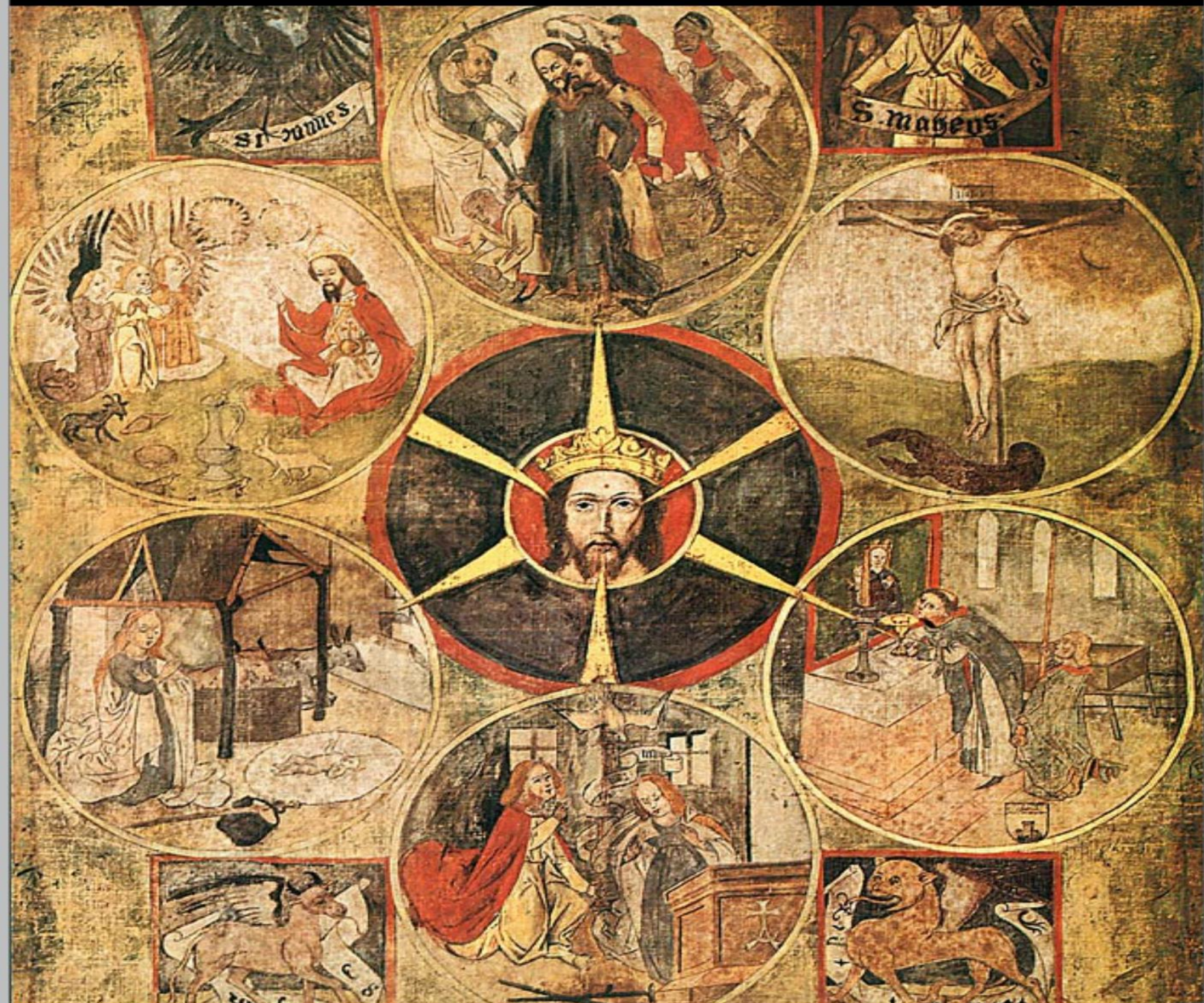


WITH THE ADEPTS

Franz Hartmann



With the Adepts

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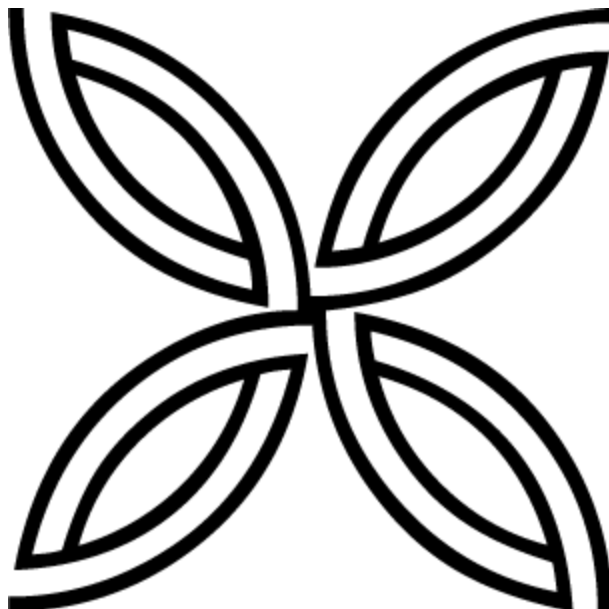
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With the Adepts

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1.The Excursion

I AM penning these lines in a little village in the Alpine mountains, in Southern Bavaria, and only a short distance from the Austrian frontier. The impressions I received yesterday are still fresh in my mind; the experiences which caused them were as real to me as any other experience caused by the events of every-day life; nevertheless, they were of such an extraordinary character that I cannot persuade myself that they were more than a dream.

Having finished the long and tedious labour of investigating the history of the Rosicrucians, and studying old worm-eaten books, mouldy manuscripts hardly legible from age, passing days and parts of night in convent libraries and antiquarian shops, collecting and copying everything that seemed to be of any value for my object in view, and having at last finished my task, I made up my mind to grant to myself a few holidays, and to spend them among the sublime scenery of the Tyrolian Alps.

The mountains were not yet free from snow, although the spring had advanced; but I was anxious to escape the turmoil and noise of the city, to breathe once more the pure and exhilarating air of the mountain heights, to see the shining glaciers glistening like vast mirrors in the light of the rising sun, and to share the feeling of the poet Byron when he wrote the following verses:--

"He who ascends to mountain tops shall find
The loftiest peaks most wrapp'd in clouds and snow;
He who surpasses or subdues mankind
Must look down on the hate of those below;
Though high above the sun of glory glow,
And far beneath the earth and ocean spread,
Round him are icy rocks, and loudly blow

Contending tempests on his naked head,
And thus reward the toils which to these summits led."
Boarding the train, I soon arrived at the foot of the hills.
Thence I wandered on foot, highly enjoying the change
from the smoky atmosphere of the crowded streets to the
fresh air of the country, pregnant with the odour of the
pines and the daisies, the latter of which were appearing in
places from which the snow was gone. The road led up
through the valley of the river, and, as I advanced, the
valley grew narrower and the sides of the mountain
steeper. Here and there were clusters of farmhouses, and
some rustic cottages clinging to the projecting rocks of the
mountains as if seeking protection against the storms
which often blow through these valleys. The sun was
sinking down below the western horizon, and gilded the
snowy peaks of the mountains and the brazen cross on the
top of the spire of the little village church, from which
tollled the curfew, or, as it is here called, the *Ave Maria*,
when I arrived at the place selected as a starting-point for
my excursions into the mountains.

