter was his only reference, and this deprived him of the possibility of verifying. And if he rushed into it headlong, it was because he confused the message and the messenger.

We must not, however, jump to facile and hasty conclusions. The matter is subtle and requires delicate discernment. Let us not forget that John Climaque (23), who was a great authority on these matters, said: If you see shortcomings in your guide, as a man, do not attach too much importance to them; follow after his precepts, or else you will learn nothing.

One must, therefore, be prudent in one's judgement.

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In order to get a clear idea of Gurdjieff's work, one must distinguish between three categories of elements:

- 1) the fragments of the esoteric Christian Tradition;
- 2) some fragments of certain Muslim traditions;
- 3) his own ideas and inventions.

From the esoteric point of view, the two last categories are of no interest: neither for their content, nor as methods of application. What he derived from the Muslim traditions may be of some value from an artistic point of view; but as for the third category, it is of no interest whatsoever except, perhaps, for the fact that it represents the "Gurdjieff phenomenon". It is incredible that the latter was possible in the contemporary cultured layers of society; but we must not forget that the "Rasputin phenomenon", which was even more unbelievable was, nevertheless, real.

Gurdjieff's written work, which appeared under the title: Belzebuth's Tales to his Grandson, with the sub-title: All and Everything (24) was published

(23) A Doctor of the Church, born in Palestine around 525 A.D.; died in the year 605. Was superior of the Mount Sinai monastery. His principal work is the Climaux or Ladder, from which his surname was drawn.

(24) The French version Critique objectivement impartiale de la vie des hommes appeared in 1956, Ed. Janus, Paris, it comprises 1.178 pages. The German version was "All und Alles"

by his disciples, in English first, and then in French. This "inter-planetary" tale resembles Mrs. Krzanowska's (Rochester) novels which were crowned by the French Academy, and which were so popular with the Russian youth before the first World War. It deals with the same subjects, such as inter-planetary voyages, and excursions in the fathomless past and future. But Belzebuth cuts a poor figure beside the Sages, the Iron Chancellor of Ancient Egypt, and the Spider's Web. It lacks the rich imagination and accomplished prose that made the latter so successful.

It is a tiring task to read Gurdjieff's book; and after an attentive study, I was able to discover only about fifty interesting pages dealing with the first category of elements we have mentioned higher up. The rest is a hotch-potch of puerile details describing all kinds of extraordinary apparatuses, including the invention of the grand piano. All this may interest a ten-year old boy!

The comparison with Krzanowska's novels may be stretched even further, for this novelist used the themes of the "struggle of the Wise Men" and "Shades of Truth" long before Gurdjieff appeared on the scene at Moscow and at Petrograd; and they were the very subjects on which Gurdjieff wished to base his two "ballets". It was a tentative that never went beyond the preparatory stages.

Two series of posthumous works are supposed to follow, but it is premature to talk about them now.

As for the first category of incontestably valuable elements brought by Gurdjieff, and which constitute the contents of what is known as his message, we have to thank Ouspensky for revealing them in his Fragments of an Unknown Teaching. We will come back to this later on.

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Gurdjieff died of dropsy in Paris in October 1949. The official version is that they removed the liquid from his body too rapidly - about eleven litres at a time - and that this was the direct cause of his death. However, Dorothy Caruso, the famous tenor's widow, has something else to say in her memoirs. Her testimony is even more interesting when one knows that she was one of the "thaumaturge's" fervent admirers. She does not deny the fact that the disease was dropsy, nor that the liquid was drained too quickly; but she mentions an automobile accident that took place shortly before Gurdjieff's death, and in which he "fractured some ribs, and had his face and hands covered with bruises and burns" etc..

As far as I know, this was the third automobile accident that Gurdjieff had had (25). Was it just a result of the "law of chance", which can happen to any mortal, or was it due to more serious causes? The latter was an idea that had frightened Ouspensky at the time of the first accident on the Fontainebleau road.

It is interesting to recall St Paul's words here:

- Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap (26).

IV

Now, let us return to Ouspensky and his Fragments. Ouspensky put all he could into this work. We have already pointed out its weak (point) that lies in the fact that it is far too personal and written like a newspaper report. It would gain a great deal if it were re-written, and the whole subjective aspect were eliminated. It would then be reduced to about half its volume. But this is not all.

The message contained in the esoteric Tradition, which is partly revealed by Ouspensky in his Fragments, comprises a whole system of schemata. These schemata were created - no one knows when or by whom in order to help the students understand new ideas and representations that are difficult, and which demand new efforts to be understood and assimilated.

Another difficulty grows out of this.

