

THE CUP

CHAPTER VII

THE CUP

AS the Magick Wand is the Will, the Wisdom, the Word of the Magician, so is the Magick Cup his Understanding.

This is the cup of which it was written: "Father, if it be Thy Will, let this cup pass from Me!" And again: "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"

And it is also the cup in the hand of OUR LADY BABALON, and the cup of the Sacrament.

This Cup is full of bitterness, and of blood, and of intoxication.

The Understanding of the Magus is his link with the Invisible, on the passive side.

His Will errs actively by opposing itself to the Universal Will.

His Understanding errs passively when it receives influence from that which is not the ultimate truth.

In the beginning the Cup of the student is almost empty; and even such truth as he receives may leak away, and be lost.

They say that the Venetians made glasses which changed colour if poison was put into them; of such a glass must the student make his Cup.

Very little experience on the mystic path will show him that of all the impressions he receives none is true. Either they are false in themselves, or they are wrongly interpreted in his mind.

There is one truth, and only one. All other thoughts are false.

And as he advances in the knowledge of his mind he will come to understand that its whole structure is so faulty that it is quite incapable, even in its most exalted moods, of truth.

He will recognize that any thought merely establishes a relation between the Ego and the non-Ego.

Kant has shown that even the laws of nature are but the conditions of thought. And as the current of thought is the blood of the mind, it is said that the Magick Cup is filled with the blood of the Saints. **All thought must be offered up as a sacrifice.**

The Cup can hardly be described as a weapon. It is round like the pantacle—not straight like the wand and the dagger. Reception, not projection, is its nature.¹

¹ As the Magician is in the position of God towards the Spirit that he evokes, he

So that which is round is to him a symbol of the influence from the higher. This circle symbolizes the Infinite, as every cross or Tau represents the Finite. That which is four square shows the Finite fixed into itself; for this reason the altar is foursquare. It is the solid basis from which all the operation proceeds. One form¹ of magical cup has a sphere beneath the bowl, and is supported upon a conical base.

This cup (crescent, sphere, cone) represents the three principles of the Moon, the Sun, and Fire, the three principles which, according to the Hindus, have course in the body.²

This is the Cup of Purification; as Zoroaster says:

“So therefore first the priest who governeth the works of fire must sprinkle with the lustral water of the loud-resounding sea.”

It is the sea that purifies the world. And the “Great Sea” is in the Qabalah a name of Binah, “Understanding.”

stands in the Circle, and the spirit in the Triangle; so the Magician is in the Triangle with respect to his own God.

¹ An ugly form. A better is given in the illustration.

² These “principles” are seen by the pupil when first he succeeds in stilling his mind. That one which happens to be in course at the moment is the one seen by him. This is so marvellous an experience, even for one who has pushed astral visions to a very high point, that he may mistake them for the End. See chapter on Dhyana.

The Hebrew letters corresponding to these principles are Gimel, Resh, and Shin, and the word formed by them means “a flower” and also “expelled,” “cast forth.”

It is by the Understanding of the Magus that his work is purified.

Binah, moreover, is the Moon, and the bowl of this cup is shaped like the moon.

This moon is the path of Gimel through which the influence from the Crown descends upon the Sun of Tiphereth.

And this is based upon the pyramid of fire which symbolizes the aspiration of the student.

In Hindu symbolism the Amrita or "dew of immortality"¹ drips constantly upon a man, but is burnt up by the gross fire of his appetites. Yogis attempt to catch and so preserve this dew by turning back the tongue in the mouth.

Concerning the water in this Cup, it may be said that just as the wand should be perfectly rigid, the ideal solid, so should the water be the ideal fluid.

The Wand is erect, and must extend to Infinity.

The surface of the water is flat, and must extend to Infinity.

One is the line, the other the plane.

But as the Wand is weak without breadth, so is the water false without depth. The Understanding of the Magus must include all things, and that understanding must be infinitely profound.

¹ A—, the privative particle; *mrta*, mortal.

H. G. Wells has said that "every word of which a man is ignorant represents an idea of which he is ignorant." And it is impossible perfectly to understand all things unless all things be first known.

Understanding is the structuralization of knowledge.

All impressions are disconnected, as the Babe of the Abyss is so terribly aware; and the Master of the Temple must sit for 106 seasons in the City of the Pyramids because this coördination is a tremendous task.

There is nothing particularly occult in this doctrine concerning knowledge and understanding.

A looking-glass receives all impressions but coördinates none.

The savage has none but the most simple associations of ideas.

Even the ordinary civilized man goes very little further.

All advance in thought is made by collecting the greatest possible number of facts, classifying them, and grouping them.

The philologist, though perhaps he only speaks one language, has a much higher type of mind than the linguist who speaks twenty.

This Tree of Thought is exactly paralleled by the tree of nervous structure.

