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JACOB BOEHME



THE TEUTONIC PHILOSOPHER

By

W. P. SWAINSON



London

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JACOB BOEHME

THE TEUTONIC PHILOSOPHER

CHAPTER I

EARLY LIFE

SEARCH where we will through the whole range of mysticism, it is hard to find a deeper or more interior mystic than the poor, unlettered shoemaker of Goerlitz, Jacob Boehme. Unlearned, as this world understands learning, he yet penetrated to the core of things, touching depths that the profoundest philosophers and the keenest thinkers have essayed in vain to reach. Where the most subtle metaphysicians have failed in their search for truth, this poor shoemaker, through his humble childlike faith, succeeded in discovering the ground of all things. Not only was he a great mystic, but he was also a spiritual occultist.

He was born at the village of Alt-Seidenberg, near Goerlitz, in Saxony, in the year 1575.

His parents were simple but respectable peasants. As a boy Boehme spent much of his time alone, tending the cattle. At an early age he developed the visionary faculty, and was able to see in the spirit world. He went to school, learned to read and write, and, on leaving, was apprenticed to a shoemaker.

One day, while his master and mistress were out, a stranger entered the shop, bought a pair of boots, for which he paid an excessive price, and departed. On reaching the street he called out, "Jacob, come hither." The lad, greatly surprised to find that the man knew his name, went outside, whereupon the stranger fixed a kind yet penetrating glance upon him, and said, "Jacob, thou art yet but little, but the time will come when thou shalt be great and become another man, and the world shall marvel at thee. Therefore be pious, fear God, and reverence His Word; especially read diligently the Holy Scriptures, where thou wilt find comfort and instruction, for thou must endure much misery and poverty, and suffer persecution. But be courageous and persevere, for God loves and is gracious unto thee." The stranger then clasped his hand, looked kindly at him, and disappeared. He was probably one of those highly evolved beings called Adepts,

or Masters, who watch over and help all who earnestly and truly endeavour to serve God, follow in the footsteps of the Christ, and desire to be of use and service to their fellow-men. Similar instances are to be found in the lives of other mystics.

The interview made a deep and lasting impression on Jacob. He became more serious and meditative, more childlike and humble. He admonished his fellow-workmen, with the result that his master dismissed him, whereupon he became a travelling journeyman.

During this period Boehme was greatly troubled with doubts. He was conscious of his own unworthiness, and fell into a profound and deep melancholy. The mystery of life and the sin and misery he saw on all sides almost overwhelmed him. He had a keener sense of sin, together with that tumult of conflicting desires and reactionary evil, that so often precedes the outburst of light.

At length his first period of illumination took place. It lasted for seven days in succession. During the whole of that time his higher or more extended consciousness was active, and his range of vision correspondingly widened. His external or bodily faculties meanwhile

continued in their normal condition. What some call the inner body being consciously awake, or active, he was naturally aware of what was taking place on the plane corresponding to it.

In 1594 he married a tradesman's daughter, by whom he had four sons.

In 1600, at the age of twenty-five, a second illumination was vouchsafed to Jacob. One day, while walking in the fields, he fell into a deep and inward ecstasy, so that he could look into the inmost principles and deepest foundations of things, gazing, as it were, into their very heart. The mystery of creation was opened to him suddenly, and he learned the ground of all things. He writes: "In one quarter of an hour I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at a university, at which I did exceedingly admire, and I knew not how it happened to me; and thereupon I turned my heart to praise God for it. For I saw and knew the Being of all beings, the Byss and Abyss, also the birth or eternal generation of the Holy Trinity; the descent and original of this world, and of all creatures, through the divine wisdom. I knew and saw in myself all the three worlds, namely the divine, angelical, and paradisiacal world;

and then the dark world, being the original of nature to fire ; and then, thirdly, the external and visible world, being a procreation, or external birth ; or as a substance expressed or spoken forth from both the internal and spiritual worlds ; and I saw and knew the whole being in the evil and in the good, and the mutual original and existence of each of them. . . . I saw it (as in a great deep) in the internal, for I had a thorough view of the universe, as in a Chaos, wherein all things are couched and wrapped up, but it was impossible for me to explicate and unfold the same." He thanked God in silence for the vision, but told no one, continued his shoemaking, and attended to his family duties.

Ten years later his third illumination took place. That which had previously seemed chaotic and fragmentary now formed into a coherent whole. His scattered intuitions were co-ordinated. Fearing lest he should forget what he had seen he wrote it down in order to preserve it, though not for publication. This was the origin of the *Aurora*, his first work, which he compiled as a help to his memory. He began writing in 1612, and continued doing so till his death in 1624, composing some thirty books in all. They are

full of the deepest mysteries regarding God, Christ, heaven and hell, and the secrets of nature. All he did was for God's glory and the redemption of mankind, nothing for personal gain.

CHAPTER II

LATER LIFE

A NOBLEMAN, Carl von Endern, happening to see the *Aurora*, was so impressed with its unique value that he had several copies made. By accident one of them fell into the hands of Gregory Richter, the Lutheran pastor of Goerlitz, a narrow-minded bigot lacking spiritual insight. He was so exasperated at the idea of a poor shoemaker knowing more of God's dealings than himself, an ordained priest, that henceforth he became Boehme's bitterest enemy. He publicly denounced him as a most dangerous heretic, insulted him in every possible way, and threatened to have him imprisoned. Boehme was brought before the City Council, who ordered him to leave the town forthwith. The following day they rescinded the order but confiscated the manuscript of his *Aurora*, at the same time telling him to stick to his last and write no more books.

This action of the Council, however, had the opposite effect to that which they intended, for it brought Boehme's writings to the notice of many who would otherwise have never heard of them. He thus became known to many who were better educated than himself, from whom he afterwards derived considerable assistance in expressing his thoughts.

