

## Goethe's The Mysteries— An Interpretation

### Part 1

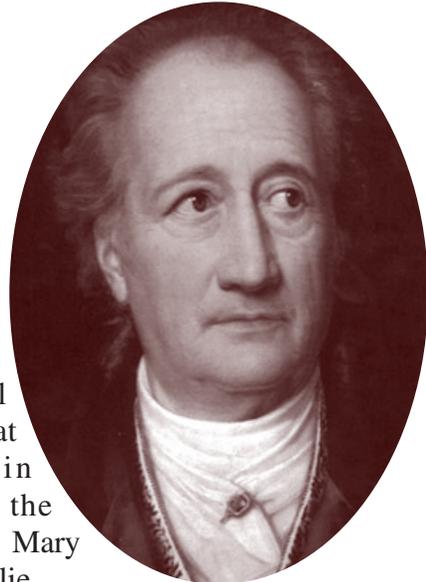
**W**HEN in the fourteenth century the great individual who is venerated under the symbolical name *Christian Rose Cross* founded the Rosicrucian Order, he foresaw the trend of Western civilization in the direction of materialism and, together with a circle of twelve Brothers, took steps to counteract this trend, which they saw would threaten not only the soul-life of the human race but the very existence of the planet itself.

At the same time that they worked to emancipate the human intellect from materialism, the Brothers of the Rose Cross worked with equal force to break the chains of ecclesiastical dogma which bound the human Spirit in ignorance and servile superstition.

A third labor involved the saving of the ancestral culture of Europe from annihilation, for they saw that it was neither right nor necessary for Western civilization to be separated from its own psycho-spiritual roots. Christianity was introduced into Gaul, Britain, and Germany in the first, second, and third centuries by Greek-speaking missionaries, of whom legend preserves for us, as the earliest of these missionaries, Joseph of Arimathea, named as

*Max Heindel called the German poet, scientist, and philosopher Wolfgang von Goethe an Initiate. The Fellowship's founder quotes from a number of Goethe's writings (especially Faust) in many of his books (see p. 5). In The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception Heindel identifies the influence of "the Founder of the Rosicrucian Mystery School....In the works of the immortal Goethe and the masterpieces of Wagner" (pp. 518-519). Beginning with this issue, the Rays will reprint a series of articles that Ann Barkhurst wrote for the Rays in 1962 and 1963 on Goethe's "The Mysteries" (Die Geheimnisse), which has a specific Rosicrucian content.*

the founder of the first Christian Mystery School in the West, at Glastonbury in Britain, while the relics of Mary Magdalene still lie, so church legend



*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

has it, at Vezelay in France, which was then Gaul. We also understand from church legends that Linus, Bishop of Rome after Peter, was sent by Peter to Gaul, but, he, too, represented not Latin but Greek Christianity in the esoteric or Gnostic form, which was basic to the entire primitive church in all its five Patriarchates.

The Christianity of this early School never sought to destroy the Mysteries native to Europe and the Isles, and therefore the circled cross of the Sun cults was readily interpreted in terms of the Cross of Golgotha and the glorious Christ Archangel of the esoteric Christian tradition. Observe here the significance of the fact that the Druids, before the advent of Christianity, had already taken to writing their own Celtic tongue in the Greek characters; for Greek culture flourished in Gaul when it was dying at Athens, thanks to several Greek universities established at various places—one of them that same Marseille where Joseph and his party first landed on their flight from Jerusalem. The same conditions obtained at Alexandria in Egypt, where the Greek culture was nourished; and in Egypt, also, the ancient Egyptian tongue came to be written in the Greek characters,

giving rise to the Coptic language in which the Egyptian Gnostics wrote their sacred texts.

Evidence of these truths sometimes comes to light in a surprising way. A number of years ago quilted bedspreads were on exhibit in London which testify to the persistency, if only in symbol, of the ancient wisdom of which we have spoken. The bedspreads were decorated with what we would call Rosicrucian symbols, and they were made in Wales according to a centuries-old custom!