Positive studies are based on the principle of information. For each subject, the student assimilates a certain quantity of data that is included in the syllabus. Creative work is not compulsory. In esoteric studies, creative work is demanded right from the beginning. Without conscious efforts, or creative efforts, the student cannot go very far. In this domain, as in the research

(25) Apart from the one that happened in 1924, he met with another accident in 1932, when he was accompanied by Dr. Stjernvall.

(26) Galatians, VI, 7.

Institutes, one is called upon to conquer knowledge. The professor reveals what is strictly necessary and sufficient to enable the student to delve deeper into the subject through his own creative efforts.

We must remember that, in esoteric subjects, the object studied and the student are one and the same. Through the method of introspective observation, the professor gradually introduces the student to his inner world, where he should work like a scientist in his research - laboratory, avid for new ~~idea~~ discoveries.

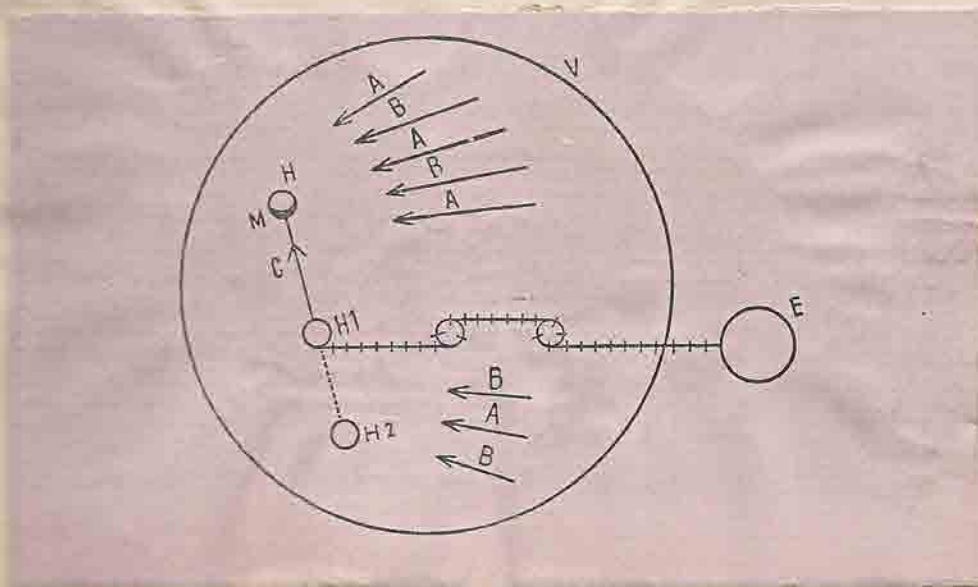
It is not sufficient to accumulate information, of course. For example, may learn the Gospel by heart, but never become a saint because of it. It is absolutely necessary to sound the depths: the student must learn to think like a gimlet - in order to bore his way through.

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This is ^{we} ~~why~~ find Fragments of an Unknown Teaching perplexing.

I do not know who prepared the final text for publication. Without going into a critical analysis of the passages which have been badly edited, I must state that some of the schemata that illustrate the text, are faulty. Others are completely missing. I do not think that Ouspensky himself could have deformed or omitted them. In any case, he did not mention it to me.

The fact is important. For example, let us study the following schema, which is of the greatest importance to students of esoteric subjects. One can see immediately, that it is incomplete, and that it is full of gross errors. Here is the diagram as it figures in the Fragments, with the commentary that follows it :



V....life.

H....a man, taken separately.

A....influences created in life by life itself -- first type of influences.

B....influences created outside life, but thrown into the general whirlwind of life - second type of influences.

H₁....a man linked to the esoteric centre in order of succession, or pretending to be linked to it.

E....esoteric centre, situated outside the general laws of life.

M....magnetic centre in man.

C....influence of the man H₁ on the man H; in case of a real link with the esoteric centre, whether this link is direct or indirect, this is an influence of a third type. It is conscious, and under its action, in a point M, which indicates the magnetic centre, a man becomes free from the law of accident.

H₂....a man who is mistaken himself, or who misleads others, having no direct or indirect link with the esoteric centre.

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The diagrams contained in the system, as in most of the other esoteric texts and monuments, are conceived in such a way that they provide one with the means to verify their authenticity, and to detect the errors committed by "editors or translators". If this were lacking, it would be impossible to transmit them through the centuries and extinct civilizations. At the same time, this means of verification offers the attentive student the possibility of seizing the really profound meaning that is hidden behind the apparent one. (Picture p. foll.)