For seven years Boehme submitted patiently to the decree of the Council, and kept silence. At length the Divine Spirit could no longer be restrained, and he began to write again. He had more leisure than formerly, his business having fallen off, but his friends supplied his needs. His books attracted the attention of those interior souls who were able to appreciate them, and he found followers among both rich and poor.

Among his many works were *The Three Principles*, *The Threefold Life of Man*, *Signatura Rerum*, *Mysterium Magnum*, *Forty Questions*, *The Clavis*, *The Incarnation of Christ*, *Dialogue Between an Enlightened and an Unenlightened Soul*, and *The Way to Christ*.

About a year before his death his old enemy, Gregory Richter, renewed his persecutions with redoubled fury, in consequence of the publication of *The Way to Christ*. This time Boehme

did not remain so quiet, but wrote a defence to Richter's accusations. The City Council, afraid of the blustering priest, requested Boehme to leave the town lest he might suffer the fate of other so-called heretics and be burnt alive. He left Goerlitz in disguise, and went to Dresden, where he found a refuge and was greatly honoured. He had not been there long when, at his own request, he was carried back to Goerlitz. He told his friends that in three days' time he would pass away. This was on a Friday. On the following Sunday, November 21st, 1624, he called his son Tobias to his bedside, and asked him if he heard the beautiful music, requesting him at the same time to open the door in order that it might be heard more plainly. At length, after giving his wife certain instructions about his books, and telling her that she would not long survive him, as indeed she did not, he bade farewell to his family and exclaimed with a smile, "Now I go hence into Paradise." Shortly after he turned round, gave a deep sigh, and passed into the other world.

Richter, the Lutheran pastor, had died recently, but his successor demurred to giving Boehme's body a decent burial. The Catholic Count, Hannibal von Drohna, however, arrived

on the scene, and insisted upon its being solemnly interred.

Some of Boehme's friends had a cross placed over his grave, on which certain occult symbols were carved, among others the Hebrew letters יחשׁוּה.

CHAPTER III

THE MAN

IN personal appearance Boehme was the reverse of striking. He was short of stature, with a low forehead, a rather aquiline nose, and a short, scanty beard, but he had marvelously luminous blue eyes, which redeemed his otherwise plain features. His voice was feeble, besides which he was somewhat deficient in strength, though he does not appear to have suffered from ill-health during his life. He was mild in speech, unassuming in conversation, modest, patient, and gentle. His faith was invincible, and he was fervently spiritual, although he was not what the world would call intellectual. His interior knowledge was too profound for the ordinary understanding. He was one of the few who possessed Divine consciousness.

The most remarkable trait in his character was his extreme humility. He realised, in its fullest sense, that he was a sinner, and took no

credit for his spiritual knowledge. He maintained that all he wrote was "not in the flesh, but in the spirit, in the impulse and motion of God. It is not so to be understood that my reason is greater or higher than that of all other men living, but I am the Lord's twig or branch, and am a very mean and little spark of His; He may set me where He pleaseth. I cannot hinder Him in that . . . if the spirit were withdrawn from me, then I could neither know nor understand my own writings."

He possessed remarkable occult powers, being not only able to look into the past, but also to read the future. He sometimes told people all about their past life. He was conversant with the import behind each name, irrespective of the external language, revealing the essential character of the person, or hidden nature of the animal or plant. Their outer forms expressed to Boehme their inner qualities, being the outward and visible symbols of the inward essence or reality. His consciousness being active on the plane where verbal expression is transcended, he was able at times to understand and speak in the various earthly dialects, like the Apostles on the day of Pentecost. He termed this universal speech the language of nature.

In later times Boehme has numbered among his admirers some of the most highly educated men, including J. G. Gichtel, William Law, the English mystic, and Louis Claude de Saint Martin, the unknown philosopher.

CHAPTER IV

BYSS AND ABYSS

UNLIKE many other seers, Boehme, instead of giving us details concerning the invisible world, deals rather with the inmost principles of things, going, as it were, direct to their ground or centre. The universe is the outcome and development of One Grand Thought. All things are governed by one central law, and all planes of existence are related. That which is true upon one plane is equally true upon all others, in keeping with the law of correspondences. To fully understand the one universal principle at work at the core of every phase and aspect of evolution would be to penetrate the secret of creation. It is the key to all knowledge, and was called the Philosopher's Stone by the old alchemists. This was the work upon which the hermetic philosophers and alchemists were engaged. They purposely chose their vague and, to us, strange terms in order to express very broad

generalisations and abstractions, which applied to every branch of science on the various planes—celestial, spiritual, psychological, intellectual, and also physical—astronomical, chemical, etc. Boehme, who was essentially a spiritual alchemist, makes use of the old alchemical terminology in the exposition of his system of philosophy.

We will start at the centre of things, taking first Boehme's concept of what, for want of a better word, we call God. We are, however, met at the threshold with a difficulty, for, in speaking of the Supreme, we are compelled to use finite, not to say erroneous, terms to express the Infinite. We speak of God's operations as though they had a beginning in time, whereas they have neither beginning nor ending. The finite cannot grasp the Infinite, any more than the measureless can be measured or the end of numbers reached. Only the Eternal can realise the Eternal. Boehme, like others, laboured under this difficulty, hence his religious system of philosophy is largely allegorical and symbolical. This is unavoidable, and must be borne in mind throughout the study of his writings.

Boehme calls that which underlies all things the Abyss. This Abyss contains within Itself

everything and nothing—that is, everything potentially, but nothing manifestly; somewhat as an acorn contains, potentially, a forest of oak trees. Hidden, as it were, within this Abyss is an eternal, bottomless, uncreated Will, or Byss. This Will, or Byss, ever desires to become manifest—"It willeth to be somewhat." This is only possible in a state of duality or differentiation, for without contrast there could only be eternal stillness, nothing could ever be perceived. It would be something like a great eye, which could see nothing because there would be no object, apart from itself, to be seen.

