

Theosophical Symbology Some Hints Towards Interpretation of the Symbolism of the Seal of the Society

by **G.R.S. Mead, F.T.S.**

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"A combination and a form, indeed,
Where every god did seem to set his seal,
To give the world assurance of a MAN."

As the question is often asked, What is the meaning of the Seal of the Society, it may not be unprofitable to attempt a rough outline of some of the infinite interpretations that can be discovered therein. When, however, we consider that the whole of our philosophical literature is but a small contribution to the unriddling of this collective enigma of the sphinx of all sciences, religions and philosophies, it will be seen that no more than the barest outlines can be sketched in a short paper.

In the first place, we are told that to every symbol, glyph and emblem there are seven keys, or rather, that the key may be turned seven times, corresponding to all the septenaries in nature and in man.

We might even suppose, by using the law of analogy, that each of the seven keys might be turned seven times. So that if we were to suggest that these keys may be named the physiological, astronomical, cosmic, psychic, intellectual and spiritual, of which divine interpretation is the master-key, we should still be on our guard lest we may have confounded some of the turnings with the keys themselves.

If it can be demonstrated that these symbols are the formulae of the laws, forces, and powers of nature and man, we shall have established a rational basis for their use, and shall restore to their ancient dignity these monarchs who have been dethroned by superstition and cant into the dungeons of an artistic aestheticism.

In our attempt, let us follow the time-honoured and spiritual method of proceeding from universals to particulars. Let us take the primitive type of the serpent with its tail in its mouth. This we find in all symbology to be the circle, the most mysterious and universal of all symbols. Taking it in its [Page 4] highest interpretation, it stands for the absolute, or Absoluteness, of which we can predicate nothing. Yet as the mind of man, in order to preserve its reason and growth, continually fights against the paralyzing inanity of a blank negation, it is ever striving to advance the circumference of its knowledge, unconscious that at the same time the circumference of its ignorance is proportionally increasing. Till at last, tired with this endless quest for the external and that which is not, in despair it turns upon itself to know the knower and the subject of that object which it thinks *not self*.

Thus, by analyzing self-reflection, an ultimate is reached — pure thought.

Yet there is one factor which cannot be destroyed. From thought the idea of Space can never be eliminated. Therefore, as in all deductions we slant from pure thought, and as that thought is the Self, and yet cannot eliminate from itself the idea of Space, Space is taken as the first aspect of the Absolute, as far as *Self* is concerned. Still, as the *Self* is essentially of the nature of the Absolute, it leaves open the path of progress to ITSELF by retaining the idea of that which is neither *space* nor *self*, but Space and Self as a unity. This from the standpoint of *Self*, or pure thought, is ABSTRACT SPACE.

This, then, is the highest interpretation of the circle, whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere. And its centre, which is equally itself, is the first potentiality of all that may be evolved in Space and Time, and which may be represented by the symbols which the serpent surrounds in our Seal. Thus, then, the Circle represents the type of abstract Space, and this primordial type is assumed by the serpent which swallows its own tail. The Serpent is not the Circle, but assumes the form of the Circle.

This is, of course, from the highest and most metaphysical standpoint, when the circle is taken to typify the Absolute. Nor must we be misled by the term "space" as meaning anything of a material nature, for we might equally endeavour to explain it by the graphic symbol of the "Great Breath", or Absolute Motion, meaning thereby Absolute Consciousness, in that Consciousness cannot be conceived by us without the idea of change, and change is *motion*; or, again, we might (to coin a word) call it "Beness". or that which underlies and comprehends both being and non-being.

We must further remember that this Absolute Circle includes every idea of Space and Time, that it is Abstract Space and Time, or Duration. Hence we see that the perfect type of space is a sphere or globe, as it was also the type of perfect man. Thus we have the same figure for the Macrocosm, or Great World or Universe, as for the Microcosm, Little World or Man. The heavenly bodies are spheroidal, as are also their paths, and the perfect, or heavenly Man, is typified by a globe, as Plato has said and the Egyptians have everywhere testified in their hieroglyphics.

Moreover, seeing that the Circle has no end and no beginning, it is a fit symbol of eternity, eternal Time, or Duration, the ever-present type of Time as we know it. Hence, also the circles, or cycles of Time which play so [Page 5] important a part in all ancient systems and in all astronomical calculations, are but manifestations of this one eternal type. Further, the terms "wheels", planetary chains, rings, rounds, etc., are all synthesized by this comprehensive symbol. Truly, as Plato says, the Deity geometrizes.

