

THE MYSTERIES OF ISIS AND OSIRIS.

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III.

ACCORDING to Renouf there was no "esoteric doctrine known to the scribes and priests alone, as distinct from the popular belief." If this be so, the well-formulated opinion among ancient writers—Grecian and Roman—that the Mysteries were designed to teach higher truths to the initiates, unknown to the masses, must be abandoned.

I cannot accept this negative conclusion. Rawlinson says (*Ancient Egypt*, p. 437): "The Egyptians, we are assured, had 'Mysteries'; and it was of the essence of Mysteries, in the Greek and Roman sense of the word, to distinguish between the outer husk of a religion and its inner kernel, the shell of myth and legend and allegorical fable with which it was surrounded, and the real essential doctrine or teaching which that shell contained and concealed. Initiation into the Mysteries conveyed to those who received it an explanation of rites, an interpretation of myths and legends, which gave them quite a different character from that which they bore to the uninitiated."

The Mysteries, even in the period of Egyptian decadence, undoubtedly taught the initiates many profound truths,—the idea of the one God, even though that idea was conveyed in a pantheistic form. The lowest kind of pantheism is still a recognition of the immanence and unity of Deity. To a believer in polytheism this revelation must have come as a sublime awakening. The next highest and most logical step was to predicate the transcendency of Deity. But this latter knowledge was lost to the Egyptians of later times, if Renouf's theories are correct. The consensus of opinion of the Greek writers on the subject of the Mysteries was that to be initiated into the Mysteries of Isis and Osiris of Egypt

was to be regenerated,—to be put in possession of divine truths concerning the soul, and the soul's eternal progress in worlds to come.

But why this secrecy about fundamental truths necessary to the salvation of all men? Selfishness on the part of a privileged hierarchy is one answer. Another is that the government of Egypt was based on the theocratic idea; to have suddenly undeceived the ignorant masses would have been to destroy civilisation, such as it then existed. Owing to this fact, perhaps, there was one doctrine for the philosopher (*esoteric*, or hidden); another for the multitude (*exoteric*, external). Religion was a state affair, and he who openly attacked the popular mythology undermined the social system. Socrates lost his life in the attempt to subvert sacerdotalism in favor of a simpler and more spiritual faith. The great mass of men were not prepared to receive philosophic truths. You do not give meat to babes. The more exalted doctrines were reserved for the cultured few, those morally and spiritually fitted to receive them.

IV.

The Mysteries of Isis and Osiris were regarded with awe and wonder by the ancient world. Philosophers came from distant lands to receive arcane instruction at the hands of the hierophants of Egypt. When we consider the fact that all knowledge worth knowing at that early period of history was in the hands of the pagan hierarchy, the interest manifested in the Mysteries of the temples is easily appreciated. The initiates doubtless received instruction in the exact sciences as well as the sacred doctrine. The facts of astronomy, medicine, morals, and religion were imparted to the initiates. Long preparation was necessary before a candidate was admitted to the greater Mysteries. He underwent a most rigid and exacting novitiate. The penalty of divulging any part of the esoteric doctrine was death.

The reason for this is not difficult to divine. The pagan priesthood assumed the power of working miracles, of foretelling future events, etc. They were enabled to rule over the masses by keeping them in ignorance of the secrets of nature. Says an interesting writer: "The science in which the Egyptian priesthood were most proficient, and which they most jealously guarded, was that of astronomy. The people worshipped the sun, moon, and stars as gods, and a knowledge of their true nature would have at once put an end to the influence of the priests, who were believed by the

ignorant and superstitious crowd to be able to withhold or dispense by prayers, invocations and sacrifices, the divine favor. . . . By a knowledge of astronomy the priests were able to calculate and predict eclipses of the sun and moon, events beheld with superstitious awe and fear by the multitude. . . . Of course, a knowledge of astronomy diffused among the people would have been fatal to the occult pretensions of the hierarchy. The facts of astronomy were therefore, for these reasons, most carefully hidden from the common people, and the priesthood only communicated them to each other, veiled in allegorical fables, the key to which was disclosed to him only who had taken the highest degrees of the Mysteries, and given the most convincing proofs of his fidelity and zeal."