"God," says Boehme, "is in Himself the Abyss without any Will at all. . . . He maketh Himself a Ground or Byss." This Will, or Byss, fashions what is called a Mirror, which reflects all things, everything existing already in a latent or hidden state in the Abyss. It thereby makes them visible or manifest. The Supreme thus, as it were, perceives all things in Himself. The dual principle is latent in Him. He is both Byss and Abyss. He could not otherwise know Himself. The manifest is equally eternal with the unmanifest, there never having been a period without manifestation. Boehme terms this Mirror the Eternal

Wisdom, the Eternal Idea, or the Virgin Sophia. It is the Infinite Mother, the Will being the Infinite Father.

From this Duality proceeds a Trinity. The Father-Mother begets the Son, in Whom His-Her energies are concentrated or gathered up. These are again diffused by the Holy Spirit, somewhat as the Sun gathers up the light and heat of the universe and diffuses them again by means of its rays.

Manifestation is brought about by what Boehme calls Eternal Nature. When the Will, or the Father, beholds Himself and his wonders reflected in the Eternal Idea or Virgin Sophia, the Mother, He desires that they shall not merely remain passive or hidden, but become active and manifest. The Mother also yearns for the manifestation of the marvels latent in Her. Through the union of the Will and the Wisdom, the Father and the Mother, the generation of all things takes place, the unmanifest becomes manifest, the latent becomes active.

CHAPTER V

THE THREE PRINCIPLES

UNDERLYING all Boehme's teachings are what he calls the Three Principles. The Supreme is a Unity of two apparently contradictory elements, which he terms Fire and Light or Wrath and Mercy—in other words, Law and Love. These two contrasting principles exist in all created things. From the union of these two elements proceeds a third, which manifests itself in our external or temporary nature, and which partakes of the qualities of the other two. What Boehme calls the Fire, or Dark Principle in God, is really a latent or unmanifest condition forming, as it were, a ground upon which the Light or Love Principle can act. The Dark Principle only becomes evil when opened—that is, roused to activity—before it is transmuted by the Light or Love Principle. The Supreme does not will that it should be opened, but He allows it to become active if man wills it should, otherwise man could never become self-conscious.

Apart from relative existence there can be no such thing as consciousness, consciousness being the perception of relations. In order to be conscious there must be something of which we are conscious, and this something must differ from that which it is not—in other words, it must form a contrast or apparent opposite. When man gives way to the Dark Principle he is in what Boehme calls “the false imagination,” consequently God can only speak to him in fire or wrath terms, the terms man has made for himself, and this exists as long as man remains in “the false imagination.” He misunderstands God, and looks upon Him as full of wrath and vengeance, instead of love, mercy, and gentleness.

These two apparently antagonistic or antipathetic principles are interchangeably spoken of as Brahma the Creator and Siva the Destroyer, as Ormuzd and Ahriman, God and Devil, Good and Evil, representing respectively the Powers of Light and Darkness. Vishnu, the Preserver in the Indian Trinity, holds the balance between them, and forms a third principle, corresponding to the concise knowledge, or wisdom gained through experience, resulting from eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, spoken of in the Hebrew

Scriptures. Vishnu, the Preserver, represents Truth or Wisdom. By reconciling or uniting law and love He restores the original Trinity, for, though all else in the universe undergoes constant change, Truth is always the same—permanent, durable, and unalterable. If man follows truth, he transmutes evil into good and endures, but if he departs from truth he becomes the slave of Siva and is destroyed.

On every plane manifestation results from the interaction of two seemingly antagonistic, yet really complementary, forces or principles—positive and negative, active and passive, masculine and feminine, and their equilibrium. The Will and Wisdom, Theo-Sophia, or Father and Mother of the Divine Creative Powers, become in nature force and space, which beget motion, resulting, on the physical plane, in positive and negative charges of electricity in the ether, called electrons. Combinations of electrons constitute the atom, combinations of atoms produce chemical entities, etc., from which our material universe arises. Everywhere throughout nature there is an endless hierarchy of unities subdividing into other unities.

Polarity, or Sex, action and reaction, is the great law which underlies all manifestation. It is the creative power of the universe.

CHAPTER VI

THE SEVEN QUALITIES

BESIDES the Three Principles, or rather contained within them, are what Boehme calls the Seven Qualities of Eternal Nature. These are the seven properties or forces through which the Divine energy operates. They correspond in a general way, though not specifically, to the seven *Tattwas* of Indian philosophy and the seven lower Sephiroth of the Kabbalah.

Although each quality has its own specific essence, they yet form one harmonious whole, each being dependent on, or existing within the other six. They work simultaneously, like our different senses, and permeate all things from the highest to the lowest.

The first quality is that of "Contraction." It is the desire drawing all towards itself, and is what Boehme terms "astringent"—that is, harsh, cold and sharp in its nature. It is a kind of magnetic attraction, the congealing of

the Eternal No-thing into Some-thing, and may be spoken of as *Desire*.

The second quality is that of "Friction." This is an expansive force thus creating a dual action, and so causing differentiation. Boehme compares it to gall or bitterness. It is the desire going forth into multiplicity, motion and perception, and may be termed *Motion*.

The third quality is that of "Sensibility." It is brought into existence by the action and reaction of the first and second qualities. Unable to separate from each other they produce a rotary motion which Boehme speaks of as "anguish," "wandering," "the wheel of life." This "anguish," he says, "amasses itself into an Essence." It is also called the fiery strength and may be expressed as *Sensation*.

These three qualities, or properties, form the first or dark ternary, consisting of the three fire principles. It is inharmonious by itself.