Again, from a mathematical point of view, zero becomes a number only when preceded by one of the nine figures to manifest its potency. Zero by itself is no number.

To put it mathematically :

The Deity = O.

As Oken says, " There is only one essence in all things, the O, the supreme identity, but there is an infinite number of forms. The ideal nought is absolute, or monadic unity, not a singularity, like an individual thing or number 1, but an indivisibility, or absence of number, in which can be discovered neither the 1 nor the 2, neither line nor circle — a pure identity. The mathematical O is the eternal. It is not subjected to any definition of time or space, it is neither finite nor infinite, neither great nor small, neither at rest nor in motion, but it is and is not all these. The eternal is the *nothing* of nature."

Mathematical readers might do well also to reflect on the formula

$x^{\circ} = 1$.

Here x may stand for any unity or collection of unities, in fact, for all differentiation. Therefore, all things in their essence are a unity, for the formula is true for all values of x.

We will now consider more particularly the meaning of the serpent. In its highest aspect it is the symbol of Wisdom. "Be ye therefore wise as serpents", says one of the Masters. Do we not find throughout the Greek and Roman classics that the serpent was regarded with the greatest reverence, and frequently guarded within the sacred Adytum of the Sanctuary ? Everywhere the same legends and traditions in Egypt and Chaldea, among the Druids and Norsemen, with the ancient Mexicans and Peruvians. In India the folklore teems with legends of the cobra. These sacred reptiles almost invariably guard *hidden* treasure, for is it not the Initiates who guard the *occult* secrets of nature ?

Throughout the whole of antiquity the Serpent was sacred to the Gods of Wisdom, and we find that Isis has the asp in her head-dress.

What matters though the sacred genii of the Temples and the quiet dwellers in the fanes of Aesculapius appear as hissing vipers in the hands of the Pythoness and Sibyl, or in the locks of Medusa, or of the Eumenides and the frenzied Bacchanals! They were all typical of one and the same force of Inspiration.

Then, also, the Initiates in all ages were called Serpents or Dragons, of which, indeed, the reason may appear in the sequel.

In the first place, as the serpent is oviparous, it was regarded by the [Page 6] ancients as a symbol of the Divinity which issues from the egg of Space, as, for instance, the Ophio-Christos of the Alexandrine Mystics.

As the *Secret Doctrine* tells us: "The Spirit of God moving on Chaos was symbolized by every nation in the shape of a fiery serpent breathing fire and light upon the primordial waters, until it made it assume the annular shape of a serpent with its tail in its mouth."

Moreover, as the serpent sloughs its skin, it was taken as the type of rejuvenation and immortality. In other words, it symbolized the immortal individuality, or Ego, of man, or the Christ-principle which is the silent Watcher of each of us — our conscience. This it is which is the sun whose ray forms this or that personality, and as the snake sheds its skin, so does the spiritual individuality shed its various personalities in its pilgrimage, or cycle, of reincarnation.

In Indian symbology the serpent is seven-headed, even as the Gnostic Dragon has seven "Vowels" above its crest. These vowels typify the seven planes of Cosmos, the seven principles in man, and all the septenates in nature.

Moreover, in symbolism, the serpent and dragon are interchangeable, so that in the Chinese Theogony we find Kwan-shi-yin, the "Logos", "the Son identical with his Father", called the Dragon of Wisdom. [See *Secret Doctrine*, i. 472]

In the Greek, the word δράκων (Dracon) means "watcher" or "Seer", thus giving a key to the symbol as applied to the Initiates, or Eoptae, of the Greater Mysteries.

Still following out the higher meaning of the symbol, we find it typifying the " Fallen Angels"; the Serpent, or Dragons of Wisdom, who fell into generation, or hell; or, in plainer words, our spiritual Egos incarnating into the prison of the body, the marriage of the Heavenly Man with the Virgin of the World or Nature.

It would take too long to enter into the astronomical interpretation of the constellation of the dragon, one out of the seven keys to this protean symbol, with which, indeed, the solar mythologists are so content that they deny all others. Neither can more than a glance be given at the variants of the Serpent symbol as, for instance, the tenth zodiacal sign, which, in India, is represented by Markara, the Crocodile, and in its correspondence with the human principles is the most mysterious of all signs.

The comprehensiveness, again, of the symbol may be seen by the fact that the Milky Way, the Ecliptic, Tropics, and the Cycle of the Great or Sidereal Years were called Serpents by the Astrologers and Adepts.

