




THE ROSE
IMMORTAL

A BOTHWELL
GOSSE 



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BY

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TO
THE MEMORY OF
JOHN YARKER

FOREWORD

THIS is, as far as I am aware, the first time that the symbolism of the Rose has been treated by an English writer with a consciousness of the universality of its mystic import. The Blessed Henry Suso and Dante were as familiar with the emblematic significance of the Rose as Jelal-ed-Din-Rumi and Saadi. So also was the Egyptian initiate who knelt at the shrine of Isis, and saw in the Rose a symbol of the mystery of Life. The cathedral builders of the Middle Ages adopted this symbol, carved in stone, to typify Mary the Mother of God as the Rose

Queen of the World. The Rose has linked together East and West, being recognized by all alike as a symbol of the Path towards Divine Perfection as well as of the Goal of Attainment itself. The particular significance of the Rose has varied in the language of the mystics according to its colour. Thus the Red Rose, the White Rose, the Golden Rose, and the Black Rose have each their special connotations; while variations of meaning are drawn from the number and arrangement of the petals and the essence and fragrance of the perfume.

To the great Saints and Seers the Rose has ever been the symbol of Divine Union, while to those who are in an earlier stage of the Divine Adventure it speaks in the first

place of mingled joy and sorrow. The Rose being the Flower of Flowers, naturally represents the greatest gift of God to man—the knowledge of Himself. The union of the Rose and the Cross in the symbol of the Rosicrucians indicates that Divine Perfection can be attained through Love and Suffering alone.

Within the narrow compass of these few pages it has been the aim of the author to trace the evolution of this beautiful symbol among the different faiths of mankind, and to show how its varying interpretation has served to bring out the meaning underlying the mysticism of all religions.

I trust that this unique little contribution to the library of the Mystic will meet with

the appreciation and friendly reception of that limited but discriminating public to which all such writings are addressed.

RALPH SHIRLEY.

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“O Splendour of God, whereby I saw the lofty triumph of the truthful realm, give me the power to tell how I beheld it.

A light there is up yonder, which maketh the Creator visible to the creature, who only in beholding him, hath its own peace; and it so far outstretcheth circle-wise that its circumference would be too loose a girdle for the sun. All its appearance is composed of rays reflected from the top of the First Moved, which draweth thence its life and potency.

. . . mounting o'er the light, around, around, mirrored in more than a thousand ranks I saw all that of us hath won return up yonder.

And if the lowest step gathereth so large a light within itself, what then the amplitude of the rose's outmost petals?

Within the yellow of the eternal rose, . . . me—
Beatrice drew.”

DANTE.

The Rose Immortal

CHAPTER I

THE PATH

“Take a leaf from my rose-garden.
A flower endures but five or six days,
But this rose-garden is always delightful.”

SAADI.

WHAT rose do you wear? That is the strange question frequently addressed to the traveller to-day, when wandering among the palm trees by the blue waters of the Nile or when travelling over the scorching sands of Arabia, he is met by a Sheikh, who, thinking he is destined perhaps for the same goal, falls into converse with him. The reply is awaited with suspense, for this question is not what it seems; it is no mere enquiry

about a flower, but is indeed fraught with a deep significance. The hoped-for answer is a password to confidence, for it declares the goal and at the same time indicates the road by which it may be reached.

“What rose do you wear” is the occult form of asking,—To what Esoteric school do you belong? What Path do you tread?

The goal the travellers strive to reach is not of earth. The way thereto has divers names, varying with the land and the people; some call it the quest for God, others know it as Initiation; but to all, finally, it is Union with the Supreme. The schools are many, the paths are various,—endless adaptations for the convenience of the wayfarer,—but the end is ever the same, “for the path men take from every side is Mine.”

This ineffable consummation is typified by

the Rose. A hieroglyph which is universal is intelligible whatever the language and the race, so the "flower of flowers" became the symbol of Union, understood of all who beheld it. It became the symbol of the Mysteries by which the goal is attained, and likewise of the different schools or roads on which the disciples travel towards the Divine.