The first principle of motion in nature is attraction, the second being repulsion, while the third principle is circulation, resulting from the conflict of the two former. All nature, from the greatest to the least, is derived from the operation of this threefold source. When either attraction or repulsion is predominant

the circulation forms an ellipse, but when they are in equilibrium or balance, a circle is produced. A body is, as it were, circumscribed in space—that is, it is under limitations. This is what Boehme speaks of as “anguish.” These three first properties correspond to the mutually antagonistic elemental forces of inorganic nature.

The fourth quality is called the “Lightning flash,” or “Fire.” It is brought about by the entrance of the Spirit, which diffuses a mild light throughout, and transforms the dark principle, thus ending the strife between the opposing forces. To use Boehme’s expression, “the fire in its devouring changes the grossness of the first amassed Essence.” The flash, or solving fire of the Word, impresses the Divine quality into the life. This principle is the central and really dominant one, the first three being merely abstract movements. It is the origin of life, and is a fire of anger in relation to the first three, but a love fire in relation to the last three principles. It is really Consciousness, or *Life*.

The next three qualities constitute the bright ternary, consisting of the three light principles.

The fifth quality is Love, or “Light.”

Boehme speaks of it as "the true love fire." The oil of love binds and loosens, builds up and harmonises the principles to joy and perfection. In brief, it is *Love*.

The sixth is intelligible or vital sound. It is the principle of "Audibility." The powers or qualities concentrated or drawn together in the fifth property now become intelligent life, distinct and audible. It is the expression or manifestation of life—in other words *Intelligence*.

The seventh quality is the last. The previous six are gathered up into one harmonious whole, the ideal loveliness or supreme bliss. Boehme speaks of it as "Essential Wisdom," "God's Corporeity," or the "Thing Itself." It is His aspect of Reality, the Kingdom of Divine Glory, the uncreated heaven, or *Wisdom*.

Everything, according to Boehme, is brought about through the agency of these seven natural properties. When complete in expression, nature is everywhere found to be septenary.

Summarised, the seven qualities act as follows: The attractive and repulsive forces, by their interaction, produce the third property or rotary motion. These three, or the dark ternary, in their eternal action, constitute

the basis of all life, or the first degree of active life of every creature, whether angel, spirit, man, animal, plant, or mineral. The dark ternary, with its tremendous forces, is essential, the alternative being an eternal death. When the Eternal, or Ain Soph of the Kabbalah, sends forth the Verbum Fiat, or the Son, which is a solving fire, and corresponds to the fourth quality, the three first qualities, or dark ternary, are transmuted in their essence and become respectively the Light, the Joy, and the Divinity of things, the light ternary. This is the Magnum Opus, or Great Work that must likewise be performed in each of us individually, if we are to re-attain our original nature, and the great transmutation which Christ Jesus accomplished in His Own Person.

CHAPTER VII

THE CREATED UNIVERSE

PASSING from the uncreated heaven, or glory of God, we come to the created universe. Creation implies that God produces something, as it were, outside or apart from Himself. It also implies that this something has to be developed from incompleteness to completeness—that is, evolved gradually, as distinguished from the uncreated heaven, which is perfect and complete in itself, being, so to speak, part and parcel of God Himself.

This giving forth from Himself does not impoverish but rather enriches God, like a man who imparts his thoughts to others by means of books does not lose, but rather gains by so doing. On the other hand, there was no necessity for God to create to complete His own perfection. It was a free resolve on His part “to have children in His own likeness”; an act of pure love without any compulsion.

The Supreme does not create out of nothing.

Ex nihilo nihil fit—out of nothing nothing comes. He produces from His Own eternal nature and eternal wisdom, wherein all things dwell in a latent condition, all contrasts exist in a hidden or non-manifest state. When the Verbum Fiat, or Spoken Word, goes forth, these hidden principles—the qualities, forms, colours, powers, etc.—arise in a manifestation of glorious celestial orders in a universe of angelic beings whose life is light, joy, and peace. Here all things are in that state which Boehme speaks of as “in temperature”: that is, in perfect proportion or analogy—in other words, in complete harmony.

As creation arises, creatures manifest successively and independently of one another. They thus come into time and space, as distinct from eternity. Eternity is not simply endless duration, but rather simultaneity, rhythmic circularity, instead of linear movement. To express it symbolically, time may be designated by a straight line and eternity by a circle.

Although the creation of spirits in freedom brings about a multitude of relative centres, in a sense independent of God, this does not necessarily imply disorder or antagonism. All, until self-love made its appearance, were “in temperature,” or harmony, like the various

colours and forms in a garden of flowers, where each enhances the beauty of the whole, thus forming pleasing contrasts without producing violent antagonisms. One quality may predominate in some, another in others; still, this does not mar the beauty of the whole. It simply heightens the general effect through their dissimilarity.

Creation unfolds through endless circles. Outside the circle of the uncreated heaven is the created heaven, or angelic world, consisting of three hierarchies, at the head of which were placed three Hierarchs—Michael, Uriel, and one whose name is not given by Boehme, but who became Lucifer after his fall. Michael represented the Father, the Hierarch afterwards called Lucifer the Son, and Uriel the Holy Spirit. They were formed out of both the light and the dark principles, the latter forming a base or ground for the former.

Boehme states that the angels inhabiting this heaven are very bright and beautiful, and of various hues. They are not hampered by time and space like we are. With them all things are within, not outside, one another.

CHAPTER VIII

FALL OF LUCIFER

WE now reach a point in Boehme's philosophy which touches on the dark principle in God. This brings us face to face with that riddle of the universe, the origin of evil. Although the dark or fiery principle exists in the Supreme, it is ever overcome by the light principle. It never becomes active, but remains in a latent or passive condition, being simply a tendency which allows itself to be vanquished by the light. There is no such thing as evil or disorder in the Supreme. All is perfectly balanced and harmonious.