But as everything has its opposite, so the " Divine Serpent" has its contrary, the Serpent of Evil, even as the Ophites had their Agatho-daemon, or Good Spirit, and their Kako-daemon, or Evil Spirit. If there is a

Universal Medium, or [Page 7] Primordial Substance which pervades, comprehends, or surrounds all things, and which we may conceive of more correctly by considering it as a Universal Force, then we may look upon this comprehending *something*, as fitly symbolized by a serpent which bites its own tail. As such it is neither good nor evil. But seeing that all things are differentiated, and that the law of their differentiation is septenary, as we shall see in the symbolism of the interlaced triangles, it follows that this one substance can only in its higher essence be considered as pure and good.

This plastic medium, which the Hindus call Akash, impinges upon the earth in its most differentiated form, and is, moreover, stained and discoloured by the evil thought-emanations of the earth's inhabitants. This it is which Occultists call the "Astral Light".

Thus the Norse mythology allegorizes a great truth when it tells us that the Midgard Snake encircles the earth, coiled at the bottom of the seas, for the seas are the planes of this primordial force, or matter, and the Midgard Snake is the Astral Light. This, then, is the lower serpent without man corresponding to the serpent within, and typifying the lower nature of each man, his personality, which has to be slain, even as St. George and St. Michael slew the dragon, Bellerophon the Chimsera, and Oedipus the Sphinx — the dragon of Self must be slain by every Initiate, or son of God. And, indeed, in battling with this serpent of the lower nature, no quarter is asked or given by him who would become a Dragon of Wisdom, and change this corrupt body for an incorruptible. So also those who are developing the psychic senses, if they get ensnared within the coils of the Serpent of the Astral Light, will have no quarter given them, but will either fall willing victims to the subtle draughts of this mayavic nectar, or lose their senses before the awful visions that their own impurity attracts. For the *psyche* is of a truth "earthy, sensual, devilish".

To have true vision, this Guardian of the Threshold must be passed — true vision lies beyond. Thus we can plainly see that of a truth *Demon est Deus inversus*, and thus also why the first Matter of the *Magnum opus* of the Alchemists was to be *pure*, even as their Mercury.

In Egyptian hieroglyphics, the God Nahbkhoon is represented as a snake erect on human legs. The name signifies the "uniter", and denotes this medium which unites the human to the divine monad.[See "The Secret Doctrine", Volume 1, Page 472]

We see, then, that the serpent typified both the Upper and Lower Lights, and accordingly that it is on the one hand the "healer" and on the other the "destroyer".

To take a very familiar instance, the allegory of the brazen serpent in the Books of Moses shows the existence of that ever great struggle between the Initiates and the orthodox Jewish priesthood, typified by Moses holding up the [Page 8] Serpent in the wilderness, and so saving the people from the bites of the fiery serpents, or Levitical caste, who were tempting Israel to sin; and with a larger interpretation, it typifies the true teacher, who, by his power, can heal the wretched victims of the fiery serpent, or the passions of their lower natures. Moreover, the skin of the serpent is covered with scales, which may fitly suggest by their forms the facets of diamonds, and thus typify the various religions, philosophies, and sciences of the world, which are but facets of the one immutable truth. Or, again, they may represent individuals who make up the whole of humanity or the microcosms which compose the macrocosm, each reflecting but so much of the rest, and, therefore, capable of appreciating and reflecting but a portion of

the wisdom of the whole.

It is also to be observed that the serpent bites or swallows its own tail, typifying thereby the descent of spirit into matter, and the ascent of matter into spirit, as also the incarnation of the Manasaputras, or mind-born sons of the great intellectual Soul of the Universe, into the Amanasa, or mindless men-animals, the production of nature. For, if "nature, unaided, fails", it must be that Divine Intelligence should aid her in her work. And yet both are from one source, the head and tail of the serpent are both essential parts of the reptile.

Evolution and involution are correlations. The Great Breath is out-breathed and in-breathed; and its in-breathing makes every point and atom of its out-breathing conscious as each re-enters into itself.