Finding a hospitable reception in the village inn, I soon
retired to rest, and awoke early in the morning, having
been aroused from my sleep by the tinkling of little bells
hanging around the necks of the goats which were sent out
to their pasturage. I arose and stepped to the window. The
shadows of night were fleeing before the approach of the
coming sun; the dawn had begun, and before me in sublime
array stood the grand old peaks of the mountains,
reminding me of Edwin Arnold's description of the view to
be had from the windows of Prince Siddârtha's palace,
Vishramvan. There the grand mountains stood:--

"Ranged in white ranks against the blue-untrod
Infinite, wonderful--whose uplands vast,
And lifted universe of crest and crag,
Shoulder and shelf, green slope and icy horn,
Riven ravine and splintered precipice,

Led climbing thought higher and higher, until
It seemed to stand in heaven and speak with gods."

Soon I was on the way, and wandered farther up through the valley along the river-bed; but the river was here merely a small stream, rushing and dancing wildly over the rocks, while farther down, where it had grown big, it flowed in tranquil majesty through the plains. The valley through which I wandered seemed to cut through long ranges of mountains, and other valleys opened into this. Some of these valleys were known to me, for I had roamed through them and explored their mysterious recesses, caves, and forests some twenty years ago; but there was one mysterious valley which had not yet been explored by me, and which led towards a high, bifurcated mountain peak, whose summit was said to be inaccessible, and upon which the foot of no mortal had ever trod. Towards this valley I seemed to be attracted by some invisible but irresistible power. I felt as if, in its unexplored depths at the foot of this inaccessible mountain, the secret and undefined longings of my heart were to be satisfied; as if there a mystery was to be revealed to me, whose solution could not be found in books.

The sun had not yet risen above the horizon, and the dark woods to the right and left were of a uniform colour. As I entered the narrow, mysterious valley, the path rose gradually, leading through a dark forest along the side of a mountain. Slowly and almost imperceptibly it ascended; at first it was near the rushing stream, but as I progressed the roar of the torrent sounded more and more distant; the foaming stream itself seemed to sink farther down. At last the forest became thinner, and the dark woods were now far below me; but before me and above the intervening trees rose the naked cliffs of the inaccessible mountain. Still the path led up higher. Soon the distant noise of a waterfall was heard, and I approached again the bed of the mountain stream, which, however, now seemed to be a

mass of rocks, split into pieces by some giant power, lying about in wild confusion, while the white foam of the water danced between the cliffs.

Here and there were little islands of soil covered with green vegetation. They stood like isolated tables in the midst of the wilderness; for the combined action of water and air had decomposed and eaten away a great part of their foundations, and they looked like plates of soil resting upon small pedestals; hard as they are, their final tumble is merely a question of time, for their foundations are slowly crumbling away.

My path took me upwards, sometimes nearing the river-bed, sometimes receding from it, leading sometimes over steep rocks, and again descending to the bottom of ravines formed by the melting snows. Thus I entered deep into the mysterious valley, when the first signs of sunrise appeared upon the cliffs above my head. One of these towering peaks was crowned with a halo of light, while beyond it the full sunlight streamed into the valley below. A mild breeze swept through the tops of the trees, and the foliage of the birch-trees, with which the pine forest was sprinkled, trembled in the morning air. No sound could now be heard, except occasionally the note of a titmouse, and more rarely the cry of a hawk which rose in long-drawn, spiral motions high up into the air to begin its work of the day.

Now the ash-gray walls and cliffs began to assume a pale silvery hue, while in the rents and crags of the rock the dark blue shade seemed to resist the influence of the light. Looking backwards, I saw how the valley widened, and, far down, the stream could be seen as it wandered towards the plains. Obtaining more room as it advanced, it spread, and formed ponds and tanks and little lakes among the meadows. On the opposite side of the valley rose the tops of high mountains far into the sky, and between the interstices of the summits, still more summits arose. The foot of the range was covered with a dark vegetation, but

the mountain sides exhibited a great variety of colours, from the almost black appearance of the rocks below to the ethereal white of the farthest peaks, whose delicate hues seemed to blend with the pale blue sky. Here and there the surface was already covered with spots of light from the rising sun, falling through the rents of the rocks and through the branches of trees, foreboding the near arrival of the orb of day. Thus the higher peaks enjoyed the warm light of the sun long before it shone into the valley below; but while it shone in its full brightness upon the mountain tops, the dark shadows in the deep valley became thinner and began to disappear.