When, however, the Supreme creates independent intelligent spirits and endues them with a certain freedom of choice, in other words individualises them, the possibility of evil or disorder arises. Possessing the power to choose either the nature-centre, egoism, with its contractive self-love, as exemplified by the magnetic astringency of the first quality

of the dark ternary, which contracts and hardens everything, or the light-centre, Love, with its ever-expanding powers, every spirit having these two contrasting principles within himself, they are liable to temptation, until they fix themselves in one or the other. Should they desire that which is false, choosing to be self-centred instead of God-centred, evil or disorder makes its appearance, the harmonious flow of the divine life being checked, and finally pushed back through meeting a counter-current proceeding from self-will. Obscuration takes the place of light.

A selfish desire, or what Boehme terms "a false imagination," having become kindled, it continually increases in intensity, ever burning more fiercely, causing a confusion that Boehme speaks of as "turba." The wheel of birth thus becomes literally a wheel of anguish. Instead of the divine light soothing the opposing forces, it stirs them up till the anguish becomes persistent and existence a struggle and anxiety.

What are called the devil and hell thus make their appearance when the negative or dark ternary, in separation from the light ternary, becomes manifest in intelligent creation, instead of remaining in concealment or latency. The

potentiality of evil is necessary to constitute a ground upon which character may be formed. We must partake of the tree of knowledge of good and evil to gain experience.

Evil, as an actuality, first made its appearance, according to Boehme, when the Hierarch, afterwards called Lucifer, who was the head of our universe—whose body it really was—opened his self-centre, or *centrum naturæ*, instead of keeping it closed, and so lapsed from the Divine order. This self-centre, or *centrum naturæ*, is the foundation upon which hell rests. “The wrath of God,” writes Boehme, “has existed from all eternity, though not as wrath, but as fire latent in a tree or stone until it is aroused.” In the Supreme wrath and love harmonise, severity and mercy balance each other.

While the Hierarchs Michael and Uriel remained true to God as their centre, the Hierarch, afterwards called Lucifer, who knew the Will of God and the misery that would ensue from his departure therefrom, moved by a lust of knowledge for its own sake, which begat pride, chose the *centrum naturæ*. He set his will in opposition to the Divine Will. He moved not as God moved in him. Lucifer’s fall, according to Boehme, was caused by pride,

which led him to despise "the meekness and lowliness in which consisteth the Kingdom of Heaven and the virtue of the Heart of God. He saw the greatest hidden mysteries of the Deity stand in such humility that he took offence at it, and entered into the fierce might of the fire, and would domineer with his own self, wit and reason over the Heart of God ; he would that God should be in subjection under him. He would be a framer and creator in nature, and therefore he became a devil." Unbalanced curiosity and a desire for something new, possibly even higher than God Himself, entered his mind. He refused to sacrifice the fire principle, or egoism, to the light principle, or love. The dark principle within him sought to manifest itself. He opened his centrum naturæ and fell. He became self-centred, instead of God-centred.

The foundation of hell, hidden from all eternity, now became manifest. Lucifer had aroused the principle of the wrath of God. The dark ternary had dominion over him.

Lucifer's action started another centre of operative force, at variance with the primordial centre, or will. The whole gear of nature became loosened, and a new world arose, in which the dual principles were separated, one

ever being in excess of the other. The Divine Will retired to an inner ground and the creaturely will worked its downward way. From out of the world of one element arose the world of four elements, ever in conflict with each other. An appalling "turba," or confusion, ensued.

Concerning this, the ancient hermetists taught that "to reattain the Prima Materia, one must reconcile extremes." Fire and water, air and earth, must be brought into unity again by harmonious reconstruction. The Prima Materia is the element of immortality—perfect, plastic, moulded by the will for creative purposes, without the necessity of painful toil or extreme agony.

CHAPTER IX

ADAM'S FALL

OUR earth, according to Boehme, was situated spiritually rather than geographically within the sphere of Lucifer. His dominion may be expressed as the sidereal universe of which our earth is a part. The six qualities were generating the seventh, through which they might manifest in a sweet and orderly manner, nature then being very ethereal and exalted, instead of dense and gross as we know it. Lucifer's fall, however, created an evil sphere by separating the Love and Wrath, in other words the mercy and severity of God, thus upsetting the equilibrium of nature, and so causing a state of general disorder and strife. As a result, nature became very gross and unable to work harmoniously. Still, the forces of light gradually gained on those of darkness, until at length the balance of things was sufficiently restored to culminate in man.

Man, in the true sense of the word, is not simply an intellectual animal, but a composite being containing the elements of all things. He possesses faculties that bring him in touch with everything on all planes of existence, and enable him not only to apprehend spiritual, astral, and physical, but also divine things. His capacity is limitless, there being nothing beyond his reach. These hidden or latent powers are unknown to, or at least ignored by, many of our modern scientists. The man they discuss is an incomplete and rudimentary being, little else than an intellectual animal, leading a more or less aimless existence, subject to, instead of lord and master of, nature.

Boehme asserts that Adam, who symbolises our earliest and spiritual ancestors, when the race was ethereal, not gross as it now is, was a luminous being, permeated by his spiritual or, rather, celestial essence. His body was not dense like ours, but ethereal in its nature. The inner man kept the external man imprisoned within itself, and penetrated it in a manner comparable to iron, which glows if it is penetrated by fire, so that it seems as if it were fire. When, however, the fire becomes extinct, the dark iron becomes manifest.

Boehme describes the state of Adam before his fall—that is, before he became immersed in matter, and so merely natural—in the following words: “The mind of Adam was innocent, like that of a child playing with the wonders of its Father. There was in him no knowledge of evil will, no avarice, pride, envy, anger, but a pure enjoyment of love. . . . The inner man stood in heaven . . . he knew the language of God and the angels, and the language of nature . . . giving names to all creatures, to each according to its own essence and quality. . . . Fire, air, water and earth could not tame him; no fire burned him; no water drowned him; no air suffocated him; all that lived stood in awe of him.”