Thus, at this point of balance, is self-consciousness; and the ancient wisdom which bade its disciples "know thyself", knew that Mind could know Mind and the Knower, Knowing and Known become one in that Trinity, which is essentially a unity. These symbolical serpents are also connected with trees, and interchangeable with them. Thus we have the Tree of Life, or Spirit, in the midst of the Garden of human Principles, and also the Tree of knowledge of Good and Evil, the tree of Matter. For had not the Serpent of Matter tempted the Divine Androgynes Adam and Eve to fall into generation and disobey the law of Sameness, they could never have gained that knowledge of Self-Consciousness which was required by the law of progress. For the descent of spirit into matter is followed by the ascent of matter into spirit, as has been said, even as the pendulum swings back upon its own path to its starting-point. Therefore, following the law of creation, or action, the "Fall" of our progenitors into creation, or generation, was necessary as soon as it had been initiated by their creator. As a variant upon this symbol, there is an old Hermetic glyph in which the circle is formed by two serpents swallowing each other's tails. Everyone will recollect the Caduceus of Hermes, the Psychopompus, or conductor of the Souls of the dead from and to Orcus. This is composed of a rod with a knob at the top, entwined with two serpents, but in the original symbolism it was composed of three serpents, the three *Fires* which are also seven and forty-nine.[Page 9]

In this connection it may be remarked that Kundalini, one of (lie powers latent in man, is said in the "*Voice of the Silence*" to be called the "Serpentine, or annular power, on account of its spiral working..... It is an electric fiery power, the great pristine force, which underlies all organic and inorganic matter".

Therefore, when Thomas Vaughn, in one of his alchemical receipts, says, "Take our two serpents, which are found everywhere on the face of the earth", he may not be quite an ignoramus as the moderns imagine, and, after all, there may be something more in Alchemy than our material scientists are prepared to admit.

We will now leave our circle, and, bearing in mind that the serpent is a dual Symbol in that it shadows forth both Spirit and Matter, will proceed to consider the symbol of the interlaced triangles.

Let us again refer to Oken, and see how he traces the connection between the O and this duality. "(+ —)," he says, "is nothing else than the definition of O. This duality is the monad itself under another

form. In multiplication, it is the form alone which changes. The Eternal becomes the real by a dual division of itself. Once manifested it is either positive or negative. Nought differs from infinite unity only because it is not affirmed.

"+ presupposes O; — presupposes + and O; but O presupposes neither + nor —. Purely negative quantities are nonentities, for they can only be connected with positive magnitudes. — is the retrogression of + into O".

If + be taken to represent Spirit or the Purush of the Hindu philosophies, then the triangle with its apex pointing upwards will have the same signification. For has it not the shape of a tongue of flame or fire ?

Truly as + it is the everlasting Yea of Teufelsdr ch, the positive pole of the Universal Magnet.

In like manner, the triangle with its apex pointing downwards is the — or negative pole of the Universe, Matter, or Prakriti, the Everlasting Nay of the Philosopher of Old Clothes. As, also, the Above is Fire, so the Below is Water; but this metaphysically. Yet these two triangles are essentially one and as a distinct duality, unthinkable. For there must be a Centre of Indifference, a Synthetical Something, whether we express it by the all-containing circle of the Serpent, or by the central point expanded into the symbolism of the Crux Ansata of ancient Egypt. Thus the Higher is reflected in the Lower, which is essentially itself, and we have a duality of trinities which are essentially a unity, which unity in itself is nothing (O).

This pantacle portrays the generation of all numbers, and is, therefore, the type of the Universe. For example, the point within, or the whole figure, is 1; the two triangles are 2; each triangle has three sides; the three sides of one triangle with the other as a unity, or the three sides of each triangle with the [Page 10] centre point common to both produce 4; the common property of three sides, and the duality of the triangles yield 5; there are 6 points to this hieroglyphic hexagram, which, together with the central one, make 7; and if we proceed to place the tail in the Serpent's mouth by adding the extremes we obtain: —

$$1 + 6 = 7.$$

$$2 + 5 = 7$$

$$3 + 4 = 7.$$

This trinity represents the three lower, or manifested, planes of cosmos, and the synthesizing fourth plane, corresponding with each of which are two human principles, and the seventh, which is universal.