Further subtleties of meaning arose; the form, the number and arrangement of the petals, the beautiful colours, the essence and the intoxicating perfume, each bore a definite significance and had its own interpretation, until the system of the symbolism developed into a veritable language of flowers understood by the mystics of all lands. Used in its most elaborate form by the Sufis in the East, the Persian saint and the Arabian poet comprehend it; none the less it belongs to no one

age or clime. In infinitely remote times, thousands of years before our era, the Egyptian Initiate kneeling at the shrine of Isis knew the Rose as symbol of her Mysteries and her power. In the Middle Ages the pious cathedral builders of Europe wrought the Rose symbolism into carved stonework of most exquisite perfection, for the Church had taught them that Mary the Mother of God was the Rose Queen of the World.

In the imagery of the Orient, combined with the Rose symbolism is found that of the Cup; very often indeed the terms are synonymous, or again the many uses and meanings of the "Cup" are woven (as it were) into a parallel allegory, wherein the same high teachings are revealed to those who have 'ears to hear.'

On the other hand, in the divine wisdom of the West, the Cross is inseparable from the Rose; both play a prominent part in the ritual of worship which conveys by these symbols a profound belief in many mysteries, and this faith is reflected in the form and ornamentation of ecclesiastical architecture.

To-day and yesterday, in countries far and near, those who "have taken the Rose" have the emblem enshrined for ever in their hearts; so East and West, partaking of the same knowledge, in the possession of the same symbol at once beautiful and profound, can join hands as "comrades of the Rose." Cloistered monk and frenzied dervish both see in it a pledge of the devotion of their lives, and know that the "Rose on the head honours the wearer—it points to the Path."

CHAPTER II

THE GOAL

"Only the bird of the morning knoweth the worth of the book of the rose; for not everyone who readeth the page understandeth the meaning."

HAFIZ.

THE "Rose on the head" points to the Path, that path which finally leads to the rose enshrined for ever in the heart; the reflection in each fragment of humanity of the Rose of the World. Narrow is the way and straight is the gate leading to this inmost sanctuary, and it is reached by going *within*. That is why it is so difficult to find, and when found so hard to follow, so full of hindrances and obstacles. The *without*, the external attracts us, while we fain would turn *within* to the internal. Like Mr. Facing-

both-ways the position is impossible; one way or the other must be relinquished, to choose either will bring peace, because with definite choice the struggle ends, but between the two kinds of peace there is no comparison, one is temporal and the other leads to life everlasting. The external belongs to the three dimensional world of form, the internal belongs to another plane. Between them is a boundary, all exoteric teachings lead up to this boundary where the true Path begins. When this line is reached and overpassed all outward forms seem secondary, for the goal, although far off, is clearly seen. Form belongs to the physical and is no longer necessary when that is transcended. The rites and ceremonies of various religions are external aids only, and being realized as such become matters of indiffer-

ence. They are merely the signposts pointing out the way, the gateways in the barrier between the unreal and the real, and are no longer needed when the gate is entered and the frontier crossed. In this unknown land man's spirituality asserts itself, he enters into his own kingdom, into the empire of the spirit; *reality* is touched for the first time, and with it comes the realization of the nearness of the Master.

Companionship with others who have embarked on the same high endeavour keeps the holy fire alight in the heart and, where possible, association with those who are further advanced or who have already attained the goal, is a great stimulation to spiritual growth. In a very literal sense it is good for the novice to be with the disciple, and for the disciple to sit at the feet of the

Master! Saadi, who was a great mystic, expresses this subtle influence very beautifully: "One day a piece of scented clay was handed to me. I addressed it thus, 'Art thou ambergris or musk, for I am charmed with thy delicate perfume?' It replied, 'I was but a worthless piece of clay, but for a while I associated with the Rose and so partook of the sweetness of my companion.'"

But there is no vicarious attainment; hard work in character-building alone ensures progress, so, pressing on towards the goal of his high calling, the postulant now replaces exoteric observances by an inner ritual of prayer, contemplation, meditation and above all devotion. Valuable indeed are the first, for the practice of them gives one-pointedness and steadiness to the mind and thus makes it an efficient instrument. The fire of

devotion burns up the dross of self ; in loving he gives himself, so love alone frees him from himself. "Only in its love has the heart its life ; only in its love has the soul its felicity" ; and the sole end of meditation is to love ever more perfectly. Therefore by devotion, meditation and contemplation the pilgrim on the Path abstracts himself from the external, frees himself from space and time and so passes into the centre of his own being, where, offered upon the altar of his heart, his adoration and oblations of praise continuously ascend to the throne of the Most High.