Pythagoras, the Grecian philosopher and mathematician, is said to have been initiated into the Mysteries of Egypt (Porphyr. de Vita Pythag.), his life being exposed to great danger. Says Wilkinson (*Ancient Egyptians*, Vol. III., pp. 391-392):. . . . "The reluctance of the Egyptians, particularly in the time of the Pharaohs, to admit strangers to these holy secrets probably rendered his trial more severe even than that to which the Egyptians themselves were subjected; and it appears that notwithstanding the earnest request made by Polycrates to Amasis to obtain this favor for the philosopher, many difficulties were thrown in the way by the priests on his arrival in Egypt. Those of Heliopolis, to whom he first presented the letters given him by Amasis, referred him to the college of Memphis, under the pretext of their seniority; and these again, on the same plea, recommended him to the priests of Thebes. Respect for the king forbade them to give a direct refusal; but they hoped, says Porphyry, to alarm him by representing the arduous task he had to perform, and the repugnance of the previous ceremonies to the feelings of the Greeks. It was not, therefore, without surprise that they beheld his willingness to submit to the trials they proposed; for though many foreigners were, in after-times, admitted to the Mysteries of Egypt, few had then obtained the indulgence, except Thales and Eumolpus. This prejudice of the Egyptians against the Greeks is perfectly consistent with the statement of Herodotus, and is shown by other writers to have continued even after the accession of the Ptolemies and the Roman conquest."

Says Gould in his *History of Freemasonry*: "Of the ceremonies performed at the initiation into the Egyptian Mysteries, we must ever remain ignorant, and Sir Gardner Wilkinson expressly states 'that our only means of forming any opinions respecting them are

to be derived from our imperfect acquaintance with those of Greece, which were doubtless imitative of the rites practised in Egypt.'"¹

An imaginative account of the ceremonies of the Mysteries of Isis is to be found in Thomas Moore's beautiful story, "The Epicurean," in which the ordeals by *fire, water, and air*, the three great elements of the universe, are described with thrilling effect. It is generally conceded, however, that a dramatic representation of the myth of Isis and Osiris was represented in the degrees. Isis and Osiris were universally worshipped by the Egyptians. Herodotus says: "The Egyptians do not all worship the same gods, excepting Isis and Osiris." "The allegorical history of Osiris," remarks Gould, "the Egyptians deemed the most solemn mystery of their religion. Herodotus always mentions it with great caution. It was the record of the misfortunes which had happened to one whose name he never ventures to utter; and his cautious behavior with regard to everything connected with Osiris shows that he had been initiated into the Mysteries, and was fearful of divulging any of the secrets he had solemnly bound himself to keep."

The author of the article on "Egypt" (*Encyclopædia Britannica*) says: "Osiris is essentially the good principle: hence his name Unnefer, the good being, rather than the revealer of good (Maspero, *Histoire Ancienne*, 38). Like Ra, he is the creator, and like man, in perpetual warfare with evil. His brother, or son, Typhon, Seth (Set), is his opponent. They are light and darkness, physical good and evil, the Nile and the desert, Egypt and the foreign land. Osiris is certainly moral good. Seth is to a certain extent moral evil. Throughout the *Ritual* they are in conflict for right and wrong, for the welfare and destruction of the human soul. In chapter xvii., which was preserved intact from a remote age, this conflict appears. Seth is, however, not there distinctly named as the opponent of Osiris, except in the glosses, which may be as old or (like the case of the Mishna and the Gemara) older than the text and once in the text he appears as joining with Horus his adversary in accomplishing the final condition of the deceased who had reached the abode of happiness (verse 35); and on the other hand, one gloss explains the executioner of souls to be Seth, but otherwise Horus, the elder, brother of Osiris, who is but a variation of the younger Horus (verse 33). Yet the opposition of Osiris and Seth is a perpetual combat. Osiris is vanquished. He is cut in pieces and submerged in the water. Watched by his sister, Isis, his consort and Nephthys the consort of Seth, he revives.