It matters not by what name the pantacle is called, for there are hundreds, and we are not among those who consider that "names" are "things", it is always the symbol of the Macrocosm, or Universe. The interlacing of these triangles forms an interior plane six-sided figure, or hexagon, which is typical of the manifested universe synthesized by the central Symbol of the Microcosm, or Man, seven in all. The sides of this plane figure form the bases of six triangles, of which the apexes touch the Serpent of Wisdom. From one point of view, these are the seven rays of the Logos, or Word, the six and the synthesizing

seventh, each a trinity which becomes a septenary, thus typifying the forty-nine Fires. For analogy is the first law of symbolism, and there are ever three unmanifested, or formless planes, and three manifested or of form, and one that is both formless and of form, both subjective and objective, and yet neither one nor the other. These lower planes, or states, again, in their turn, are of a like nature, each relatively being both spiritual and material, spiritual towards the interiors and material towards the exteriors, and of neither nature, yet of both natures, at their laya, or zero points, where one passes into the other.

Moreover, as shown above, we may regard either triangles as a unity in its oneness, or as a trinity with respect to its sides, each unity of Sameness with its trinity of Difference forming a quaternary, or Tetraktis, the one towards Spirit being the Supernal, and the one towards Matter being the Infernal.

Seeing also that there are an infinite variety of triangles, of which the equilateral is the only perfect figure, the inequality of the sides will represent the infinite variety of triple qualities, which form each entity.

Therefore, each triangle typifies the three fundamental Gunas, or qualities, of the Hindu philosophies, viz., *Satva*, *Tamas* and *Rajas*, of which Satva correlates with wisdom, goodness, purity, light, spirituality, and sameness; Tamas with ignorance, evil, impurity, darkness, materiality, and difference; and Rajas with foulness, or passionate activity, a transformation of the mysterious Eros and Kama. These are the Preservative, Destructive, and Creative energies in nature, as typified by the *Trimurti*, or Trinity, of the Hindus under the personifications of Vishna, Shiva and Brahmâ.

Moreover, the six points of the interlaced triangles are the six directions of Space, North, South, East, and West, the Zenith, and Nadir; or, before, behind, right, left, up and down, synthesized by the point in the centre, which [Page 11] is no direction, yet potentially all directions. And this universe of three dimensions and seven directions is surrounded by the great circle of Time or Death, the Devourer; for even the great cosmos, endless though it may seem to our finite intelligence, is confined within the bounds of finitude and change, and with the removal of time, will in the Overprice resolve itself into its primordial Source, and the circle "Pass not", being broken, will cease "becoming" in the perfection of the great day "Be with us".

Seeing, again, that the lower triangle is a reflection of the upper, this pantacle symbolizes the great Hermetic axiom, "As above, so below". More over, the lower triangle is reversed. Thus we have a symbol of a binary in nature, without which manifestation were impossible. Among which opposites we may mention the terms personal and impersonal. The personal is limited and finite, while the impersonal is unlimited and infinite. Therefore, the Occultist refuses to entertain the idea of a personal deity as the expression of the Universal Divine, of which, indeed, he can predicate nothing — not even that, and IT is impersonal. For to predicate anything of the unspeakable and the unthinkable is to depart from its nature and create the uncreated. Yet in this war of terms, that which points towards the progress of thought and frees itself from the shackles of matter and finiteness should have the preference, and the spiritual or impersonal be predicated of one Deity rather than the material or personal. Now everything exists by its opposite, light by darkness, liberty by necessity, good by evil. And if this polarity of the universe were destroyed, *existence* would cease and all would *be*. As Eliphas Levi says: "If the shield of Satan did not stay the spear of Michael the power of the angel would lose itself in the void, or manifest itself in infinite destruction. If, on the contrary, the foot of Michael did not keep down Satan in his efforts to ascend, Satan would dethrone God, or rather, lose himself in the abysses of the height". Returning to our

triangles, if they are gradually pulled apart until their bases coincide, we have the quaternary traversed by a diameter. Remove this diameter, and the subtle being separated from the fixed, we have a facet of the symbol of the philosophers' stone, or the cube.

We will now proceed to give some meaning to the curious symbol which is near the mouth of the serpent. It is called in India the Jaina Cross, the Svastica, and the Chackra, Discus, or Wheel of Krishna, in which sense it overlaps the meanings of the interlaced triangles, which are sometimes called by the same name. In the West it is known as the Gnostic Cross, and is identical with the Wheels of Pythagoras and Ezekiel.