At last the solemn moment arrived, and the sun rose in his sublime majesty over the tops of the mountains, becoming visible to all. The shadows fled, and a flood of light penetrated into the valley, lightening up the dark forest of pines and illuminating the caves of the rocks. Shining upon the fields of snow and the glaciers, its light was reflected as in a mirror and produced a blinding effect, but upon the rocky surface it became softened, and gave it the appearance of a thousand various hues.

The road turned round a projecting part of the height, and suddenly I stood in full view of the inaccessible mountain. Between the place where I stood and the base of the mountain there was a well-nigh treeless plain, and the soil was almost without any vegetation. Everywhere the ground was covered with stones and rocks, many of which seemed to have fallen down from the mysterious mountain and to have been broken in the fall. Here and there was a small spot covered with moss or small vegetation, sending fantastically-shaped branches of green upwards along the sides of the inaccessible mountain towards the bare gray walls of the summit, where giant sentinels of a forbidding mien stood eternal and immovable, and seemed to defend their strongholds against the aggressive vegetation, crowding the latter back into the valley. Thus the

everlasting combat which had been raging for untold ages still continued; but the front lines of the contending armies changed from year to year. Everlasting, like the eternal truths, stand the bare gray rocks upon the summits; here and there the vegetation invades their kingdom, like illusions approaching the realm of the real; death is victorious; the green spots are buried each year under the descending rocks; but again life is the victor, for those rocks decay, and a new life appears upon their withered faces.

In the limestone formation of the Alpine ranges, the rocks decomposed by wind and rain assume often the most fantastic shapes, which suggest the names which are given to the mountains. Very little power of imagination is required to behold in the shape of the summits of the Wilden Kaiser mountain the figure of the Emperor Barbarossa, with his long red beard, with crown and sceptre, lying in state, unaffected by the cold of the winter or the summer's heat, waiting to be resurrected; or we may see in the shape of the Hochvogel the form of an eagle spreading its wings; in the Widder-horn, the shape of the horns of a ram, &c. At the base of the mountains and in the valleys the soil is covered with small loose rocks and piles of sand, in the midst of which the coltsfoot plant (*Tussilago farfara*) spreads its large green leaves, and the blue bell-shaped flowers of the monkshood (*Aconitum napellus*) wave their heads. In some secluded spots grows the celebrated edelweiss (*Gnaphalium leontopodium*), resembling in size those which grow on the Popocatepetl in Mexico, and on the Cordilleras of South America. There may also be found the mountain gentian, the Alpine rose, the mandrake, *Arnica montana*, the mysterious *Hypericon*, and other curious plants full of healing powers and strange virtues. Wherever a sufficient quantity of soil has accumulated to enable a tree to grow, a larger kind of vegetation appears; but the little crust of earth is not deep

enough to afford a solid footing to large trees. They may grow to a certain height, but some day a storm will arise and sweep down the mountain sides, and then the work of destruction begins. Grand old tree-corpses, whose roots have been torn from the soil, are lying about, their barkless, bleached branches like so many skeleton arms stretched up towards heaven, as if they had been calling for help in the hour of their death, but no help had arrived. Smaller growths of dwarf-trees surround them, and cover the ground or feed like parasites upon the substance of the dead.