¹ Wilkinson, *Manners and Customs of the Ancient Egyptians*, 1878, Vol. III., pp. 380, 387.

Horus His son avenges him, and with the aid of Thoth, or reason, he destroys the power of Seth, but does not annihilate him. The myth is a picture of the daily life of the sun, combating darkness yet at last succumbing to it, to appear again in renewed splendor as the young Horus or solar god triumphs over Seth. It is also a picture of human life, its perpetual conflict and final seeming destruction, to be restored in the youth of a brighter existence. In this view suffering is not wholly evil, but has its beneficent aspect in the accomplishment of final good. There are two ways of explaining the origin of this myth: either we may regard Osiris as the sun of the night, and so the protector of those who pass away into the realm of shades, or we may suppose that once taken as the type and ruler of mankind in the after state, the hidden sun was naturally chosen to represent him, the sun being with the Egyptians the source and governor of all life. Those who make the solar idea the first form of the myth have to explain its specially human aspect, and particularly why we see no such aspect in any deep sense in the case of Atum the sun of the night in the group of solar divinities.

“It will be seen how such a story took hold of the affections of the Egyptians. Osiris was the type of humanity, its struggles, its sufferings, its temporary defeat, and its final victory. The living, and still more the dead, were identified with him. Under his name, without distinction of sex, they passed into the hidden place (Amenti), the divine world below (Ker-neret), to be protected by him in their conflict with Seth and his genii, and to have their final state determined by him as their judge. It was to Osiris that the prayers and offerings for the dead were made, and all sepulchral inscriptions, except those of the oldest period, are directly addressed to him. As Isis is a form of the female principle, Osiris, the sun and the Nile, was considered in one phase to be the male principle.”

The cult of the sacred bull Apis was connected with the worship of Osiris. “It is very characteristic of the Egyptian religion that the reverence for Osiris should have taken this grossly material form.”

Bunson (*Egypt's Place in Universal History*, 1st ed., Vol. I., p. 437) writes: “The astronomical and physical elements are too obvious to be mistaken. Osiris and Isis are the Nile and Egypt. The myth of Osiris typifies the solar year—the power of Osiris is the sun in the lower hemisphere, the winter solstice. The birth of Horus typifies the vernal equinox—the victory of Horus, the sum-

mer solstice—the inundation of the Nile. Typhon is the autumnal equinox.”

Isis is a beautiful figure in the Egyptian mythology. Her titles on the monuments are: “The great mother or mother-goddess, mistress of heaven, ruler of earth, queen of the Two Countries.” Says Sir Gardner Wilkinson: “Plutarch considers Isis ‘to be the earth, the feminine part of nature, or that property which renders her a fit subject for the production of all other beings;’ and he thinks ‘that the dresses of her statues were made with a variety of colors, from her power being wholly conversant about matters, which becomes and admits all things.’ . . . Both Osiris and his sister Isis were not deified persons who had lived on earth, but fabulous beings, whose history was founded on metaphysical speculation; and adapted to certain phenomena of nature, as in the allegory of the rising of the Nile, where she is the land of Egypt irrigated by the water of the inundations. With the same spirit, and in the continuation of her fabulous history it was said that her soul was transferred after death to Sirius or the Dog-star, ‘which the Egyptians called Sothis.’ That she had the name of Isis-Sothis, and was supposed to represent Sirius is perfectly true, as the sculptures themselves abundantly prove; and the heliacal rising of that star is represented on the ceiling of the Memnonium at Thebes, under the form and name of this goddess. It is not, however, in consequence of a belief entertained in Egypt—at least, by the initiated—that the soul of Isis had been transferred to the Dog-star; this was looked upon in the same light as the connection between the god Thoth and the moon, who in one of his characters answered to the Lunus of the Egyptians, and in another corresponded to Mercury. In like manner, Isis and other deities assumed on different occasions various characters; and Sothis, the Dog-star, was one of those assigned to the sister of Osiris. This adaptation of Isis and other deities to the planetary system, led to the remark of Eusebius that the Egyptians esteem the sun to be the demiurgus, and hold the legends about Osiris and Isis and all their other mythological fables, to have reference to the stars; and their appearances and occultations, and the periods of their risings, or to the increase and decrease of the moon, to the cycles of the sun, to the diurnal and nocturnal hemispheres, or to the river. Plutarch also gives one explanation of the history of Isis and Osiris, taken from the phenomena of eclipses.”