There is nothing surprising in this. This method is the basis of all esoteric teaching. The student must be alert, and observe every infinitesimal detail in a text or monument at the same time as he takes in the whole. For example, it is sufficient to throw a rapid glance at the bas-relief of Eleusis, which is attributed to Phidias, and which represents the sending away of Triptoleme. It is reproduced here. In this well - known scene which has been given many interpretations, one generally attaches very little importance, or none at all, to Persephone's gesture: her index finger, bent intentionally, is held just over Triptoleme's sinciput.

Can one really believe that this was just a touch of the artist's whim? - Particularly when one bears in mind that the author of this master-piece must have been an épopte, i.e., one who was initiated into the Eleusinian mysteries.



L'envoi de Triptolème.

Triptoleme being sent away.

This gesture is the key that gives us access to the profound significance of the icon. Besides, the word épopée means clairvoyant; and, according to the oriental teaching, the pineal gland, which is situated precisely at the point indicated by Persephone's finger, constitutes the organ of clairvoyance once it has been duly developed by the appropriate exercises. In this way, one can progressively understand the meaning of other details in the picture, and discover the hidden meaning (that which was reserved for the initiated) of the whole composition (27).

It is said that the Gospel is a book locked with seven locks; and that, in order ^{to} grasp the integral meaning, one must find the seven consecutive keys that can open it. The first key is given in the following symbols which usually accompany the images of the evangelists when they are portrayed on icons: Man, winged Lion, Bull and Eagle, respectively. The same symbols are added to the Enneagramme, which is the basic schema revealed in the Fragments, and which encloses the whole system. Finally, one finds the same symbols on the armour of some of the early Roman Emperors including Augustus.

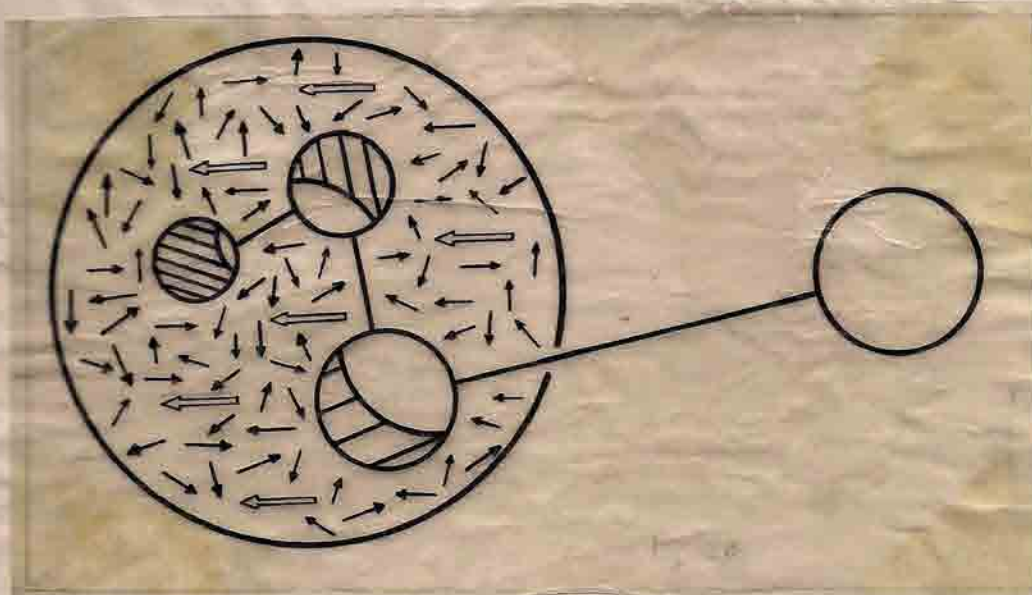
As for the numbers 3 and 9, on which the Enneagramme and the whole message are based, they are to be found in all the esoteric traditions of the world. For example, one may recall the famous wall of nine dragons in the imperial palace at Peking; and the traditional housing-plan of certain Negro tribes in Ethiopia and around. In Russia, the numbers 3 and 9 and 3 x 9 figure in nearly all ^{the} popular old legends (28). The Orthodox liturgy is also formulated on the basis of nine set points, though variable elements may intervene between them - according to the seasons, days, feasts to celebrate or saints to venerate. The Church of Saint Basil the Blessed, built in the Kremlin in 1550 - 1560, by Ivan IV, the Threatening, in commemoration of his Kazan victory, - this masterpiece of Russian architecture, which was a creation of Barma and Postnik - represents a group of nine churches, one beside the other, and crowned by nine bulbous domes. Let us not forget, either, that the ceremonies connected with the Eleusinian mysteries lasted nine days, and finally, that Apollo presided over a group of nine Muses.