The spring had advanced; but among these mountains the seasons are interlaced with each other. The red and yellow leaves painted by autumn were seen among the green foliage of the stunted pines. The moss clinging to the steep precipices shows the reddish colour obtained in the fall, and in many clefts and caverns linger the snow and ice of the past winter; but above the red and green and the pure white snow the gray masses of the summits rise in a succession of pillars and points, with domes and spires and pinnacles, like a city built by the gods; while in the background spreads the gray or blue canopy of heaven. Thin streams of water run down from these heights over the precipices, and as they splash over the projecting rocks they are reduced to vapour before reaching the ground below. The rocks themselves have been hollowed out, forming large caves, and indicating how powerful those little veins of water may become, if swelled by the floods from the melting snows of the summits.

After enjoying for a few minutes the sublimity of this scenery, I continued my way and approached a little stream coming from a waterfall in the distance. I wandered along its border; the water was deep, but so clear that even the smallest pebble could be distinctly seen at the bottom. Sometimes it appeared as motionless as if it were liquid crystal penetrated by the rays of the sun, and again,

meeting with obstacles in its way, it foamed in its rocky bed as if in a sudden fit of rage, while in other places it tumbled in little cascades over pretty pebbles and stones, forming miniature cataracts which exhibited manifold colours.

In these solitudes there is nothing to remind one of the existence of man, except occasionally the sawn-off trunk of a tree, showing the destructive influence of human activity. In some old, rotten, and hollow trunks rain-water has collected, sparkling in the sun like little mirrors, such as may be used by water nymphs, and around their edges little mushrooms are growing, which our imagination transforms into chairs, tables, and baldachinos for fairies and elves.

Where I now stood, the ground was covered with moss, and occasionally there was to be seen a great, white thistle, whose sharp-pointed leaves sparkled in the sunlight. At a short distance I saw a small grove of pines, looking like an island in the desert, and to that grove I directed my steps. There I resolved to rest and enjoy the beauty of nature. I laid myself down upon the moss in a place which was overshadowed by a mighty pine. The music of the mountain stream was heard at a distance, and opposite to the place where I rested there was to be seen a waterfall, spreading into a vapour as it fell over the rocks, and in the vapour appeared the colours of the rainbow. The mist fell into a basin formed of rock, and from a rent in this basin, overgrown with moss, the water foamed and rushed, hastening down towards the valley, to become united with the main body of the river.

For a long time I watched the play of the water, and the longer I watched the more did it become alive with forms of the most singular shape. Supermundane beings of great beauty seemed to dance in the spray, shaking their heads in the sunshine and throwing showers of liquid silver from their streaming curls and waving locks. Their laughter sounded like that of the falls of Minnehaha, and from the

crevices of the rocks peeped the ugly faces of gnomes and kobolds watching slyly the dance of the fairies. Above the fall the current seemed to hesitate before throwing itself down over the precipice; but below, where it left the basin, it appeared to be irritated by the impediments in its way and impatient to leave its home; while far down in the valley, where it became united to its brother, the river, it sounded as if the latter was welcoming it back to its bosom, and as if both were exulting over their final union in a glad jubilee.

What is the reason that we imagine such things? Why do we endow "dead things" with human consciousness and with sensation? Why are we in our moments of happiness not satisfied to feel that we live in a body, but our consciousness craves to go out of its prison-house and mix with the universal life? Is our consciousness merely a product of the organic activity of our physical body, or is it a function of the universal life, concentrated--so to say--in a focus within the physical body? Is our personal consciousness dependent for its existence on the existence of the physical body, and does it die with the latter; or is there a spiritual consciousness, belonging to a higher, immortal, and invisible self of man, which is temporarily connected with the physical organism, but which may exist independent of the latter? If such is the case, if our physical organism is merely an instrument through which our consciousness acts, then this instrument is not our real self. If this is true, then our real self may exist independently of the latter. If we mentally float along the curves of the mountain tops, sinking gradually downwards, rising suddenly upwards, and examining in our imagination the things upon their surface, why do we feel such a sense of exhilaration and joy, as if we were really there, but had left our material body behind, because too heavy to accompany the spirit to the top of the inaccessible mountain? It is true, a part of our life and consciousness must remain with the