In this secret realm within himself take place those mystic experiences of the soul which are called initiations.

From the outer court of this temple of the heart, receding ever further within, veil after veil is penetrated, until the shrine is reached,

where is consummated the final ineffable mystery of the union of the spirit with the Supreme. To adore Him, to commune with Him in spirit, to approach near to Him in this life is the supreme object of the devotee; more even than the object, it is the *destiny* of the aspirant and to this alone he consecrates his life. To attain union with God, *that* is the goal of the mysteries of the Sacred Heart, the mysteries of the Rose.

CHAPTER III

THE RED ROSE OF SORROW

“Without taking up the illusory
One cannot reach to the true ;
Without enduring the torment of the thorn
One cannot gain the rose.”

“Oh heart ! of separation complain not, for in the world
Grief is and joy ; the thorn and the rose ; degradation
and exaltation.”

HAFIZ.

AMONG the roses of the world, red is *par excellence* the true colour, and in common parlance the red rose stands for love and pleasure, but as a sacred symbol the red rose typifies sorrow. This seems contradictory, but in essence it is reasonable, for one view expresses the opinion of the world, and the other the judgment of the spirit.

At first the novice grasps at illusory joy

but later recognizes that true joy rests not in anything of earth ; he has made the first step by discovering that "the rose is not without the thorn nor the honey without the poison." The illusory is at first taken for the real and ecstatically embraced but the hidden thorn soon becomes manifest, and what was held to be heaven is seen to be only a phantasm of the real, so gradually the red rose becomes the emblem of that stage, which has to be endured sooner or later by all who seek. In one of his poems George Herbert expresses the truth clearly :

"What is fairer than a rose?
What is sweeter? Yet it purgeth.

So this flower doth judge and sentence
Worldly joys to be a scourge ;
For they all produce repentance,
And repentance is a purge."

And repentance takes the neophyte into the wilderness! There he wanders in bitterness of heart for a longer or shorter time according to his temperament and his facility for profiting by experience, and when the lesson is learned "the wilderness and solitary places shall be glad for them; and the desert shall blossom as the rose."

But there are no resting-places on the Path, and the time of peace and joy will probably be brief for trials come thick and fast as progress is made, and the periods of temptation become longer and more severe as strength and earnestness of purpose are developed. Although the obstacles and difficulties seem to increase these are more than compensated for by the ever-growing consciousness of the Divine Presence. The hermits of old, and many of the greatest

saints of the Middle Ages, deeming that life did not bring them sufficient opportunity, tortured their bodies and practised the severest austerities, to the end that they might live in the spirit only. Even in these modern days, such is the ardent passion of some devout souls that they force the development of heavenly wisdom by similar artificial trials and self-inflicted penalties. In the East the dervishes follow the same method, and with a quaint humour they give the name of "Rose" to the instruments with which they torture themselves in their frenzy! To the early initiations, crowned with roses goes the candidate in joy, but these roses wither with the hot breath of the desert which has to be traversed before the goal is reached, and this land of utter loneliness is full of thorns.

On this mystic journey from initiation to initiation the pilgrim experiences three great periods of sojourn in the Wilderness.

The *first* piercing of the veil of illusion causes a shock long to be remembered; discouraged and completely disillusioned some go no further; not for forty years do these wander in the desert but for all their lives, and they never see the Promised Land! But to the brave unconquerable soul this is only a check and he again sets out on the quest. Indeed, courage is needed, for the Obscure Night of the human soul dawns once more, bringing with it much suffering. This second conflict is caused by the separated self. Happy indeed are those who at an early stage learned to sacrifice their own will! An old proverb says "there is no royal road to learning" but in this instance it is

falsified, for the Royal Road is love! Self-abnegation, entire obliteration of self, springs from love alone. At this stage of evolution many are but apprentices in this matter and a capacity for love is rarer than a talent for mathematics or any branch of knowledge, but skill in a hundred arts avails not, for "love is the *only one* which will free thee from thyself."