It is also the Mi[^]Inir, or Hammer of Thor, in the Scandinavian mythology, the magic weapon forged by the Dwarfs in their war with the Giants. In other words, the Titans, or forces of matter. When the Ases are purified by the fire of Suffering, Mi[^]Inir will lose its virtue. This "Hammer of Creation", and in another sense of Destruction, is sung by the bards of ancient Aryavata, in India's great epic, the Mahabharata, Book I., Chapter xv. [Page 12]

"In the midst of this dreadful hurry and confusion of the fight, Nar and Narayan entered the field together, Narayan beholding a celestial bow in the hands of Nar, it reminded him of his Chakra, the destroyer of the Asuras. The faithful weapon, *ready at the mind's call*, flew down from heaven with direct and refulgent speed, beautiful yet terrible to behold, and being arrived, glowing like the sacrificial flame, and spreading terror around, Narayan, with his right arm formed like the elephantine trunk, hurled forth the ponderous orb, the speedy messenger and glorious ruin of hostile towns, who, raging like the final all-destroying fire, shot bounding with desolating force, killing thousands of the Asuras in his rapid flight, burning and involving like lambent flame, and cutting down all that would approach him. Anon he climbeth the heavens from whence he came".

The turning back of its ends denotes its revolution. It is therefore the symbol of evolution and progress as Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*: "He who in this life does not cause this cycle, thus already revolved, to continue revolving, lives to no purpose a life of sin, indulging his senses".

Round this quaternary are *two* circles, the outer, the infinite, all-comprehending, the inner the circle, *etc.*, the circle of necessity surrounding the quaternary of matter; between are the three arupa or formless and spiritual planes. From the microcosmic or human standpoint it typifies the "divine pilgrim" upon the wheel of matter, or the Christ crucified on the cross, or the tree of the lower quaternary or personality.

The form of this cross is sometimes found in this shape:—



Here we see the quaternary of matter represented by the simple Svastica and the divine Tetraktis, or quaternary, manifested by the four mathematical points. Each material cell, or principle, has a germ of spirituality within it, for in Occultism even a blade of grass has all its seven principles, though some are latent. So long as man is drawn by *tanha*, or his thirst for life, into the meshes of matter, so long will he continue to tread his sorrowful pilgrimage upon the wheel of re-incarnation. To be freed from this necessity the four arms, or spokes, must be drawn within the hub, and the base metals transmuted into gold. Further this symbol denotes the four mystic elements of the ancients—earth, water, air, and fire, surrounded by Ether "the lining" of Akasa, which we may describe, though in fear of being misunderstood owing to the materialistic bent of modern thought, as cosmic electricity. The four beings who mysteriously preside over these four points of the compass, to use the most material of all descriptions, are mysteriously connected with Karma, of which [Page 13] they are the agents, and, in another sense, are the protectors of mankind. To trace the meanings of the cross, even superficially, would take volumes, and the object of this paper is merely to give a few hints towards the comprehension of a few of the infinite meanings of the hoary symbolism collected into the seal of the Society; it will, therefore, be better to combine the interpretation of the Svastica and the Crux Ansata, the handled cross or Tau, the central symbol. Perhaps, however, it may be said that in relation to the whole, the Svastica should be interpreted as a cosmic, and the Tau as a human symbol. If that be so, we will leave the Macrocosm, and proceed to consider the symbol of the Microcosm, or man.

In the first place we observe that the Tau differs fundamentally from the Svastica in that it has only three arms. The horizontal and vertical lines do not cut each other, but merely meet. When they cut the vertical, or spiritual, is immersed in the horizontal, or material, the fall into matter is accomplished. With the "handle", or superimposed circle, it signifies life or spirit. We find that in ancient Egypt the initiated adept who had successfully passed all his trials was bound upon a cross of this shape, upon which he remained for three days plunged in a deep and sacred trance, during which his higher principles, or spiritual soul, were supposed to hold communion with the gods. For three days the body remained in the crypt of the temple or pyramid, and on the morning of the third day, just as the sun rose, the Tau and its burden was set so as to catch the first rays of the luminary, and the glorified initiate was brought back to earth-life. In this connection, then, the circle of the handle typifies the immortal spiritual Ego which was also symbolized by a winged globe.

But let it not be supposed that these dramas of initiation were peculiar to ancient Egypt. In Antiquity the Mysteries were the most sacred institutions of all nations, and all the knowledge of the ancients was derived therefrom. In their purity, their tradition and apostolic succession contained in an unbroken chain without missing links, until, with the arrival of Kali Yuga, they began gradually to lose their purity. The poison of materiality gradually infused itself, and so closed veil after veil of the temple of Isis until mankind began to deny that there ever were such things, and clamoured that the only realities were surfaces, and that these contain no within.