Isis is distinguished by the solar disk and cow's horns on her head, frequently surmounted by a small throne, and bears the lotus

scepter. Says Sayce (*Ancient Empires*, p. 64): "The cow, with its horns, symbolising the crescent moon, which in Egypt appears to lie upon its back, was consecrated to her, indicating at how early a time the bride of Osiris, the sun-god, was held to be the moon. All that is beautiful and good among men comes from her; she watches over the birth of children, and rocks the cradle of the Nile. At Neit, too, she is the authoress of weaving and of the arts of female life."

The numerous other attributes of the goddess I shall not take space to record. The curious reader will find them detailed in the works of Rawlinson, Wilkinson, Maspero, etc. As a nature-goddess her worship was introduced into Greece subsequently to the epoch of the philosophical schools of Alexandria and was enormously popular at Rome from the end of the Republic.

Proclus mentions an inscription on her statue: "I am that which is, has been, and shall be. My veil no one has lifted.

The phrase "the veil of Isis" has ever since stood for mystery. To draw aside this veil is to reveal the secrets of Nature and of God. The reader is doubtless well acquainted with a curious book by the late Madame Blavatsky, entitled *Isis Unveiled*, being a key to theosophical mysteries, ancient and modern.

Says Robert Hewitt Brown (*Stellar Theology and Masonic Astronomy*): "The Egyptian Mysteries of Isis and Osiris were in the form of a mystic drama, representing the death by violence of Osiris (the sun-god), the search for his body by Isis, the moon, and its finding and being raised to life and power again.¹" This allegory symbolised not only the passage of the sun through the constellations of the zodiac, but likewise typified the wanderings of the human soul after death in the Under-world, the shadowy realm of Amenti; its judgment by Osiris, its purification and glorious resurrection. The neophyte is supposed to have impersonated Osiris in the drama, after having first been tried by the three elements,—fire, water, and air. Passing successfully through all the ordeals, he was admitted into the Hall of Truth to receive the arcane instruction at the hands of the Hierophant of the Mysteries. Mystic and splendid visions of the gods, as well as terrible phantasmagoria of the punishments accorded to the wicked, were exhibited to the awe-inspired initiate. Apuleius, in the "Metamorphosis," describing his initiation into the Mysteries of Isis, says: "Perhaps,

¹ "The death and resurrection of Osiris occurred at the end of the month Khoiak,—that is to say, at the winter solstice, concurrently with the dying of the Sun of the Old Year and the rising of the Sun of the New."—Wiedemann.

inquisitive reader, you will very anxiously ask me what was then said and done? I would tell you if it could be lawfully told. *I approached the abode of death; with my foot I pressed the threshold of Proserpine's palace. I was transported through the elements and conducted back again. At midnight I saw the bright light of the sun shining. I stood in the presence of the Gods, the Gods of Heaven and of the Shades below; ay, stood near and worshipped.* And now have I told thee such things that, hearing, thou necessarily canst not understand; and being beyond the comprehension of the Profane, I can enunciate without committing a crime."

A year afterward he was warned to prepare for initiation into the mysteries of "the Great God, Supreme Parent of all the other Gods, the invincible Osiris."

An acquaintance with stage machinery and the science of optics and acoustics was necessary to the production of the many marvellous effects exhibited. Every temple in Egypt and Greece was a veritable storehouse of natural magic. Thanks to ancient writers like Heron of Alexandria, Philo of Byzantium, and the Fathers of the early Christian Church, we are able to fathom some of the secrets of the old thaumaturgists. The magi of the temples were adepts in the art of phantasmagoria. In the ancient temple of Hercules at Tyre, Pliny states that there was a seat of consecrated stone "from which the gods easily rose."