It is the imperfection and flaws caused by self-love that give rise to such poignant suffering when the life of renunciation is entered upon. It is at this point that the symbol of the Cross is joined to the Rose, the Rose of sacrifice stretched upon the Cross. In the Mysteries of the Rosary the devotee always begins by kissing the Cross and thus symbolically accepts the life of *self-sacrifice*, and identifies himself by the kiss of

union with the Eternal Rose. But the realization of this unity is still afar off, and much anguish of heart must be endured before the self is subdued. The lessons taught by suffering and grief unravel many knots and solve many enigmas in life; thus by degrees the red rose of sorrow begins to take on a new aspect as the uses of adversity and the value of pain are clearly understood. At the end it is seen that "the face of the red rose lights the darkness like a lamp" and so by its light the disciple passes through the portals to the next stage.

Joyous in the thought that he has now no will apart from the Divine, he rests awhile in a great tranquillity of soul, and presently goes forward with a serene spirit, firm in the consciousness of the perpetual presence of the Master. But this, which

has been the support, nay the very foundation of his inner life, is suddenly snatched away!

The *Presence* has sustained him through all difficulties and dangers, but the supreme affliction, now to be endured in this last exile in the desert is the withdrawal of the Light. 'I am alive but without life; yet deem it not strange, for who is there that would count the days of *absence*—life?' But he must be stripped of *all* things; his possessions, his knowledge and his ignorance, his sins and his virtues, his weakness and his strength, *himself*:—and then it seems, even his Master deserts him!

Unparalleled indeed in devotion must the soul be, to fulfil this hardest of all commands "with love's pain be content and be silent"—giving all with unstinting loyalty, and receiv-

ing absolutely nothing, a degree to which very few can attain!

For the thorn of separation is impossible to bear; it is the thorn of the desert that of all others wounds the most deeply,—but these thorns rank far above all flowers; it is out of them a crown is woven, a crown which kings alone may wear—more glorious and more wonderful than any crown of roses!

“It was a thorn,
And it stood forlorn
In the burning sun-rise land.
A blighted thorn,
And at eve and morn,
Thus it sighed to the desert sand.

Every flower
By its beauty and power
With a crown of glory is crowned.
No crown have I,
For a crown I sigh,
For a crown I have not found.

A crown, a crown,
A crown of mine own,
To wind in a maiden's hair.
Sad thorn why grieve,
Thou a crown shall weave,
But not for a maiden to wear.

That crown shall shine
When all crowns save thine
With the glory they gave are gone.
For thorn, my thorn,
Thy crown shall be worn,
By the King of Sorrows alone."*

And so the disciple gets him to the weaving of his crown of thorns, for, he who would follow in the divine footsteps must taste of the degradation before he can participate in the exaltation.

Vanished is the security of nearness, and instead, is the fear of the impassable Void; and 'outer darkness' reigns in the place of

* "The Thorn's Lament," by Bulwer Lytton.

inner Illumination. Outcast, abandoned by God and man, he wanders in the waste places of the soul, his heart ever wrung by the knowledge that not for him is the Beatific Vision, not for him the supernal joy of union with the Supreme.

It is the last illusion and the greatest of all, culminating in a profound desolation of spirit expressed for all time in the words of the Christ when He cried out "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

CHAPTER IV

THE WHITE ROSE OF JOY

"In form, then, of a white rose, displayed itself to me the saintly host."

DANTE.

"Happy came the rose and more happy aught is not."

HAFIZ.

AS veil after veil is lifted on the Path, the wayfarer is filled with joy. What greater happiness indeed is there, than for the seeker to have found the Path! According to the Mysteries of the Rosary, white is the colour of the Rose of Joy, and in his vision the saintly host appeared to Dante as a snow-white rose.

