

MAX HEINDEL'S MESSAGE

The Nature and Symbolism of the Soul

ACCORDING TO ANCIENT IDEAS

IT WAS THE DICTUM of Aristotle that in infancy the soul of man differed in nothing from that of the brutes, but then he admits that one animal alone, man, can reflect and deliberate, and the latter statement has found most favor with modern philosophers. Thus we are now informed that the brute is sensitive but not self-conscious, and powers and faculties are continually pointed to in man which, it is positively asserted, can be found in none lower than himself. Have the people who make such statements ever visited the chamber of thought of the lower animals, we wonder, and if they have not how can they speak of the mystery of mind with such assurance.

Plato postulated a soul of the passions and a soul of the knowing faculties, each soul having its own seat in the body and each its peculiar motions. Even Aristotle, his materialistic opponent, has his souls, vegetable, sentient, and rational. Under all Grecian physiology and psychology lay the assumption that whatever is self-motional has life or soul. Matter was admitted to be essentially inactive and thus it became necessary to suppose a vital agent where activity was manifested, and that equally in the case of mere physical function, sentience, or intellect. This was the supposition on which rested, alike, Plato's two kinds of souls and Aristotle's three souls, for to so much the theory of the last-mentioned philosopher seems very



Detail, marble relief, seventh century, Museo Civico, Pavia, Lombardy

Christian souls, figured as two peacocks, traditional symbols of eternity, drink from a chalice containing the water (blood) of life. Above, a dove feeds from grapes imbued with the life of the solar Christ, Him Who said, "I am the true vine."

nearly, if not literally, to amount.

Galen limited the term *soul* to the agent of sentient and intelligent functions and made Nature the operator in the simply physical. But Aristotle reigned over the schools and his doctrine of the vegetable, sentient, and rational souls, variously modified, may be traced in many medical physiological theories down to our very present times. It was substantially one with the *Archaeus* or governing principle of Paracelsus' philosophy and the animating and organizing principle of Harvey. Still later, Muller has modified the conception into an organic force which exists even in the germ and creates in it the essential part of the future animal. Haeckel and others, who try to get away entirely from the principle of the soul, are yet forced to reckon with it as a vital principle underlying all physical manifestations.

The immortal Christian soul has become figured both by the peacock and the dove and more frequently by the latter. We may see the disciples of our Lord represented as doves on the apsidial cross

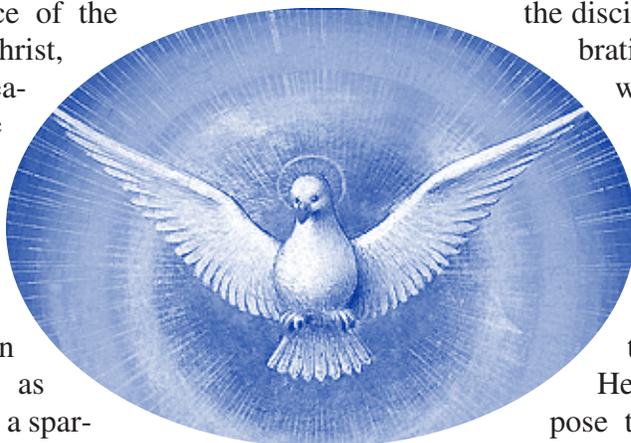
This writing may be viewed as a companion piece to the article Psyche (Rays July/August 1996). Neither is contained in Heindel books and both show the author's deep interest in the soul as the subject of myth and science of the spirit.

in S. Clemente. Christian souls are found figured as doves on mural tablets, on baptismal fonts, and on sarcophagi. Less frequently they appear as peacocks, rarely on sarcophagi, however, and even in pre-Christian times they were thus represented on the walls of sepulchral chambers. In the scenes of the Paradise of Osiris on a sarcophagus in the museum of the Vatican are two doves on a cross surrounded by the monogram of Christ in a wreath. This device may be frequently seen.

On the unique ivory tabernacle preserved in the Sacristy of the Cathedral of Sens we see a pine cone taking the place of the cross or the diagram of Christ, and on each side of it a peacock, representing not the souls of Christians merely, but the souls of martyrs, for each peacock has a small palm branch attached to its neck.

The conventional Egyptian symbol for the soul was, as every archaeologist knows, a sparrow-hawk with a human head. In latter times and among the Romans the souls of the departed in the Paradise of Osiris were figured as doves and peacocks. In a fresco painting that once existed at Pompeii (a copy of which was engraved at Naples in 1833) souls symbolized as doves and peacocks are represented as perched on sacred palm and peach trees in the Paradise of Osiris and Isis. In this fresco was also represented the heron, the symbol, according to Vicomte de Rouge, of the first transformation of the soul in this mysterious Paradise.

There was then for this purpose a certain identical meaning connected with the symbol of the peacock and that of the dove. The dove of Venus was crucified on a wheel with four spokes, the dove called also Inyx. In correlation with these symbols there occurs the story of Semiramis, described to have fled away and been changed into a dove when conquered by Staurobates who had threatened to nail her to a cross, which is identified with the four spoked wheel in the eternal crucifixion of Ixion and the wheel of execution described by Pindar.



The dove crucified on a wheel-cross is curious as an ancient pre-Christian symbol, but in Christian symbols two doves on the cross are frequently seen. It is more than probable there is another meaning to the dove symbol than that it merely represents the soul. Jesus' baptism in Jordan was a baptism of water and spirit, for when Jesus rose out of the water the Universal Christ descended upon him as a dove and from that time on he was animated by a different spirit, imbued with cosmic wisdom.

Similarly when the spirit descended upon the disciples at the Pentecostal celebration they also were gifted with spiritual powers not previously possessed by them, and only those who have evolved such faculties are really entitled to the dove symbol, such as was afterwards given to the disciples of Christ.

Hence it is reasonable to suppose that that symbol was only given to initiates whose spiritual powers had been developed, to be used in the service of humanity. But if we apply the myth of Argus as an index to the meaning of the peacock symbol it shows the awakened soul which uses its powers for a base purpose. Argus, according to mythology, had a hundred eyes and was endowed with a most wonderful all-penetrating power of observation—clairvoyance, in fact. But instead of using this power of the soul for the benefit and the service of humanity, he prostituted his spiritual sight to imprison a fellow creature, and for that reason Mercury, the god of wisdom, decapitated him and placed his eyes on the plumes of the peacock. In other words, the misuse of his spiritual powers for a base purpose caused him to be deprived of them and made him a helpless creature, arrogant and vain as a peacock, a pitiable creature despite all its gorgeous plumage.

Knowledge is good if it is of the right kind and rightly used for altruistic and helpful purposes, but it is very dangerous to be wise as a serpent if one is not also harmless as a dove. □

The Dove of the Holy Ghost, illumination from a prayer book, Tours, 16th century, Pierpont Morgan Library