In the temple at Tarsus, Esculapius showed himself to the devout. Damascius says: "In a manifestation, which ought not to be revealed, . . . there appeared on the wall of a temple a mass of light which at first seemed to be very remote; it transformed itself, in coming nearer, into a face evidently divine and supernatural, of a severe aspect, but mixed with gentleness, and extremely beautiful. According to the institutions of a mysterious religion the Alexandrians honored it as Osiris and Adonis."

By means of concave mirrors, made of highly polished metal, the priests were able to project images upon walls, in the air, or upon the smoke arising from burning incense. In speaking of the art of casting specula of persons upon smoke, the ingenious Salverte says: "The Theurgists caused the appearance of the gods in the air, in the midst of gaseous vapors, disengaged from fire. Porphyry admires this secret; Iamblichus censures the employment of it; but he confesses its existence, and grants it to be worthy the attention of the inquirer after truth. The Theurgist Maximus undoubtedly made use of a secret analogous to this, when in the fumes of the incense which he burned before the statue of Hecate,

the image was seen to laugh so naturally as to fill the spectators with terror."¹

V.

The mysteries of Isis and Osiris, according to many writers, among whom may be mentioned the learned translator of Plato, Thomas Taylor, were the prototypes of the far-famed Mysteries of Eleusis, of Greece. But on this subject François Lenormant² says: "The learned Hellenes who visited Egypt could not fail to be struck by the singular resemblance which existed between the symbolism of the mystic worship of Dêmêter, and that of the Egyptian sacred books relative to the state of the soul after death. Thus Herodotus did not hesitate to proclaim that the Thesmophoria had been imported into Greece from Egypt. At Saïs and other points on the banks of the Nile there were mysteries the institution of which exhibited a certain outward analogy with those of the Hellenic countries. More than one Greek, following the example of Herodotus, was led by the observation of all these analogies to accept the belief that the mysterious initiations of Eleusis had had their cradle in Egypt."

Heckethorne (*Secret Societies of all Ages and Countries*, Vol. I., p. 78) says: "The irradiations of the Mysteries of Egypt shine through and animate the secret doctrines of Phœnicia, Asia Minor, Greece, and Italy. The Eleusianian Mysteries may not have originated in Egypt, but doubtless many of the ceremonies were founded upon ideas imported from the Egyptian mythology."

Lenormant acknowledges this, saying: "The Orphikoi had borrowed much from this country (Egypt); in particular, the history of their Zagreus, which they were led to apply to the Iakchos of the Mysteries, was nothing else than that of the death of Osiris, the god in whose worship corn, as a symbol of the future life and of the knowledge necessary to salvation, played a part which so closely resembled the notions of the Eleusinia."

Initiation into the Mysteries of Eleusis was considered a great

¹ Modern magicians have been able to repeat these experiments. At the height of the French Revolution a Belgian optician named Robertson gave a most unique spectral exhibition in Paris in a vault beneath an abandoned Capuchin chapel. The crypt was shrouded in black draperies, ornamented with the emblems of mortality. In the center of the place was a brazier filled with burning coals. Robertson threw various essences upon the fire, whereupon clouds of incense arose. In the midst of the smoke, phantoms of the illustrious dead appeared, and lastly a gigantic skeleton armed with a scythe.

"Behold," said the conjurer, "the fate reserved for us all." No sooner pronounced than a clap of thunder was heard, and the spectators shivered with apprehension. The illusions were accomplished by the aid of a phantasmagoric lantern, casting pictures on the smoke.

² *Contemp. Rev.*, Vol. XXXVII., p. 859.

boon. The author of the Homeric hymn exclaims at its close: "Happy is he among men who has seen the Mysteries; but he who is not initiated, who does not participate in the sacred rites, will not enjoy the same destiny after his death in the abodes of darkness."¹

Sophocles² speaks to the same effect: "O thrice happy those among men who descend into the lower world after having contemplated the representations; they only have life; as for the others, there is nothing but suffering for them."