Archeology has yet to show that Britain and Gaul, and perhaps Germany, produced its own Gnosis during the early centuries; but historians are well aware that this possibility exists, and Robert Graves, in *The White Goddess*, does prove, as we think, the existence of a Celtic Christianity older than King Arthur, and rightly points out that the antagonism of the Church of Rome toward these Arthurian and Grail legends was in fact a warfare against a heresy which was older and more directly in touch with primitive Christianity than Rome had ever been. The belief that the Grail was at Glastonbury was a challenge to the supremacy of the Church at Rome; for it meant simply this, that “the true esoteric Christianity is here with us!”

The circled cross, in its two forms, Greek and Latin so-called, had been a sacred symbol from earliest times in Europe. Both Greeks and Celts had such a cross; the Greek cross proper (with equal arms) was associated with St. George, who was a popular saint of the Eastern Church before Constantine made Christianity the official cult of the Roman Empire in the fourth century. There is reason to believe that it goes back still earlier than this, to some unknown soldier-martyr and teacher who comes in the line of that centurion in the New Testament of whom Christ Jesus said: “Verily, I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel,” and of that other soldier who stood by the cross, spear in hand, and said: “Truly this man was the Son of God.”

Why does a certain Arthurian legend make so much mystery of who it is that lies buried under a white stone marked with a red cross? Malory's *Morte d' Arthur* gives the answer, for he shows that the red cross on Galahad's white shield had been drawn by Joseph, son of Joseph of Arimathea, in



N.C. Wyeth, illustration for Sidney Lanier's *The Boy's King Arthur*

***Excalibur is Proffered by the Lady of the Lake***

*Arthur is given both a mandate and the means to realize it from higher powers (sword), is guided by impulses from the World of Life Spirit (water element—the unformed), and receives counsel through the occult knowledge of Merlin, as swans, symbols of initiation and “the highest spiritual influence” (Heindel), witness the baptism of a new mystery school.*

his own blood when he lay dying; and in the same work Malory calls Joseph of Arimathea “the first Bishop in Christendom.” And we read in another place that Longinus, the Roman soldier who watched Christ Jesus die, was also of Joseph's party when he landed in Britain.

The Celtic cross is a Latin-type cross with a circle superimposed. Not the Celts alone, other northern people also had a circled cross. The Lithuanians up into the seventeenth century still knew that these circled crosses were pre-Christian, and the last High Priest of the old Sun cult immolated himself on a funeral pyre in an effort to save his people and their religion. It is indeed obvious that the circled cross is associated with such astronomical cults as built the circle of stones at Stonehenge and elsewhere.

But when the Church of Rome converted, by

guile or by force, the rulers of Europe to allegiance to the Bishop of Rome, the new-style Latin Christianity launched upon a policy of warfare against the surviving cults of the Old Christianity.

It need not surprise us, therefore, that King Arthur, who was not at first subject to the Bishop of Rome, bore the image of the Virgin on his banner; nor need we repudiate as fable the quest of the Grail undertaken by his knights. The Grail legends make it plain indeed that the House of the Holy Grail was somewhere in Britain at this time, and that it was not merely the ancient Goddess with her cauldron who was worshiped but the Celestial Virgin as imaged in the Virgin Mary and exalted by the Celtic and Gothic Christians in much the same way that the Greek Orthodox Church exalts "Sancta Sophia" to this day. For it was at this time that the Autumn Equinox began to fall in the constellation Virgo, which is shaped like a great cup or goblet.

In bloody persecution that lasted for centuries, the old religion with its Greco-Christian additions was driven underground. Yet it managed to survive, despite Catholic and Protestant persecutors. For Lutheranism was, in fact, little more than a reformed Roman Catholicism. It was by no means a resurrected "Old" Christianity, such as was brought over in the first century A.D. by Joseph of Arimathea and St. Paul, or even by Linus from Rome.