At the beginning, with some natures, the earnestness and seriousness of the quest obscure all else, but St. Teresa gives good

advice on this subject :—"Do not imitate those persons who no sooner become somewhat devout than they assume a sour and severe look, as if afraid to talk lest their devotion should take wing." Self-importance plays a considerable part in this attitude, which is born of a kind of self-consciousness and is devoid of simplicity and naturalness. Such long-faced pilgrims are not born devotees; they are still apprentices at what has been termed in mystic utterance 'the game of affection,' which God plays with those who strive to reach Him. Of course everything does not go smoothly all at once in the inner life, and the process of disillusionment, whereby veil after veil which hides Reality is torn away, makes it difficult sometimes to take heart again; but the only way, and it cannot be reiterated too often, is to "become

the captive of love in order to become free, and to lay its sorrows to thy heart that thou mayest know its gladness." To be free from *self* is to be happy and the heart full of love is also full of a simple gaiety, perpetually rejoicing in the newly found treasure of the Divine Presence. After, and even during, the wanderings in the wilderness, glimpses of the Master thus irradiate the soul with joy, so that like Abraham of old in the Mohammedan legend, when he was cast into the fire, the fire becomes "by God's grace and bounty a rose-garden" for him,—full of the roses of joy and gratitude for the grace and the bounty vouchsafed unto him. This is a complete reversion, a seeing of the *other* side of the plan, so that though the anguish is hard to bear the gladness welling up in the heart has so altered the point of view, that even in the

midst of suffering, the disciple is able to exclaim, "O desert, enamelled with the flowers of Christ!"—for the thorns of the desert are recognized now as part of the Divine purpose, beautifully alluded to by St. Jerome as the flowers of Christ.

The condition of enlightenment, which sees no difference between the thorn and the rose is surely imaged as the allegorical Rose of Jericho in the text,* "I was exalted . . . as a rose plant in Jericho." This plant is really a thorn bush, bearing small white flowers. It is also significantly called the Rose of St. Mary, and the legend relates that it opens its branches and flowers upon the eve of our Saviour's nativity. The discernment that sees the rose and thorn as one, comes with that mystic initiation known as the Birth of

*Ecclesiasticus.

the Christ; so the initiate goes singing along the Way,—awakened to love, his soul is filled with music, he perceives melody in all things and is conscious of the harmony of the Universe. The Saints dwell on the rapture and delight experienced by those who have acquired the consciousness of the Divine love; this expansion of consciousness causes great exhilaration, and expresses itself in an extraordinary influx of energy to be used undoubtedly in carrying out the Divine Will. All great mystics have displayed an almost superhuman activity, the source of which is above, and the stream of life and vigour flowing into them is transformed on this plane into an abnormal vitality and into strenuous action.

St. Teresa was distinguished for her lightness of heart even in the most trying

circumstances and encouraged it in her novices. St. Catherine of Siena is said to have been 'jocund and of a happy spirit'; while St. Catherine of Genoa was indeed 'joyous as the rose' and of a charming simplicity, giving her spare time to the weaving of little rhymes descriptive of her great love of Christ. St. Juan de la Cruz, who more than any other Saint understood the Dark Night of the Soul, said, while in prison, "The soul of one who serves God always swims in joy, always keeps holiday, always dwells in the palace of jubilation, ever singing with fresh ardour and fresh pleasure, a new song of joy and love."

The great saints and mystics of every land and of all ages have won a place in the immortal realm of beauty and joy; giving themselves up to a life of strenuous

work, they *live* in the spirit, for though "in the actual world the painful kingdom of time and place, dwell care and canker and fear, . . . with the ideal is immortal hilarity, the rose of joy."

The Rose of Joy, like the Rose of Sorrow, is accompanied by the Cross, because "the cross is always ready and everywhere awaiteth" the eager aspirant. "Turn thyself upward, or turn thyself downward; turn thyself inward, or turn thyself outward; *everywhere* thou shalt find the Cross"—at all stages of the Path, and the Rose ever at its heart.

No one enters the desert except by his own choice; dark is the Way at first, red is the rose, heavy and black is the Cross, lacerating is the crown of thorns. The way of sacrifice is the way of suffering because

the unenlightened candidate has not realized the saying, "If thou carry the Cross *willingly*, it will carry thee and bring thee to thy desired end." Illuminated by that lesson all is altered, darkness and ignorance give place to light and knowledge, and a conscious co-operation with the Divine Will takes the place of human blindness. And then it is found, that "in the Cross is infusion of heavenly sweetness, in the Cross is joy of spirit"; and the rose at the centre is the "flower of living thing, *Rosa sine spina*"; such a Cross is gleaming and shining, the rose at its heart is white and radiant, and together they illumine the whole world.