Very many people go about nowadays who are exceedingly "well-informed," but who have not the slightest idea of the meaning of the facts they know. They have not developed the necessary higher part of the brain. Induction is impossible to them.

This capacity for storing away facts is compatible with actual imbecility. Some imbeciles have been able to store their memories with more knowledge than perhaps any sane man could hope to acquire.

This is the great fault of modern education—a child is stuffed with facts, and no attempt is made to explain their connection and bearing. The result is that even the facts themselves are soon forgotten.

Any first-rate mind is insulted and irritated by such treatment, and any first-rate memory is in danger of being spoilt by it.

No two ideas have any real meaning until they are harmonized in a third, and the operation is only perfect when these ideas are contradictory. This is the essence of the Hegelian logic.

The Magick Cup, as was shown above, is also the flower. It is the lotus which opens to the sun, and which collects the dew.

This Lotus is in the hand of Isis the great Mother. It is a symbol similar to the Cup in the hand of OUR LADY BABALON.

There are also the Lotuses in the human body, according to the Hindu system of Physiology referred to in the chapter on Dharana.¹

¹ These Lotuses are all situated in the spinal column, which has three channels, Sushumna in the middle, Ida and Pingala on either side (*cf.* the Tree of Life). The central channel is compressed at the base by Kundalini, the magical power, a sleeping serpent. Awake her: she darts up the spine, and the Prana flows through the Sushumna. See “Raja-Yoga” for more details.

There is the lotus of three petals in the Sacrum, in which the Kunda-
lini lies asleep. This lotus is the receptacle of reproductive force.

There is also the six-petalled lotus opposite the navel—which receives
the forces which nourish the body.

There is also a lotus in the Solar plexus which receives the nervous
forces.

The six-petalled lotus in the heart corresponds to Tiphereth, and
receives those vital forces which are connected with the blood.

The sixteen-petalled lotus opposite the larynx receives the nourish-
ment needed by the breath.

The two-petalled lotus of the pineal gland receives the nourishment
needed by thought, while above the junction of the cranial structures is
that sublime lotus, of a thousand and one petals, which receives the in-
fluence from on high; and in which, in the Adept, the awakened Kunda-
lini takes her pleasure with the Lord of All.

All these lotuses are figured by the Magick Cup.

In man they are but partly opened, or only opened to their natural
nourishment. In fact it is better to think of them as closed, as secreting
that nourishment, which, because of the lack of sun, turns to poison.

The Magick Cup must have no lid, yet it must be kept veiled most
carefully at all times, except when invocation of the Highest is being
made.

This Cup must also be hidden from the profane. The Wand must be kept secret lest the profane, fearing it, should succeed in breaking it; the Cup lest, wishing to touch it, they should defile it.

Yet the sprinkling of its water not only purifies the Temple, but blesseth them that are without: freely must it be poured! But let no one know your real purpose, and let no one know the secret of your strength. Remember Samson! Remember Guy Fawkes!

Of the methods of increasing Understanding those of the Holy Qabalah are perhaps the best, provided that the intellect is thoroughly awake to their absurdity, and never allows itself to be convinced.¹

Further meditation of certain sorts is useful: not the strict meditation which endeavours to still the mind, but such a meditation as Sammasati.²

On the exoteric side if necessary the mind should be trained by the study of any well-developed science, such as chemistry, or mathematics.

The idea of organization is the first step, that of interpretation the second. The Master of the Temple, whose grade corresponds to Binah, is sworn to “interpret every phenomenon as a particular dealing of God with his soul.”

¹ See the “Interlude” following.

² See Equinox V, “The Training of the Mind”; Equinox II, “The Psychology of Hashish”; Equinox VII, “Liber DCCCCXIII.”

But even the beginner may attempt this practice with advantage.

Either a fact fits in or it does not; if it does not, harmony is broken; and as the Universal harmony cannot be broken, the discord must be in the mind of the student, thus showing that he is not in tune with that Universal choir.

Let him then puzzle out first the great facts, then the little; until one summer, when he is bald and lethargic after lunch, he understands and appreciates the existence of flies!

This lack of Understanding with which we all begin is so terrible, so pitiful. In this world there is so much cruelty, so much waste, so much stupidity.

The contemplation of the Universe must be at first almost pure anguish. It is this fact which is responsible for most of the speculations of philosophy.

Mediaeval philosophers went hopelessly astray because their theology necessitated the reference of all things to the standard of men's welfare.

They even became stupid: Bernardin de St. Pierre (was it not?) said that the goodness of God was such that wherever men had built a great city, He had placed a river to assist them in conveying merchandise. But the truth is that in no way can we imagine the Universe as devised. If horses were made for men to ride, were not men made for worms to eat?

And so we find once more that **the Ego-idea must be ruthlessly rooted out before Understanding can be attained.**

There is an apparent contradiction between this attitude and that of the Master of the Temple. What can possibly be more selfish than this interpretation of everything as the dealing of God with the soul?