Not until the 18th century, when science was rapidly freeing itself from church domination, did the clock of the centuries strike the hour for the

*\*Dr. Morton Smith, assistant professor of history at Columbia University, related his discovery (circa 1960) of evidence to show that the author of the earliest gospel, Mark, also wrote a secret gospel for initiates only. The writing, found copied into the back of a book published in 1646, in a monastery near Jerusalem, was a quotation from a letter purportedly written by Clement of Alexandria of the second century A.D. The letter refers to a secret gospel, a gospel so secret that the receiver is enjoined to deny knowledge of it even under oath. According to this writing, Mark's Gospel written at Rome under Peter's instruction did not include certain secret matters, most important of which related to Lazarus. Church legend has it that Mark founded the church at Alexandria, and according to this letter of Clement, he left his secret Gospel to the Alexandrians. Other scholars seem to concur with Dr. Smith that this letter of Clement may be an authentic copy of the original, for it corresponds in vocabulary and style to known writings of Clement.*

ancient wisdom of Europe to come forth once again into the light. It came, however, in a new guise, which included within itself all aspects of the esoteric cults that had gone before, since the raising of Lazarus from the tomb; for the raising of Lazarus was, from the beginning, the nexus of the new esoteric Christianity, as recent antiquarian findings have shown.\*

It was the young Wolfgang von Goethe who was chosen for this new labor, at a time when he was associated with a certain mystical society into which he was inducted by a friend, the Fraulein von Klettenberg, who proved to be an inspired teacher for the young poet in his most sensitive and impressionable years. Herself a mystic who had beheld the Christ in a vision, Fraulein von Klettenberg longed for the time when all her friends should have this wonderful experience. But Goethe was by nature occultist rather than mystic; and we readily observe how a new force enters his consciousness at this time, which is distinct and apart from the heart-awareness of his first teachers, but which in a strange way, clearly reinforces that awareness by means of egoic powers working through the intellect, to channel and clarify the ecstatic seizures of the mystic. He becomes the agent and messenger of this new force, which he is careful not to name, but which is nevertheless named by indirection; and he gives himself up to the pursuit of alchemy into which he had also been led by Fraulein von Klettenberg. Dr. Metz, a member of the mystic circle, had furthered the young man's recovery from a serious illness with a "panacea," and Goethe proceeded to try to discover the formula of this panacea for himself by experiment in his own laboratory, in the attic of his father's house, but without success, as might be expected.

Goethe later introduced the new concepts in a poem entitled *The Mysteries (Die Geheimnisse: Ein Fragment)*, consisting of forty-four eight-line stanzas, with the rhyme scheme *ab, ab, ab, cc*. The poem was never completed, and the reader is left to conjecture as to why it was not completed. Was it stopped from a change of attitude or interest? Or were the concluding stanzas written and then destroyed because of the esoteric content which

was not suitable to publication at that time? May we not hope that the mystery which could not be published then may be published now, “restored,” as the archeologists say, or drawn out of the existing fragment, by developing the esoteric concepts and drawing the lines of action to their ultimate logical conclusion, in the light of knowledge vouchsafed us since Goethe’s day?

We believe that this can be done; we can, at any rate, make the attempt.

There is no really adequate translation of this poem, *Die Geheimnisse*, in English, for subtle philosophical nuances are sacrificed to the exigencies of rhyme and meter, and we will therefore adhere more closely to the original verses, translated quite literally, in order to bring to the light the many profound meanings hidden in the original.

We will first take the foreword and the opening stanzas of *The Mysteries*, in which the neophyte, an envoy from an unnamed brotherhood, arrives in a rocky gorge at the foot of a mountain on whose summit is to be found a monastery where dwell twelve Brothers, and a Thirteenth who is the Head, and whose symbol is a cross wreathed with roses.

The first two stanzas of *Die Geheimnisse* constitute a sort of foreword, in which Goethe calls attention to the esoterics of the poem which is to follow. He says, and we translate with complete literalness: “A song of marvels is prepared for you. Receive it with joy, and call to every man to come hither! Through mount and valley is the Way led. Here the view narrows, there again it is free. And if the Path glides softly into the thickets, think not that this is an error! Shall we not still, when we have climbed enough (persevered to the limit of our endurance), in the right time come near our Goal!”