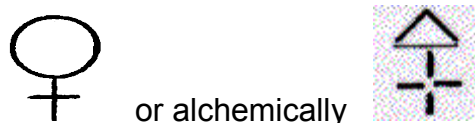
But though, from lack of knowledge, the generality denied these mysteries, yet they remained; for, though the school had ceased for want of fit pupils, the masters had still to watch and wait; they could not leave their self-appointed task until they were relieved by volunteers who would continue to guard the portals of knowledge from the unworthy, and point the way to worthy aspirants. Hence the traditions that a magician could not die until he has passed the "word" to his successor.

Yet this symbolism and these mysteries were in vain if they but pointed [Page 14] to mere external forms

and ritual. The spiritual interpretation of them must be for all time, and must point to something ever present. And if the latter is the case, as we believe, we can never over-estimate the wonderful efficacy of these magnificent heirlooms left us by our predecessors.

The true interpretation of a symbol is that which applies "now and within", and we shall find that this Crux Ansata contains a wonderful mystery and a virtue that can raise humanity from the animal to the divine. For the dark crypt in which the crucified one *was* placed, *is* the body. The body was plunged in a deathlike trance, and the cross of the passions was still and lifeless, for this was the last trial, and the lower nature was to be for ever subdued by the higher. So too if we can send the three-headed Cerberus of the passionate nature or principles to sleep, we shall be glorified by the awakening of the spiritual senses, and so overthrow the old dragon.

There is another form of this symbol, viz :



This is also the Ansated Cross, and is a symbol of man, generation and life. The androgyne has separated into male and female, and man has stepped out of the circle of Spirit. It is thus the symbol of septenary man, the 3 and the 4. It also symbolizes Venus-Lucifer, the morning and evening star. Venus or Lucifer may be looked upon as the *alter ego* of the earth, for their symbols are the same except with this remarkable difference, that they are reversed, and that whereas in the case of the former spirit dominates matter, with the latter it is the material quaternary which crowns it in triumph. There is much food for reflection in this strange fact. How verily art thou fallen from Heaven, Lucifer, Son of the Morning!

If, however, it is remembered that the fallen angels are in reality the incarnating and spiritual souls of men, it will be easy to see that their reflections, our evanescent personalities, are their counterparts reversed in the ocean of matter or Maya, illusion and ignorance, the permanent above the impermanent below. Therefore, to be at one with our higher natures we must reverse this tendency of our lower natures, and let the circle or triangle of spirit dominate the quaternary of matter. The Ansated Cross, therefore, is the symbol of regenerated man, who, when thus purified, remains in the midst, knowing all things in the universe.

Returning to our symbol as a whole, let us treat it from the exteriors to the interiors, remembering at the same time that in so doing we really proceed from the interior to the exterior of things as manifesting the eternal idea.

First we have the Serpent, which, as a unity, represents the one substance, the Mother-Father, of the stanzas of the Book of Dzyan in the *Secret Doctrine*. This substance is purely metaphysical, and is not matter; but the one Something which, as has been said, is for us pure thought. Then, as Brahmâ, the supreme [Page 15] being divides himself into two, and in his female half Vach creates Viraj, who, when born, immediately exclaims " I am Brahm", thus producing the illusion of " I am I", as distinguished from

the reality "I am", so the one Substance becomes two, or Mother and Father, and immediately results in the Son, or the Universe, symbolized in our seal by the double-circled Svastica, which is further portrayed and expanded by the Seal of Solomon or the interlaced triangles. And as the Serpent bites its own tail, so the Universe enters within itself in man, the central symbol, who is the intelligent and self-conscious centre of the arc of evolution.

It will further be seen that the seal of the Society includes its three objects for as it shows the centre of the universe as man, so it shows that all men are essentially one, thus portraying its first object of establishing a basis of universal brotherhood.

Moreover, in uniting into one symbol the symbolism of all the great world religions, it shows their essential unity, which is the basis of Theosophy, the synthesis of all systems; thus it fitly typifies the second object, which is the study of comparative religions, sciences, and philosophies.

And, lastly, as the powers of Cosmos, or Nature and Man, or of the Macrocosm and Microcosm, are shown forth especially in the symbology of the Serpent, so our seal declares the third object, which is a study of the undiscovered laws of nature and the powers latent in man.