CHAPTER V

THE GOLDEN ROSE OF UNION

"Come! for the Rose tree is on fire with the fire of Moses, that thou mayest learn from the bush the subtlety of Unity."

HAFIZ.

"Within the yellow of the Eternal Rose, . . . me—Beatrice drew."

DANTE.

THE disciple, servant of the Rose and of the Cross, progressing along the narrow Path and passing through the narrow gateways of Initiation, keeps ever before his eyes the Goal, remote at first, but ever growing nearer. From the beginning he has been pledged to the finding of Unity, for Unity stands at the end of the Path.

According to the mysteries of the Rosary, gold or yellow is the colour of the Rose of

Union and this was doubtless the prototype of the Rosa Aurea, the Golden Rose presented by the Popes from time to time to great Queens. It is the traditional custom for it to be blessed by the Pope on the fourth Sunday in Lent, Laetare Sunday, by an elaborate consecration ceremony. This exquisitely wrought jewel was intended as a reward for perfection in virtue, a symbol of earthly human perfection, a reflection of the heavenly and superhuman attained by many of the saints.

The very nature of gold decrees the appropriateness of the choice; gold contains *no* dross; refined in the furnace of the cleansing fires it represents the *pure* flame burning in the Sanctuary of the Sacred Heart, the *fire* and the *light* of the Eternal Rose.

Reposing ever in the centre of all created

beings, but recognized and striven after by the devotee, the "Rose is the sign of the beauty and fragrance of His beneficence"—the beauty of suffering as well as the beauty of joy for it is discovered in *all* states even the most irreconcilable. It is the transcendent reconciler, the unifying factor of all opposites—sorrow and joy, death and life, humanity and divinity, above and beyond them all, the One that preceded the Many on the Path of Outgoing and that awaits the return of all at the end of the Path of *Within-going*.

"I Am," the One, is 'the flower of the desert shrine, the blossom of the hidden horizon'; the Sacred Rose of One-ness, of At-one-ment, of the Christ triumphant united with the Supreme. Within the purified heart of the disciple is the reflection of this

Flower of Immortal Love and Beauty, and expanding it has filled him with the joy of Illumination, but finally he realizes that even this supernal image must be relinquished to attain to the Absolute Reality. Thus far the Divine Presence is felt as separate and distinct; the individuality of the disciple affirms a duality within his heart, the human in the presence of the Divine; and the consciousness is overwhelmed with its own finiteness, in its realization of Infinity.

There has been communion but not union; periods of absolute self-forgetfulness have anticipated for brief moments the glory of absorption—but there is still a *me* and *Thee*.

The celestial splendour of the One has thus been glimpsed in visions throughout

the long Way, at first through a mist of tears, afterwards veiled in Light—yet still *veiled*—but “between the lover and the Beloved, veil is none! Thou thyself art thine own veil, from the midst arise and attain unto the Beloved.” To rend this last veil of illusion is now the work of the disciple; the gateway of the mystical death is before him and passing through he will find it but the portal to the Life Universal and Eternal.

The soul athirst for this Divine consummation, as he presses the Cross of the Rosary to his lips in the kiss of Union, fervently breathes the heartfelt prayer, “Union with the Beloved than everlasting life is better, O Lord! me that union give, for *that* is best!”

But *how* can that supreme act of im-

passioned self-abandonment be accomplished? How be conscious of Unity alone when duality is so distinctly realized? Love is the unifying principle, so the Union can only be achieved by a love so great, so dominant, that the self no longer exists! The human love raised to its highest power is lost, drowned in the Ocean of Divine Love!

So difficult, and yet so simple, as this little story* shews: "One day a lover came and knocked at the door of the Beloved and a voice answered and said, "Who is there?" The lover replied, "It is I." "Go hence," said the voice, "there is no room within for thee and me." After long wanderings in the wilderness, came the lover a second time and knocked; and again the voice demanded,

* From Jelal-ed-Din Rumi.

"Who is there?" And the lover answered, "It is thou thyself." "Enter," said the voice, "for I am within."

Thus the entry into Light and Life and Love is accomplished and the disciple is now merely a channel for the outpouring of these into the world. An extraordinary freedom and lightness of heart fills him, for although on earth carrying out the behests of the Master, in spirit he knows the "immortal hilarity" of the gods and participates in the creative activity of the Eternal.