Says Lenormant:³ "Whatever awakens and develops in man the religious sentiment, even though misguided by error, exerts a salutary influence over him. If, then, the Fathers of the Church have been justly shocked at the obscenity of certain symbols presented to the view of the initiated; on the other hand, given ancient society, with its beliefs, we must accept the correctness of what is said by so many philosophers and great thinkers of paganism with regard to the beneficial influence of the initiations of Eleusis. Above all, side by side with all the pantheistic errors and the most fantastic aberrations of symbolism, what remains as the honor and the indisputable merit of the Mysteries of Eleusis is the energetic affirmation, maintained in them from the first day to the last, of the divine life after death, and of the immortality of the human soul.

"In the Egyptian 'Book of the Dead,' man at the moment of his death is represented as a grain of corn which falls into the earth in order to draw from its bosom a new life. Though we are not obliged, on that account, to seek its origin on the banks of the Nile, the symbolic teaching of the Mysteries of Eleusis was the same, and the fable of Kore is as much the image of the destiny of man after death as it is that of the reproduction of vegetative life by means of the seed committed to the earth. But as soon as men rise above the rude and primitive notion of a palingenesia purely terrestrial—of a return to existence in this world—immortality, the life beyond the grave, presents itself to their minds in connection with penalties and rewards, with the elect and the reprobate. It was natural that, in proclaiming the existence of the future life, the Mysteries should exhibit themselves as securing beatitude in that life to those who participated in their purifications and their merits."

Some writers have endeavored to strip the Eleusinian Rites of

¹ *Hymn. in Cer.*, 480-482.

² Ap. Plutarch., *De And. post.*, p. 81, ed. Wyttentbach.

³ *Contemp. Rev.*, Vol. XXXVIII., p. 429.

their mystery, by declaring that no esoteric doctrine subversive of the popular mythology of Attica was taught to the higher initiates. "If this be so," says a writer in *Blackwood's Magazine*, Vol. 73, p. 204, "it is scarcely possible to account satisfactorily for that incident mentioned by Plutarch in his life of Alcibiades, where the spoilt darling of the Athenians is described as having mutilated the statues of Mercury and of other divinities, *after* having, in a drunken frolic, travestied the Mysteries,—he himself representing the Hierophant, Theodorus, the herald, and Polytion the torch-bearer. Guided by the light of the supposition already mentioned, we discover the circumstance of this profanation to be immediately comprehensible: whereas, denied the aid of some such rational explanation as to the debasement of the popular mythology of the Mysteries, an act of impiety so flagrant and audacious surpasses belief, even when told of a madcap like Alcibiades."

Says Albert Pike (*Morals and Dogma*, p. 379): "The object of all the mysteries was to inspire men with piety, and to console them in the miseries of life. That consolation, so afforded, was the hope of a happier future, and of passing, after death, to a state of eternal felicity. Cicero says that the initiates not only received lessons which made life more agreeable, but drew from the ceremonies happy hopes for the moment of death. Socrates says that those who were so fortunate as to be admitted to the mysteries, possessed, when dying, the most glorious hopes of eternity. . . . It is a great mistake to imagine that they were the inventions of charlatanism, and means of deception. They may in lapse of time have degenerated into imposture and schools of false ideas; but they were not so at the beginning; or else the wisest and best men of antiquity have uttered the most wilful falsehoods."

The Mysteries of Isis and Osiris and those of Eleusis lasted until late in the Christian era, but they had become disfigured by many gross practices. The sacred rites of Isis and Osiris had their last stronghold in the little island of Philæ, in the Nile, at the first cataract. There the Hierophants made a long and successful stand against the encroachments of the Christian religion. Finally there came a special edict from Constantinople, from the Emperor Theodosius, abolishing the pagan worship at Philæ. The temples of Isis and Osiris were pulled down by fanatical fellahs; the sacred shrines were violated, and thus ended those Mysteries that were the admiration of the ancient world. About the ruins of Philæ—the supposed burial place of Osiris—there grew up a little circle of

mud huts, inhabited by monks, whose contempt for the old faith of Mizraim was manifested in acts of useless vandalism.