In his unfallen state Adam consisted of the three principles—spirit, soul and body. His spirit belonged to the light principle, his soul to the dark, or fire, principle, and his body to the world of sense formed through the union of the first two, or the light and the dark, principles. These three principles were “in temperature”—that is, in perfect harmony—the two latter being subordinate to the first, or the light, principle. He understood alike divine, human, and natural things.

In order that Adam might become truly virtuous it was needful for him to experience temptation, for, apart from the possibility of vice, there can be no such thing as virtue. It was a sore conflict. Each of the opposing principles struggled for the mastery. Adam allowed himself to be tempted by Lucifer into a false lust, and set his desire and imagination upon the world. Curiosity prompted him to try to ascertain what it would be like to be "out of temperature," how the opposite qualities, the hard and the soft, the bitter and the sweet, would taste apart from each other. He gave way to the temptation and fell, whereupon the Divine Image grew pale instead of heavenly in his nature, and he became earthly, the whole of nature on this earth being involved in his fall. The two primary principles being "out of temperature," or balance, brought about a state of disorder, both individually and collectively. Man's work is to reconcile these opposing qualities, or principles, in himself, and thus pass permanently into the light principle, which is Divine, transmuting wrath into mercy, law into love.

Adam's fall, however, was not like that of Lucifer. Lucifer placed himself in direct opposition to God; Adam only in indirect.

He had no wish to oppose God—all he desired was earthly enjoyments, but in order to secure them he was compelled to yield to Lucifer and so disobey God.

CHAPTER X

ADAM-EVE

BOEHME states that Adam, or more correctly Adam-Eve, was originally a dual-unity. In the *Mysterium Magnum* he writes: "Adam was a man and also a woman, and yet neither of them distinct, but a virgin full of chastity, modesty, and purity, namely the image of God." When Adam's imagination became set on this world, Eve, or the feminine part of his nature, not only consenting but prompting, seeing that with the lower animals the male and female organisms were separate, he was seized with an earthly desire to propagate like them. To save Adam from a still greater calamity, the Lord caused a deep sleep to fall upon him. "He fell asleep to the angelical world, and awakened to the external world"; in other words, he became involved in matter. When Adam awoke from his sleep—that is, when he realised his merely natural condition—his consciousness being on a lower or more

external plane, the woman, or feminine part of his complete nature, stood before him, his wife Eve. He had ceased to be a spiritual dual-unity.

The dual-unity of the complete man (*homo*) having been dissolved, there were henceforth two distinct sexes—man (*vir*) and woman (*mulier*). Setting their imagination upon each other, they ate of the fruit of the forbidden tree, the tree of knowledge of good and evil, and became subject to physical death. They were no longer able to remain in paradise, either internally or externally, being unable to comprehend anything outside the sidereal universe, of which they now formed a part. Becoming more and more earthly in their nature they begat children in the merely natural way, like the animal creation, and were subject to the ills and troubles of the world in which, by their own act, they had placed themselves. The Virgin Sophia receded, retiring to a more interior region of their nature, from which to watch over and guard them.

Boehme tells us that, in consequence of the fall, both of Lucifer and Adam, man has become subject to corruption, though he yearns to be redeemed. Nature has also become gross through the dissolution of "temperature."

The four elements—fire, water, air and earth—which, prior to the fall, were really one composite element, and which then appeared in harmonious contrasts, now stand in mutual antagonism. Although sustained by the powerful bond of natural law to which God has subjected them, they yet fight in an empty and resultless manner. The effect of their struggles is seen throughout the planet. Violent storms and destructive earthquakes alternate with dead calms and murky fogs. The earth brings forth the noxious weed and poisonous berry, as well as the beautiful flower and delicious fruit; the cruel reptile and savage beast, as well as the noble and gentle animal. Curse, decay, corruption, and death struggle with blessing, health, and life. The nature spirit has fashioned out of the kingdom of phantasy strange creatures who do naught but torment and vex other creatures who exist side by side with them, and whose sole end is to serve and be of use. The wrath, as well as the love of God, is manifested throughout nature.

The same thing repeats itself in man, the head of creation, as exemplified in the history of the race. He has sunk through sin or self-will, more or less to the animal plane of exist-

ence, so that the animal world projects itself into the human. Man, on this earth, has acquired a tendency to the bestial, and presents a glaring contrast to his original dignity. Every man has, so to speak, an animal in his life. Hence we find wolfish men, foxy men, apish men, leonine men, and so on. Men's dispositions correspond, very largely, with those of the animals. Man has to extirpate these instincts so that he may become wholly human, and thus again in the image of God. When man is restored to the Divine Image time will end, consequently the essential import of history is the redemption of humanity.

Although in idea man precedes the rest of creation, in manifestation he comes last. He was to be the mediator between heaven and earth, spirit and matter, and the crown of all things. Had Adam, who was to have filled the void caused by the fallen Hierarch, remained obedient to the Highest, nature would ultimately have been restored to order, and rescued from the state of "turba" or confusion into which it had fallen through the action of Lucifer. Adam was a kind of pivot, or gate, through whom the Supreme might operate for the redemption of the fallen angels. Adam's fall, however, necessitated the Incarnation.

Christ, as the second Adam, re-establishes man in his primal dignity as Lord of Creation. From this will follow the final redemption, not only of man, but also of the lower creation, thus ultimately restoring all things to their original order.

CHAPTER XI

ATONEMENT AND REDEMPTION

BOEHME was a firm believer in the historical Christ. He writes, "We Christians believe . . . that He (Jesus) was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin without any blemishing of her virgin chastity. Through the incarnation of God in Jesus there arose a Divine Human Being of the essence of both God and Mary. He was conceived of His mother without sin. Through her very conception Mary first attained perfect virginity, the Virgin Sophia thereby penetrating her essence. As son of man Christ's soul became absolutely pervaded by the Eternal Word and the Heavenly Virgin. Christ is thus not only Son of the Virgin Mary, but also of the Heavenly Virgin, who united Herself with Mary. The Virgin Sophia, Who departed from Adam when he fell, re-entered Christ, the second Adam, through Whom She is restored to us."