All those who have attained union with the Supreme speak of this radiant happiness.

As Beatrice drew Dante within the yellow of the Eternal Rose he noted "the splendour of her laughing eyes"; and from the heart of that glowing Rose of gold he rapturously exclaimed, "Meseemed I was beholding the

smile of the Universe; wherefore my intoxication entered both by hearing and by sight.

O joy! O gladness unspeakable! O life compact of love and peace!"

CHAPTER VI

THE LITTLE BLACK ROSE OF SILENCE

“ Before Thee, like a folded rose-bud
The seal of silence shall be upon his mouth.”

HAFIZ.

“ He was caught up into paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.”

ST. PAUL.

SILENCE, secrecy, and fidelity are required from every aspirant to the Mysteries, and as the Rose is the universal hieroglyph of the Mysteries,—of *all* that pertains to the Quest for God from the beginning of the Path, through Initiation after Initiation to the Divine Union consummated at the end,—this flower naturally came to signify *silence* regarding what could not be revealed, and

fidelity in keeping secret that which is unveiled on the Way. The little 'black' rose is the natural and appropriate emblem for that which may not be talked of, nor shewn to those who are without. The Rose reveals and conceals; it indicates that divine wisdom is obtainable, that esoteric schools exist to help the pilgrim to discover and to walk upon the narrow Path; therefore is it said, this "rose is priceless, count its presence as a gift"—the greatest gift given by God to man, the knowledge of Himself, that "He is the Way inviolable, the truth infallible, and the life interminable"; but the essence of the teaching remains hidden under and within the symbol, which conceals as well as reveals, "in the matter of roses and rose-water, this is the decree that the rose should be shewn in the market

and that the rose-water should remain behind the Veil."

It has always been thus, an impenetrable silence surrounds the mystic Path in every direction; as a *command*, requiring obedience and loyalty that the Mysteries be not divulged to the profane; as a *preparation* within the heart which only in emptiness and peace can receive the Divine Word; as a severe *test* of endurance and trust that even in the darkest hour all is well; as a *result* of profound experiences which go too deep for words; and finally as an *effect* of the realization of the poverty of language to describe the things known and seen.

Before the Path is entered on, control of the tongue must be learnt and practised by the probationer. Subsequently after acceptance, silence in a very complete sense is

demanded from the aspirant as a preparation,—“Be thou obedient to this call, and be silent before the Lord, sitting alone with Him in thy inmost and most hidden cell”—for how otherwise can the Voice of the silence be heard? It is a natural and necessary condition, for the listening soul is as it were on a plane of silence, in an abyss of silence. As St. Thomas à Kempis teaches, “The prophets may indeed sound forth words but they give not the spirit, most beautifully do they speak but they inflame not the heart, they give the letter but *Thou* discloseth the sense; they publish the mysteries but *Thou* unlockest the meaning of the things signified”—hence the continual injunction throughout the Scriptures, “Be silent before the Lord” that the divine wisdom may make itself heard within the soul.

But not only is it a command and a preparation but at one stage of the Path it is also part of the test. In the arid tracts of the wilderness the soul of the wanderer, quivering in agony must suffer alone and in silence; "with love's pain be content and *be silent*"—there must be no repining, no complaining, no seeking for consolation, but with an invulnerable spirit the disciple must take the disappointments and the failures as part of the training and be well content therewith.

Afterwards as a result, silence becomes an involuntary attitude, he does not wish to speak of his inner life, the more *real* an experience, the more impossible to talk of it,—such thoughts and feelings are too near, too intimate, and too deep for words; 'the anguish of love and the poison of absence' are alike indescribable and impossible to

relate. No comrade is close enough to share these happenings; indeed, as St. Catherine of Siena said, such secrets can only be revealed to a friend who has become *one* with his friend.

Silence again ensues, when finally the disciple 'knows the mystery of the Kingdom of God' and to help others tries to describe the Vision. Words are utterly inadequate; the stammering tongue falls back on negatives as being nearer the truth than any positive expression. Infinite unfathomable boundless Void, dimly indicates the quality of Absolute Being, and in the same way the Divine Dark expresses somewhat the state of the soul in the presence of and blinded by excess of Light.