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(27) It is said that, when duly developed, the pineal gland assumes a bulbous shape. This is why the Russian architectural tradition gives this characteristic form to church - domes.

(28) Ref.: J. Polivka's interesting article: "The Numbers 9 and 3x9 in the Tales of the Eastern Slavs" (in French) in the Revue des Etudes Slaves, Paris, 1927, t.VII, pp. 217 - 223. Ref.: also Afanasieff, Poetical Representations of Nature in the Ancient Slavs (in Russian), in 3 vols., St-Petersbourg, 1865-69.

Let us go back to the schema. Here it is in its correct form:



The difference between the two diagrams is obvious. Now we will follow up with the commentaries:

These arrows represent the influences created in life by life itself, i.e., the A influences. One may notice that the black arrows cover the whole surface of the circle of life in an almost equal manner. As with all the forces radiating from Nature, their effect is inversely proportionate to the square of the distance, thus, man mainly suffers the influence of the arrows of his immediate entourage, and is permanently at the mercy of their momentary result. The man without cannot escape the influence of the A arrows, and buffeted about, he errs within the circle of his life from the time of his birth to his death.

The human lot is thus, placed under the sway of the law of chance, which is formed by the group of A influences. Now, on examining the schema more closely, one will notice that every black arrow is neutralized by another one, which is equal in strength and diametrically opposed to it - so much so, that if they had been left to neutralize each other effectively, their general result would be equal to zero. This signifies that, all together, the A influences are of an illusory nature, though their effect is real. ~~This is why man generally takes them to be the their effect is real.~~ This is why man generally takes them to be the only reality in life.

○ - The esoteric centre, situated outside the general laws of life.
 ← - The B influences. These are the influences that are thrown in to the whirlwind of life from the esoteric centre. Created outside life, these

influences are represented in the schema by white arrows. These arrows are all oriented in the same direction. All together, they form a sort of magnetic field.

Seeing that the A influences cancel each other out, the B influences are, in fact, the only reality in life.



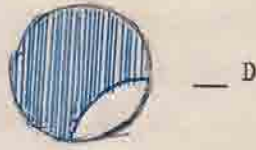
- Man taken separately. In the schema, he is represented by a small circle covered with lines. This signifies that the nature of the involute man is not homogeneous, but mixed.

If a man spends his whole life without being able to distinguish between the A and B influences, he will end it as he began it, that is to say, mechanically, moved by the law of chance. However, because of the force of the momentary result under whose sway he lives, he can even have a brilliant career, become a deputy, minister, scientist, orator or writer; but he will reach the end of his life without having understood or learned anything real. And "dust to dust returns".

In life, every individual is, in fact, subjected to a sort of concurrence-test. If he discerns the existence of the B influences, if he acquires the habit of gathering and absorbing them, and if he aspires to assimilate them more and more, his mixed inner nature will begin to undergo a gradual evolution. And, if his efforts are constant and sufficiently strong, a magnetic centre could begin to take form in him. This magnetic centre is represented in the schema by the small white space.

Once this centre takes form, it will, in turn, exercise an influence on the effects of the still-functioning A arrows. A deviation then takes place; and it can be violent. It constitutes a transgression of the general Law of life, and provokes conflicts in and around the man. If he loses the battle, he comes out convinced that the B influences are only an illusion, and that the A influences represent the sole reality. Gradually, the magnetic centre that was formed in him will dissolve disappear. His new situation will then be worse than the former one in which he could hardly discern the B influences.

But, if he comes out victorious from this first struggle, his magnetic centre, consolidated and reinforced, will draw him towards a man of C influences - stronger than himself, and possessing a more powerful magnetic centre. Thus, through successive links, he will be connected to the esoteric centre E (the man of C influences being in touch with a man of D influences, and so on).

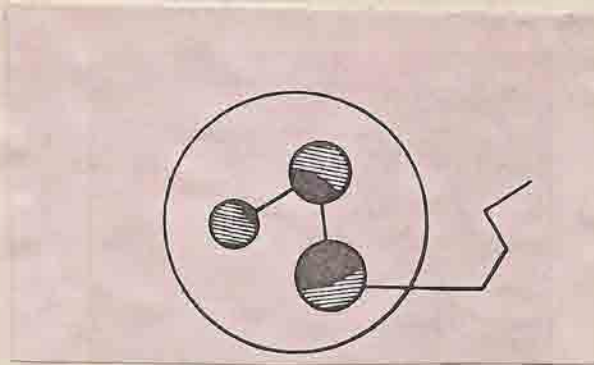


Thenceforth, in life, the man will never again be isolated. Of course, he will continue to live under the sway of the A influences for a long time to come; but, little by little, thanks to the effect of the chain influence B-C-D-E, his magnetic centre will develop more and more, and as it grows, he will escape from the hold of the law of chance and enter into the domain of consciousness.