But it is God who is all and not any part; and every "dealing" must thus be an expansion of the soul, a destruction of its separateness.

Every ray of the sun expands the flower.

The surface of the water in the Magick Cup is infinite; there is no point different from any other point.¹

Thus, ultimately, as the wand is a binding and a limitation, so is the Cup an expansion—into the Infinite.

And this is the danger of the Cup; it must necessarily be open to all, and yet if anything is put into it which is out of proportion, unbalanced, or impure, it takes hurt.

And here again we find difficulty with our thoughts. The grossness and stupidity of *simple impressions* cloud the water; *emotions* trouble it; *perceptions* are still far from the perfect purity of truth; they cause re-

¹ "If ye confound the space-marks, saying: They are one, or saying: They are many . . . then expect the direful judgments of Ra Hoor Khuit. . . . This shall regenerate the world, the little world my sister." These are the words of NUIT, Our Lady of the Stars, of whom Binah is but the troubled reflection.

flections; while the *tendencies* alter the refractive index, and break up the light. Even *consciousness* itself is that which distinguishes between the lower and the higher, the waters which are below the firmament from the waters which are above the firmament, that appalling stage in the great curse of creation.

Since at the best this water ¹ is but a reflection, how tremendously important it becomes that it should be still!

If the cup is shaken the light will be broken up.

Therefore the Cup is placed upon the Altar, which is foursquare, will multiplied by will, the confirmation of the will in the Magical Oath, its fixation in Law.

¹ The water in this Cup (the latter is also a heart, as shown by the transition from the ancient to the modern Tarot; the suit "Hearts" in old packs of cards, and even in modern Spanish and Italian cards, is called "Cups") is the letter *Mem* (the Hebrew word for water), which has for its Tarot trump the Hanged Man. This Hanged Man represents the Adept hanging by one heel from a gallows, which is in the shape of the letter Daleth—the letter of the Empress, the heavenly Venus in the Tarot. His legs form a cross, his arms a triangle, as if by his equilibrium and self-sacrifice he were bringing the light down and establishing it even in the abyss.

Elementary as this is, it is a very satisfactory hieroglyph of the Great Work, though the student is warned that the obvious sentimental interpretation will have to be discarded as soon as it has been understood. It is a very noble illusion, and therefore a very dangerous one, to figure one's self as the Redeemer. For, of all the illusions in this Cup—the subtler and purer they are, the more difficult they are to detect.

It is easy to see when water is muddy, and easy to get rid of the mud; but there are many impurities which defy everything but distillation and even some which must be fractionated unto 70 times 7.

There is, however, a universal solvent and harmonizer, a certain dew which is so pure that a single drop of it cast into the water of the Cup will for the time being bring all to perfection.

This dew is called Love. Even as in the case of human love, the whole Universe appears perfect to the man who is under its control, so is it, and much more, with the Divine Love of which it is now spoken.

For human love is an excitement, and not a stilling, of the mind; and as it is bound to the individual, only leads to greater trouble in the end.

This Divine Love, on the contrary, is attached to no symbol.

It abhors limitation, either in its intensity or its scope. And this is the dew of the stars of which it is spoken in the Holy Books, for NUIT the Lady of the Stars is called "the Continuous One of Heaven," and it is that Dew which bathes the body of the Adept "in a sweet-smelling perfume of sweat."¹

In this cup, therefore, though all things are placed, by virtue of this

¹ See Liber Legis. Equinox VII.

dew all lose their identity. And therefore this Cup is in the hand of BABALON, the Lady of the City of the Pyramids, wherein no one can be distinguished from any other, wherein no one may sit until he has lost his name.

Of that which is in the Cup it is also said that it is wine. This is the Cup of Intoxication. Intoxication means poisoning, and in particular refers to the poison in which arrows are dipped (Greek *τόξον*, "a bow"). Think of the Vision of the Arrow in Liber 418, and look at the passages in the Holy Books which speak of the action of the spirit under the figure of a deadly poison.

For to each individual thing attainment means first and foremost the destruction of the individuality.

Each of our ideas must be made to give up the Self to the Beloved, so that we may eventually give up the Self to the Beloved in our turn.

It will be remembered in the History Lection ¹ how the Adepts "who had with smiling faces abandoned their homes and their possessions—could with steady calm and firm correctness abandon the Great Work itself; for this is the last and greatest projection of the Alchemist."

The Master of the Temple has crossed the Abyss, has entered the Palace of the King's Daughter; he has only to utter one word, and all

¹ Liber LXI, the book given to those who wish to become Probationers of A. : A. : .

is dissolved. But, instead of that, he is found hidden in the earth, tending a garden.

This mystery is all too complex to be elucidated in these fragments of impure thought; it is a suitable subject for meditation.

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THE EQUINOX

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