Christ's work, according to Boehme, is to

restore man to "temperature," or harmony. As the archetypal man, expressive of our Heavenly Father-Mother, the Christ united, in His Own Person, the highest excellences of the masculine with the best attributes of the feminine character, combining the forcefulness of man with the tenderness of woman.

The whole of the work of Christ Jesus pivots on the Atonement and the Redemption. He came to heal all things, and re-establish "temperature." The light principle, the dark principle, and the principle of this world were all present in Jesus, as in Adam. Whereas Adam, when tempted, allowed the principle of this world to prevail, Christ Jesus fixed His imagination wholly upon the Father and the Kingdom of Light, thereby subjecting the lower principle, and re-establishing "temperature," or order, in His Own Person. He quenched "wrath" by His voluntary self-devotion. He surrendered Himself unto death so that He might vanquish it from within. He brought body, soul, and spirit into perfect harmony by sacrificing everything in His death and passion.

When He arose from the dead it was in a paradisiacal body, which absorbed His earthly body. He finally ascended to heaven—that is,

His paradisiacal body became invisible. Heaven is not a distinct locality, but a sphere existing side by side with and interpenetrating the physical universe, though veiled from normal sight.

In order to pass out of the "turba," in which we have become immersed, and regain "temperature," we must be regenerated by the Holy Spirit. A merely historical faith, Boehme reiterates again and again, will never save any man. Wrapping ourselves round externally with the robe of Christ's righteousness is worse than useless, if inwardly we remain wild beasts. We must forsake the dark fire, or devilish principle, and the principle of this world, with its lusts and appetites, and enter into the light principle, lost through Adam's fall, but regained by Christ.

Boehme contends throughout his writings that it is only as man gives up his own self-will and immerses himself unconditionally in the Will of God that he can attain salvation and understand Divine Wisdom. He constantly urges his readers to seek only the Heart of Jesus Christ, and so to come into full harmony with the Divine Will, and thus into conscious union with and knowledge of the Supreme. Our Heavenly Father, Boehme

asserts, is quite close to us, His children, but our eyes are holden that we should not see Him. Our merely natural sight constitutes a veil which hides Him.

The qualification needed to fit one for membership in our Heavenly Father's Kingdom is to become a little child, not a superman. The true superman is the outcome of the Christ child within. Entrance into the Kingdom is only to be obtained through birth, not in any other way.

Christ, Boehme asserts, "tinctures" our will in order to lead it to something higher. Faith must be a vitalising, sanctifying power. There must exist between Christ and the believer a mystical bond of union, which is to grow and increase as life develops.

Boehme's leading idea is life, prayer being the means whereby the soul soars up above the *centrum naturæ*, the abyss of hell, and the spirit of this world, and penetrates into the light, into the Heart of God. In true prayer will and desire are one.

When a man dies, Boehme maintains, his state becomes fixed for good or ill, that after death the will cannot be changed. Whatever quality was strongest in the soul during life becomes continually stronger, so that the

evil eventually surrender themselves to the devil, while the good enter heaven. Even on earth all stand in heaven and hell, although they may not know it, so that when the body perishes the holy soul is already in heaven and the wicked in hell. In answer to the question : Where does the soul go after death ? Boehme in *The Supersensual Life* writes : “ It has no need to go ; it has heaven and hell within itself. The Kingdom of God is within you. . . . Heaven and hell are within one another, and are to one another as a nothing.” Those souls who are in a sort of half-regenerate condition, including even those who have but the slightest spark of goodness, if they but cling to it after leaving the body, ultimately reach heaven, but only after much suffering, while those who have never heard of Christ are saved if they stand in the light principle.

We must not infer from this that Boehme taught the eternity of hell, because only that which has arisen in the “ eternal fixity ” is eternal in its nature. Evil, having arisen in time, will disintegrate and perish when time is swallowed up in eternity.

According to Boehme, creation was the act of the Father, the Incarnation that of the Son, while the end of the world will be brought about

by the operation of the Holy Ghost. The earth will then be restored to "temperature," or harmony. Man will again be in the Image of God, and the present separate distinction of sex will disappear, all being dual-unities, as was Adam-Eve before the fall.

CHAPTER XII

CONCLUSION

BOEHME was neither a Theist nor a Pantheist exclusively, but a combination of both. He realised that the Supreme was both immanent and transcendent. His God is not merely a speculative impersonal abstraction, neither is He a limited personality in any sense. In his quaint style he writes, "The external world is not God. . . it is merely a state of existence wherein God is manifesting Himself." Elsewhere, "Thou must not think that God, Who is in heaven and above heaven, doth there stand and hover, like a power and quality which hath in it neither reason nor knowledge. . . . No! the Father is not so, but He is an all-mighty, all-wise, all-knowing, all-seeing, all-hearing, all-smelling, all-feeling, all-tasting God, Who in Himself is meek, friendly, gracious, merciful, and full of joy ; yea, joy itself."

Boehme was the first of the great Protestant mystics, remaining throughout his life a humble

member of the Lutheran Church. While many of the other mystics, such as Eckart and Swedenborg, were highly educated, he was an illiterate man, experiencing the greatest difficulty in finding suitable words to express his thoughts. Words to him were symbols expressive of ideas in their inmost sense. In this poor shoemaker we have the remarkable spectacle of an uneducated man conversant with some of the deepest mysteries of the universe. Although his philosophical and religious system was more or less coloured by his mental outlook, as is the case with all seers, being affected by the current theology and theosophy of the period during which he lived, still there are hidden riches in his writings which are practically inexhaustible, and which will more than repay anyone the trouble of unearthing them.