If he arrives at this result before his death, he can say that his life has not been lived in vain.

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Let us now study the very same diagram from a different aspect:



This second schema with the black magnetic centres, represents the case of the man who is mistaken, and who, while imagining that he is absorbing the B influences, is actually selectively taking in the A influences, or black arrows, which are, in a way, parallel to the white arrows of the B influences.

This will also lead him to contact other people possessing magnetic centres of the same nature, who are also mistaken, or who mislead others. These have no direct or indirect link with the esoteric Centre.

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The reader may ask. How can a man avoid falling into the second category ?

The reply is simple : the magnetic centre must be kept scrupulously pure from the very beginning, and all along the evolutionary road.

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Our commentary on the schema is not exhaustive. An assiduous student will understand the system even better after having meditated upon it. He will find that this schema comprise ^a whole series of human laws that are revealed in the Gospel in the form of parables or allusions.

V

I do not pretend that this necessarily brief study contains a complete analysis of the "Gurdjieff phenomenon" or of Ouspensky's work. I will be satisfied if it incites the disciples of one or the other to reconsider their impressions ^{or} experiences.

I have also written this for the students of Geneva University who, for the last three years, have been attending my lectures on the esoteric Tradition in the Oriental Orthodoxy.

Personally, I have always thought that the Gurdjieff case was a failure - especially after the automobile accident of 1924. Was he tempted by money, women or a dream of "power" ? He evoked for me a fallen angel. Sometimes, it seemed to me that he was looking for some resistance - and did not find any at all...

Gurdjieff was not a clairvoyant. And, when in Constantinople, he thought it would strengthen his "Institute" to associate himself with a famous medium, who was the wife of a Russian diplomat. Right after the preliminary meetings, she presumptively declined to collaborate with him.

It is my opinion that Gurdjieff never wholly recovered his physical and moral capacities after his first automobile accident. And, if one concedes that this accident was already the result of preceding deviations - since it was followed up by others - one must conclude that he was never able to surmount this divergent spirit right up to the end.

All said and done, he was not a "thau^maturge" like Cagliostro or Rasputin. Such charlatanges of this kind do not die. They are killed. Gurdjieff was not of the same stuff; he died, as we know, of dropsy.

-What do you want, he used to say vehemently to newcomers.

- Do you want to die like a dog ?

He followed this up by telling them that there was a means of escape - and that he knew it.

Did he escape himself ?

As for Ouspensky, he died because his kidneys stopped functioning. What was the cause of his illness ? - Perhaps his excessive consumption of wine and alcohol? In the 1920's, when he came from London to Paris, a dinner with him was always followed up by an all-night drinking session.

These are the facts, and the facts are sad.

Esoteric research involves a particularly difficult, even perilous road. As the student advances, obstacles and temptations - prelesti, in the Orthodox Tradition, rise up to bar the road. They take place on different planes, and at the most unexpected times. These are trials. They sometimes appear in an agreeable form: women, money or unmerited success, followed up, of course, by pride and conceit. If these do not succeed, they take on a disagreeable form, chiefly conveyed through one's closest relatives or immediate circle. Is it not written: And a man's foes shall be they of his own household ? (29)...If one falls into the trap, one has to start all over again from zero. And this time, it will be even more difficult. Or, if the temptation is an agreeable one, even only apparently, one leaves the straight and narrow path and follows the broad one leading to destruction...The law is explicit : there is no half measure.

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A practical question may arise: what attitude should students adopt towards the "Gurdjieff phenomenon" and Ouspensky's Fragments ? - The attentive reader will easily find the response in the contents of our study : in the first case, it is necessary to separate the message from the messenger; and in the second, to go beyond the inquiring stage. The example we have given higher up shows that, in this way, one can manage to discover and eliminate errors.

There is a fable that is well-known everywhere in the Orient. It is said that there exists a race of particularly noble swans, which is that of the Royal Swan. And if one places a recipient containing milk and water before him, he separates the milk, drinks it, and leaves the water aside. Students should adopt this attitude.

Finally, those amongst them who have benefited - or are benefiting - from the message, should be grateful to the messenger and to his interpreter. If they know how to pray, let them pray for the souls of the latter.

[29] Matthew, X, 36; Micah, VII, 6.