He continues: “But let no one believe that, with all his intellect (or senses) he will ever be able to decipher this poem entire. Many a man must gain much here; many a blossom brings forth the Mother Earth! One flees hence with somber glance. The other stays, with cheerful mien (or gesture). Each man should, according to his own pleasure, take and enjoy! For many a Wanderer should the fountain flow!”

Now obviously the literary effect in the German

is not like this literal translation which we give. But we are not at the moment trying to be literary; we are only trying to give the basic concepts of the poem, although naturally, in the original there are subtleties which escape a literal rendition.

The poet starts with the open announcement that his poem is addressed to all men everywhere, inviting them to an account of marvellous things. Receive this with joy, take it deep into your heart, into your consciousness; call out so that men far and near may hear of these wonders and attend the wisdom feast. But, the song is not an end in itself. It is only the map of a spiritual journey which you must take for yourself, since no one else can take that journey for you, the map of a journey leading from the lowlands of sense to unimaginable heights of spirit.

The Way is led, the course is laid, by a higher power. It may be that we find ourselves in valleys where the view shrinks; but then again we emerge upon plateaus where the gaze wanders wide and free. And even if it should happen that we seem to be off our course, when the Path loses itself among brambles and thickets so that we cannot see where we are, or where we are going, think not that this is an error! There are no errors, there are no delays, there are no obstructions on this Path which is laid by a Divine Power. Only persevere; continue climbing; and in exactly the right moment of time, we shall come near our Goal

There follows two lines containing a rhetorical question that does not require an answer. Literally, the text is: “We will yet, when we have climbed enough, at the right time come near to the Goal.” But in truth the meaning is more like: “Shall we not still, when we have struggled and persevered enough—that is, to the limit of our strength—in exactly the right moment arrive at the Goal!” The “right time” or “right moment” refers not to the passage of time alone but to the events of the soul world which are the real subject of this poem. The force of the German “wollen” is not “will” but “want, desire”—Do we not yearn for, do we not deeply desire, the Goal; and after hard struggles, faithfully persevering on the upward Path; shall we not, led by Divine Power, arrive at the Goal in exactly the right moment! As St. Paul puts it: “All

things work together for good to them that love God.”

This mystical concept of time is very ancient. It arose, quite naturally, with astronomical observations. Every moment of time has its special work in the cosmic scheme, in which certain events must culminate. “All the times of God come to their term according to what He has decreed concerning them in the Mysteries of His Prudence,” says the Habakkuk Commentary of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

In German, as in English poetry, what is unsaid is as important as what is said, and the reader must be on the alert for all those philosophical subtleties with which the German language is so richly endowed, and which make it the language of the philosopher *par excellence*.

Nevertheless, the poet warns us again, let no one believe that the meaning of this Wonderful Song (*Wunderbares Lied*) lies on the surface. With all the powers of the natural intellect, with all the application of the senses, he warns, you, the reader, will never decipher all that is hidden here. Its wonders have universal significance. For each man who takes to the Path it has a different meaning, a unique value for that man alone. It is right that this should be so. Each man should discover for himself what is there. No two “wanderers” will unearth the same treasure. There is something special for each one. Just as Mother Earth brings forth a multitude of blossoms, and each one chooses for himself the blossom he desires, so in this poem there are many meanings, and each person must choose for himself the meaning that best pleases him. That meaning which he chooses is the right one for him. The Fountain flows for all wanderers alike; and each man drinks according to his capacity.