In the main essentials Boehme's philosophy is largely in keeping with the ancient hermetic doctrine. The Will and Wisdom of which he speaks correspond to Abba and Aima of the Kabbalah, while his seven qualities of Eternal nature show that he was conversant with the septenary constitution of all things, as known to occult science. His assertion that our first ancestors, whom he calls Adam-Eve, were

twain-one and ethereal in their natures, is in agreement with that of the hermetic schools of antiquity. They taught that our remote ancestors of the old Golden Age were ethereal dual-unities before the fall into matter took place. Boehme tells us that the Father and Mother beget the Son, in Whom their energies are gathered up to be again diffused by the Holy Spirit. This is identical with the belief of the ancient Egyptians, who worshipped Osiris the Father, Isis the Mother, and Horus the Issue, together with a fourth Deity called the Holy Ghost, which overshadowed the whole.

“ Whate’er the Eastern Magi sought,
Or Orpheus sung, or Hermes taught ;
Whate’er Confucius would inspiro,
Or Zoroaster’s mystic fire ;
The symbols that Pythagoras drew,
The wisdom godlike Plato knew ;
What Socrates debating proved,
Or Epictetus lived and loved ;
The sacred fire of saint and sage,
Through every clime, in every age,
In Boehme’s wondrous page we view,
Discover’d and revealed anew.”

Boehme was devoutly Christian to his inmost core. He was intensely spiritual, his spirituality being even deeper than his philosophy was profound, as the following extracts from his writings will show.

“Many a man goeth to church twenty or thirty years, heareth sermons, receiveth the Sacraments, and heareth absolution read or declared, and yet is as much a beast of the devil and vanity at the last as at the first. A beast goeth into the church and to the Supper, and a beast cometh out from thence again.

“The Sacraments do not take away sin ; neither are sins forgiven thereby. But it is thus : When Christ ariseth then Adam dieth in the essence of the serpent ; as when the sun riseth the night is swallowed up in the day, and the night is no more. Just so are sins forgiven.

“A true Christian, who is born anew of the spirit of Christ, is in the simplicity of Christ, and hath no strife or contention with any man about religion. He hath strife enough in himself, with his own bestial evil flesh and blood. He continually thinketh himself a great sinner, and is afraid of God : But the love of Christ by degrees pierceth through, and expelleth that fear, as the day swalloweth up the night.

“It is the greatest folly that is in Babel for people to strive about religion, as the devil hath made the world to do so ; so that they contend vehemently about opinions of their

own forging, viz. about the letter ; when the Kingdom of God consisteth in no opinion, but in power and love.

“ Where will you seek for God ? Seek him in your soul that is proceeded out of the eternal nature, the living fountain of forces wherein the divine working stands.

“ If man’s eyes were but opened he should see God everywhere in His heaven ; for heaven stands in the innermost moving everywhere. Moreover, when Stephen saw the heaven opened and the Lord Jesus at the right hand of God, then his spirit did not first swing itself aloft into the upper heaven, but it penetrated into the innermost moving wherein heaven is everywhere.

“ That moving the outward man neither knows nor comprehends, neither doth the astral comprehend it ; but every fountain spirit comprehends its innate source, which resembles the heaven.

“ The disciple said to his Master, ‘ Sir, how may I come to the Supersensual life, so that I may see God and hear God speak ? ’ The Master answered and said, ‘ Son, when thou canst throw thyself into That, where no creature dwelleth, though it be but for a moment, then thou hearest what God speaketh. ’ ”

Gichtel, writing in 1698, says: "I have searched through many mystics in my time, but found in none of these what . . . I have found in this enlightened shoemaker. . . . If there is in Scripture anything obscure, magical or mystical, Boehme solves it all."

Paxton Hood, in his essay on *Boehme, the Evangelical Hegel*, sums up his peculiar value as follows: "To those who would know how much is to be said to the reason and understanding to strengthen and confirm the faith and keep the frail spirit of the thoughtful man from reeling from its steadfastness or plunging into an ocean or night of despair, the works of Boehme are full to overflowing of light and strength."

In his *Appreciation of Jacob Boehme*, Dr. Alexander Whyte remarks, "*The Way to Christ* is a production of the very greatest depth and strength, but it is the depth and strength of the heart and the conscience, rather than the depth and strength of the understanding and imagination. . . . There is all the reality, inwardness and spirituality of *The Imitation* in it, together with a sweep of imagination, and a grasp of understanding, as well as both a sweetness and a bitterness of heart that even À. Kempis never comes

near." Elsewhere he writes, "Not Augustine, not Luther, not Bunyan, not Baxter, not Shepherd has ever written anything of more evangelical depth and strength and passion and pathos."

Many dislike Boehme because, with unconventional thoroughness, he lays bare the root of all evil—self-love. This is not to say that if anyone kills self-love within himself he will be necessarily drawn to Boehme's writings, for the writing is so obscure, and the ideas are conveyed in language so unusual and, in many ways, so opposed apparently to the religious thought of the ordinary man or woman, that, at first sight, they naturally repel; besides which the keenest intellects are far from being the best equipped for a study of Boehme's works. Those, however, who desire truth before all else will find much in them that is helpful.

There is one lesson, a most essential lesson, we can all learn from Jacob Boehme—humility. His wonderful humble-mindedness, his child-like attitude of mind, was the root cause of his profound knowledge. We speak of loving all, but unless our love is firmly rooted in humility it will be dissipated by the first spasm of self-will.

When St. Augustine was asked which was the first great Christian virtue he replied, "Humility." When asked which was the second he replied, "Humility"; and which the third, he again replied, "Humility." Humility is the foundation virtue, because it is the antithesis of pride, which is the root cause of all evil.

Boehme sought the heart of Christ before all things, hence he became a mouthpiece of the Highest to all who are willing to receive his message, and to such he is ever an instrument to reveal "the deep things of God."

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