And if anyone inquire what good is this study of symbolism and this revival of the superstition of the ancients, it may be replied in the words of one of the greatest of the moderns, *viz.*, of Thomas Carlyle, "of kin to the incalculable influences of Concealment, and connected with still greater things, is the wondrous agency of symbols. In a Symbol there is a concealment, and yet a revelation; here, therefore, by Silence and by Speech acting together, comes a double significance. And if both the Speech be itself high, and the Silence fit and noble, how expressive will their union be! Thus in many a painted Device, or simple Seal-emblem, the commonest Truth stands out to us proclaimed with quite new emphasis".

And further on: "Another matter it is, however, when your symbol has intrinsic meaning, and is of itself fit that men should unite round it. Let but the God-like manifest itself to sense. Let but Eternity look, more or less visibly, through the time Figure! Then it is fit that men unite there, and worship together before such a symbol; and so from day to day, and from age to age, superadd to it new divineness".

In speaking of the keys of the mystery-language and of symbolism, the author of the *Secret Doctrine* says:

"The comprehension of the Occult Doctrine is based upon that of the seven sciences, which sciences find their expression in the seven different applications of the secret records.....Thus we have to deal with modes [Page 16] of thought on seven entirely different planes of Ideality. Every text (and symbol) relates to, and has to be rendered from, one of the following standpoints: —

1. The Realistic plane of thought.
2. The Idealistic.

3. The purely Divine or Spiritual.

The other planes too far descend the average consciousness, especially of the realistic mind, to admit of their being symbolized in terms of ordinary phraseology. There is no purely mythical element in any of the ancient religious texts; but the mode of thought in which they were originally written has to be found out and closely adhered to during the process of interpretation. For it is either symbolical (archaic mode of thought), emblematical (a later, though very ancient mode of thought), parabolical (allegory), hieroglyphical, or, again, logogrammatical — the most difficult method of all; as every letter, as in the Chinese language, represents a whole word.

Thus we see that, of all writings, symbols are of the most universal application, and how that the ancients, by their symbology, created vehicles for the Infinite, with which, indeed, they were in closer touch than the moderns, who rejoice in the exact verbosity of modern scientific and legal phraseology, whereby we strive to narrow and confine all things. Like, also, as the spiritual science of Alchemy left its gross body to the material science of Chemistry, and Astrology bequeathed its shell to mathematical Astronomy, so has symbology projected its shadow in the science of Geometry and Algebra. If, then, the material expression of these sciences is so potent that it has enslaved the intellectual world of the nineteenth century, what must be the spiritual potentialities within them!

Herodotus is called the Father of History, and his writings are revered by scientific chroniclers as the rise of the sun of intellect over the fields of superstition, mythology, and allegory. But was the method of the ancients so irrational ?

For them the events of history were but the fleeting and impermanent showing forth of great laws of nature; for them the form was nothing, the spirit that manifested, alone was worth the remembering; causes were nearer truth than effects. Therefore, they refused to stamp the evil of the past upon the minds of men, for they knew full well that seeing there was more of evil in the world than good, and that the events of history and the hate-bred warfare of the nations was the result of the passionate side of human nature, they refused to perpetuate the progeny of these passions by clothing them in the protecting garments of history.

They refused to perpetuate national hatred by feeding the fire of discord by the fuel of history. For they knew that by the law of the association of ideas the passions of the past would thus inoculate the thought of the present. But [Page 17] mankind required a demonstration of the truth of these laws, of which the majority were gradually losing the knowledge. Thus following the law of ebb and flow, the pendulum has swung into the materiality of realism, and, having now reached the end of its arc, commences to return upon its path with the added knowledge of its experience. It is now being daily demonstrated that results are infinite and that their study requires longer time than the life of the individual allows, therefore it becomes imperatively necessary to reduce this infinity, and confine it within some limit, if we are not to lose ourselves in the void. In plain words, the details of sciences, religions and philosophies have to be classified and synthesized; and a beginning in this direction has been already made in the introduction of the comparative method. Thus the swing of the pendulum begins to return, and at this returning point a moment of pause is given us, where we have the chance of a brief respite from the overpowering rush of collective thought. At such moments we can view the landscape and choose; we can even ascend the shaft of the pendulum, and so, for ourselves, lessen its velocity.

Of this ascent the simplicity of symbolism is a type; for in a symbol may be included the whole science of life, and therefore, the adoption by the Society of a Seal which includes the chief symbols of the past is a potent sign of the tendency of thought today. Moreover, it is the gauntlet thrown down to materialistic negation by serving as a practical method for the training of that intuitive faculty which is the bridge between the material and spiritual mind, the path from the Satanic to the Divine.