The Christian anchorites, who fled to the Egyptian deserts to worship God in silence and solitude, had many strange and fearful experiences, if monkish historians are to be believed. They were constantly haunted by evil spirits—some in the guise of beautiful nude women, others as terrible demons, breathing smoke and flames. Perhaps these apparitions were those of the old Hierophants, taking their revenge against the despoilers of the temples of the gods.

It is not to be supposed that the worship of Isis and Osiris was entirely eradicated by the Christian religion. Many of the dogmas of the old solar and phallic cults were absorbed into Christianity. The sphinx still keeps guard over the ancient faith of the Pharaohs, buried though that faith be in a metamorphosed symbolism. A celebrated French artist has depicted the Virgin and infant Jesus, during the flight into Egypt, resting at the foot of the sphinx, while over them the eternal stars shine in the blue-black sky. The mysterious sphinx broods over the mother and child, veils them in its shadowy embrace, seeming to say to the Christ: "And thou too, and thy religion may pass away, but the wisdom of the ancient Initiates—never!"

If one of the priests of Isis or Osiris could return to life again, and visit a Roman Catholic cathedral on the Continent, he would see many things that would recall to his mind the mysterious religion of the ancient temples:¹—the lights on the altar; the peculiar vestments of the clergy; the incense; the sacred image moving in procession "escorted by the tonsured surpliced train," which Juvenal satirised centuries ago; the worship accorded to Madonna and child, a paraphrase of that given to Isis and the infant Horus; the nimbus (a solar emblem) about the head of the pictured saint; the very orientation of the cathedral itself.

Speaking of this orientation, the astronomer Lockyer (*Dawn of Astronomy*, pp. 95-96), writes: "All our churches are more or less Oriental, which is a remnant of old sun-worship. Any church that is properly built to-day will have its axis pointing to the rising of the sun on the Saint's Day, i. e., a church dedicated to St. John ought not to be parallel to a church dedicated to St. Peter. It is true that there are sometimes local conditions which prevent this; but if the architect knows his business properly he is unhappy unless he can carry out this old-world tradition. But it may be sug-

¹ See Inman's *Pagan and Christian Symbolism*, pp. 51-52, 76-77, 101-105.

gested that in our churches the door is always to the west and the altar is always to the east. This is perfectly true, but it is a modern practice. Certainly in the early centuries the churches were all oriented to the sun, so that the light fell on the altar through the eastern doors at sunrise. The late Gilbert Scott, in his *Essay on Church Architecture*, gives a very detailed account of these early churches, which in this respect exactly resembled the Egyptian temples.

“In regard to old St. Peter’s at Rome (*Builder*, Jan. 2, 1892), we read that ‘so exactly due east and west was the Basilica that, on the vernal equinox, the great doors of the porch of the quadriporticus were thrown open at sunrise, and also the eastern doors of the church itself, and as the sun rose, its rays passed through the outer doors, then through the inner doors, and, penetrating straight through the nave, illuminated the High Altar.’ The present church fulfils the same conditions.”

In front of the eastern façade of St. Peter’s at Rome, in the centre of the magnificent circular plaza, stands an Egyptian obelisk that once graced the portal of some old temple of Mizraim. It was set up by one of the Popes, as an historical curio and ornament. Singular coincidence!—obelisks are supposed to symbolise the sun’s rays. At least they were frequently used as gnomons by the Egyptians. An obelisk in front of an oriented Christian church is after all not such an incongruous thing, but a reminder to the scholar that the ancient solar cult of Isis and Osiris still survives the shock of time, though its outward significance is lost.

The worship of Osiris carried with it, wherever it was disseminated, the doctrine of the immortality of the soul. Says Wiedemann (*Ancient Egyptian Doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul*, pp. viii–ix): “From the fourth century B. C. he [Osiris], together with his companion deities, entered into the religious life of the Greeks; and homage was paid to him by imperial Rome. This Osirian doctrine influenced the systems of Greek philosophers; it made itself felt in the teachings of the Gnostics; we find traces of it in the writings of Christian apologists and the older fathers of the Church, and through their agency it has affected the thoughts and opinions of our own time.”