It may be indeed that for some the Song will have no meaning, convey no message. One man looks into this meadow filled with the variegated blossoms of the soul, this fountain welling up with wisdom, and sees nothing to interest him. With the somber glance of disappointment he turns away, he leaves the Path, and refuses to listen to the Song which for him is meaningless. Yet there is always *one who stays*, one whose innermost Self hears the call of Truth from the mountaintop—the one who is ready. (Continued) □

## THE CONCURRENCE OF INITIATES— MAX HEINDEL QUOTES THE WISDOM AND AUTHORITY OF JOHANN GOETHE

*As death is the permanent dissolution of the tie between the physical and spiritual bodies, those who are near death approach the condition existing when severance is about to take place. Goethe, the great German poet, received his first Initiation while his body was prostrated nearly unto death.*

—*Teachings of an Initiate*, p. 154

*[E]very plant gives out a certain keynote which is the sum total of all the noises upon it, blended and harmonized by the indwelling Planetary Spirit. That sound can be heard by the spirit ear. As Goethe says:*

*The sun intones his ancient song  
Mid rival chant of brother spheres;  
His prescribed course he speeds along  
In thunderous way, throughout the years.*

*This, from the first part of Faust, the prologue in heaven. And also in the second part of Faust, spirits of air greet the rising sun with the words:*

*Sound unto the spirit ear proclaims the new born  
day is here;  
Rocky gates are creaking, rattling,  
Phoebus' wheels are rolling, singing—  
What sound intense the light is bringing.*

—*Rosicrucian Philosophy in Questions and  
Answers, Volume I*, pp. 315-316

*[U]nless we are capable of investigating the past history of the human race, we can obtain no clear conception concerning anything connected with mankind. Goethe spoke of ‘Das Ewig Werdende’—the ever becoming. Change is the mainspring of progression, and if we look upon man as he is now, without regard to what he has been, our deductions as to his future must necessarily be very limited.*

—*Letter to Students*, p. 10

*Goethe, the great mystic, fittingly ends his*

version [of Faust] with that most mystic of all stanzas found in literature:

*All that is perishable  
Is but a likeness.  
The unattainable  
Here is accomplished.  
The indescribable,  
Here it is done:  
The Eternal Feminine  
Draws us on.*

*The stanza puzzles all who are not able to penetrate into the realms where it is supposed to be sung, namely, heaven.*

*It speaks of all that is perishable being but a likeness, that is to say, the material forms which are subject to death and transmutation are but a likeness of the archetype seen in heaven. 'The unattainable here is accomplished'—that which seemed impossible on earth is accomplished in heaven. No one knows that better than one able to function in that realm, for there every high and lofty aspiration finds fruition. The indescribable longings, ideas, and experiences of the soul, which even it cannot express to itself, are clearly defined in heaven; the Eternal Feminine, the great Creative Force in Nature, the Mother God, which draws us along the path of evolution, becomes there a reality. Thus the Faust myth tells the story of the World Temple, which the two classes of people are building, and which will be finally the New Heaven and the New Earth prophesied in the Book of Books.*

—**Mysteries Of The Great Operas**, pp. 45-46

*We have already lived through a mineral, plant and an animal-like existence before becoming human as we are today, and beyond us lie still further evolutions where we shall approach the Divine more and more. It will be readily conceded that it is our animal passions which restrain us upon the path of attainment; the lower nature is constantly warring against the higher self. At least in those who have experienced a spiritual awakening, a war is being fought silently within, and is all the more bitter for being suppressed. Goethe, with masterly art, voiced that sentiment in the words of*

*Faust, the aspiring soul, speaking to his more materialistic friend, Wagner:*

*Thou by one sole impulse art possessed,  
Unconscious of the other still remain.  
Two souls, alas, are housed within my breast,  
And struggle there for undivided reign.  
One, to the earth with passionate desire,  
And closely clinging organs still adheres;  
Above the mists the other doth aspire  
With sacred ardor unto purer spheres.*

—**Gleanings of a Mystic**, p. 35

*Thomas à Kempis remarks upon the desire of the majority to live A LONG LIFE, and how few are concerned to live a good life. I might paraphrase this by exclaiming, 'Oh, how many are desirous of attaining spiritual powers, but how few strive to cultivate spirituality!'*

*The story of Faust gives us an insight into what might happen should we exclaim with all the intensity of our whole being, as did he:*