The Mysteries cannot be talked about, because no language can explain what takes

place. Words can only portray dimly, and in a fragmentary manner indicate somewhat, the nature of the things experienced. With the best possible desire to explain, how can colour be defined and made clear to the colour-blind; or music expounded and interpreted to the tone-deaf? So it is with these exalted happenings, only those who have passed through the same experiences can understand the obscure hints conveyed by words. Dante, with all his command of exquisite poetic expression, said that not only language but memory failed before the Vision,—it is too elusive for words so “I write it not.” In the Gospels, the ‘unspeakable’ nature of these high things is recognized, hence the command given by our Lord, “unto them that are without all these things are *done* in parables.” That which

cannot be explained by words can be given out and illustrated in allegory, metaphor, parable and drama, all of which become signposts to those who are already seeking for the Way. Everywhere the symbols of the Divine Adventure are the same. The Christian Saints and the Persian and Arabian mystics understand them. They were used in the ancient Rosicrucian legend; neither is Masonry without them, for among the High Grades there is the Rose Croix degree in which are the same eternal verities illustrated in the ceremonial by the symbolism of the Rose and the Cross.

In the strange book "The Marriage of Christian Rosenkreuz," the hero of the Quest is told that he "to the glory of God should benefit his neighbours and reserve in silence what he had been entrusted with,"

Under this vow of service and silence he goes forth to a Royal wedding clothed in a wedding garment, wearing four roses in his hat as a token whereby he can be recognized, and carrying a cross. After he had prevailed in the test of being weighed in the balance he gave these roses to the Virgin who is his leader and instructor. After witnessing a mystic death and a re-birth he hears voices chanting that by love alone we grow like unto God and are guided by it to the Divine Consummation;—"Who into One can two transform? 'Tis love!" Profiting by their teaching he goes forward to the spiritual marriage and finally is "accepted to all joy" and becomes the Doorkeeper of the King. Thus very shortly and in quaint language is told the same story of silence, service, union and joy.

In the Rose Croix degree* of Freemasonry the Rose and Cross symbolism is more consecutive and complete. In the earlier degrees it is significant that the Master Mason's apron bears three rosettes, little roses, to remind the wearer that secrecy, fidelity and service are required. The ceremonial of the eighteenth degree has the Rose in its four highest forms, accompanying the cross and always at the heart of it. The red rose of sorrow on a black cross in a ritual of darkness and confusion, the candidate kisses this rose, and pledges himself to the finding of Unity—and going forward presently enters into a realm of light and joy. In the original 'clothing' of this degree, the red, the white, the black and the golden rose were all represented with appropriate crosses.

* A. E. Waite; Carlile; and Mackey.

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Apart from the Church therefore, such have been some of the allegorical methods which by these symbols have tried to teach those who are "without." But it is not necessary in reality to have recourse to parables and dramatic rituals, the most eloquent witness is the *life*.

Without speaking, by merely *living* the true disciple emanates spirituality and imparts knowledge to everyone who comes within the sphere of his influence. The presence alone of the Saints, being *in* the world but not of it, is a very great aid in the unfolding of the spirit which expands unconsciously under the silent influence of such great souls. And with all humility and gratitude the younger and less evolved should take advantage of this inestimable gift. Saadi with mystic insight illustrates

the *right* of the humble to participate in the society of the great in spirit:—One day seeing some common grass among some fresh roses, he said, “What has bewitched such a despicable weed as grass that it should dare to sit on a level with the rose?” The grass wept, and said, “Silence! Companionship will not hurt nobility. Although I have no claim to beauty, colour and fragrance, am I not after all the grass of God’s garden?”

Such therefore is the life-work of the Mystic, and to silence is added fidelity and above all service, for life is now naught but a joyful serving of the King of Kings.

Therefore, wrapt in the five silences, pledged to fidelity, and consecrated to service, the disciple dedicated under this seven-

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fold vow re-enters the world for the helping
of men.

“ From thee naught save fidelity do I seek ;
Beyond the Rose of Fidelity naught do I perceive ;
Save on the Path of Service to Thee I strive not ;
To none Thy mysteries do I utter ;
To none Thy praises do I chant.”