*Oh, are there spirits in the air,  
Who float 'twixt heaven and earth, dominion  
wielding?  
Stoop hither from your golden atmosphere,  
Take me to scenes new life and fuller yielding.  
A magic mantle did I but possess,  
Abroad to waft me as on viewless wings,  
I'd prize it more than any earthly dress,  
Nor change it for the royal robes of kings.*

*By this impatience and desire to get something for nothing, to reap where he has not sown, he attracts to himself a spirit of an undesirable nature, for the inhabitants of the invisible worlds are in nowise different from people here.*

—**How Shall We Know Christ at His Coming**, p.10

*It is always easy to tell others what to do or not to do but very difficult to enforce obedience on ourselves, even though we may intellectually assent to the mandates of conventionality. As Goethe says:*

*From every power that holds the world in chains,*

*Man frees himself when self-control he gains.*  
—**Letters to Students**, p. 89

*[F]rom the customary viewpoint of the man in the street, all the platitudes offered by the religionists cannot make the situation in the so-called "Christian world" less odious. But when we apply the cosmic scale of perspective and measurement, it is different. Goethe says well:*

*Who never ate his bread in sorrow,  
Who never spent the midnight hours  
Weeping, waiting for the morrow,  
He knows ye not ye heavenly powers.*  
—**Letters to Students**, p. 209

*The words of the Earth Spirit to Faust, as given by Goethe, offer splendid material for meditation, for they represent mystically what the candidate feels when he first realizes the actual reality of the Earth Spirit as a living presence, ever actively laboring for our uplift.*

*In the currents of life, in the action of storm,  
I float and wave with billowy motion;  
Birth and the grave, a limitless ocean;  
A constant weaving, with change still rife,  
A restless heaving, a glowing life,  
Time's whizzing loom I've unceasingly trod;  
Thus weave I the living garment of God.*  
—**Mysteries of the Great Operas**, p. 20

*Goethe, who was an Initiate, also showed this [that the Ego is in the blood] in his Faust. Faust is about to sign the compact with Mephistopheles and asks, 'Why not sign with ordinary ink? Why use blood?' Mephisto answers, 'Blood is a most peculiar essence.' He knows that who has the blood has the man; that without the warm blood, no Ego can find expression.*  
—**The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception**, p. 145

*It is axiomatic that 'The oftener we die, the better we live.' The Poet-Initiate, Goethe says:*

*Who has not this—  
Ever dying and bringing to birth—*

*Will aye remain a sorry guest  
Upon this dismal earth.*

*and Paul says 'I die daily.'*  
—**The Rosicrucian Cosmo-Conception**, p. 249

*It is easy to bid others do this and that, but to enforce obedience from oneself is the hardest task in the world, and it has been truly said that 'the man who conquers himself is greater than he who takes a city.' Goethe, the great initiate poet, gives us the reason why in the lines:*

*From every power that holds the world in chains,  
Man frees himself when self-control he gains.*  
—**Rosicrucian Christianity Lectures**, pp. 59-60

*Goethe also, in his novel, Elective Affinities, (Wahlverwandtschaft), brings out some beautiful illustrations wherein he makes it seem as if atoms loved and hated, from the fact that some elements combine readily while other substances refuse to amalgamate, a phenomenon produced by the different rates of speed at which various elements vibrate and an unequal inclination of their axes.*  
—**Rosicrucian Mysteries**, p. 41

*Thus we have in that drama [Faust], as represented by Goethe, a perfect symbol of the Western teaching that there is both the forgiveness of sins and the expiation of a wrong act by a corresponding right act. Death is something that comes to all and the suffering which was incident to the wrong act in each case is surely none the less in the case of Faust, where it was prolonged over a long period of years, than in the case of Marguerite, where the life is ended in a much shorter time. The only difference is that Faust has overcome consciously and will in future life be immune to temptation, while the case of Marguerite is problematical. In a future earth life she will yet have to meet temptation in order that it may be made manifest whether or not she has developed the strength of character requisite to withstand the wrong and adhere to the right.*

—**The Rosicrucian Philosophy in Questions and Answers, Volume 1**, p. 44 □