

THE MYSTERY OF SATAN

Edward Gall

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Introduction.

It is Lucifer, the Son of Mystery,
And since God suffers him to be,
God's minister too is he,
And labours for some good
By us not understood.

With these words Longfellow closes his dramatic poem *The Golden Legend*, and though admittedly he cannot claim a place in the front rank either as a poet or a thinker, yet in these lines, simple and almost trite though they may be, and couched in the conventional religious language of his day, he has provided some general indication of at least one of the ways by which the subject may be approached.

Lucifer is one of the Mystery names of Satan, and this at once brings us face to face with the problem of evil, a vast and complex subject and one to which -- let it be frankly admitted -- no final and fully satisfying solution is possible on the purely rational, analytical levels of the mind.

The real nature and function of Satan has always in the past been one of the most carefully guarded secrets of the Mystery or Esoteric Schools and it is only within comparatively recent times that at least a corner of the veil has been lifted and we have been given a conception of Satan which is vastly different from the popular picture, as can be seen, for example, in *Clothed with the Sun* by Anna Kingsford and in the poem "The Secret of Time and Satan" in Edward Carpenter's *Towards Democracy*.

The very profundity and complexity of the subject means that it is not easy to decide along which line to approach it; but here it will be treated mainly in the light of Esoteric Astrology on the one hand and Goethe's great drama of *Faust* on the other.

Astrology.

In Astrology — and here we are dealing with the Astrology of the Mystery Schools — we have to equate Lucifer with Saturn (1) and not with Satan in the popular acceptation of the word: and Saturn is, in astrological parlance, "ruler" of the "House" or "sign" of Capricorn; and viewed in this light, it soon becomes apparent that the Mystery Saturn cannot be regarded as wholly evil.

We learn, in symbolic terms, of the conflict between the Sun, representing the Logos, and Saturn. Whereas the influence of the Sun is warm and expansive, that of Saturn is cold and restrictive. Man, as the Son of the Sun (the Solar Logos) is, potentially at least, Infinite and Divine, but, as we know him here and now, his original and essential nature is almost wholly obscured and he is, in respect of his higher spiritual powers, constrained and restricted in innumerable ways — "cabin'd, cribb'd, and confin'd" — and this restrictive, opposing Force is the *Mystery* — Saturn.

Yet this same Force is absolutely necessary, since without it all man's higher powers, largely inoperative and only latent or potential at his present stage, would have no opportunity to develop and emerge.

Goethe's Faust.

In the prologue to Goethe's *Faust*, we have a scene, set in Heaven, with three Archangels and God (the Lord,

der Herr, as Goethe calls him). Presently Mephistopheles enters upon the scene. At the first glance it might seem surprising (to say the least) to find Mephistopheles in this *milieu* since, under this name, he is usually regarded in the popular mind as the personification of the crude "devil", as he is depicted, for example, in Gounod's opera. As a matter of fact, this is very much the role he plays in the body of Goethe's play; but in the *Prologue*, which actually was written after the drama itself had been completed, the character is conceived quite differently.

In the course of this scene, the Lord mentions "my servant Faust", to which Mephistopheles ironically replies that Faust might well be the Lord's "good servant", since all his paths had been made easy and pleasant; but, if he were subjected to dangers, difficulties and temptations, his story might well be a very different one; and he asks leave of the Lord to put the scholar to the test.

To this the Lord agrees, adding that man, left without any challenging, resisting power to be overcome, would tend to sink into what Goethe calls "unconditional repose" (*unbedingte Rub'*) and all his powers would remain purely latent, merely possibilities, without any means of awakening and development; and the Lord therefore gives Mephistopheles leave to test and tempt the scholar.

Here there is obviously very little to suggest the crude and melodramatic "devil" of folk-lore and popular legend, and much more of the figure of the Saturn of the esoteric teaching of the Mysteries.

Book of Job.

In the Book of *Job* we are confronted with a very similar situation, with Job replacing Faust as the individual to be tempted — or rather, tested; and it is interesting and significant to note that Goethe has left it on record that he had the Prologue to the Book of *Job* in mind, when writing the Prologue to his own *Faust*.

This links up with the Saturn of the Mystery teachings in which we are told that, before the initiation of the candidate, the Angel of Saturn tested all the vestures of the Soul to see if there were any faults or flaws likely to cause failure at the critical hour; and this, in turn, links up with the astrological teaching that Capricorn, in its higher aspect, is the House of Initiation.

There is, indeed, little, if anything, in the Satan of the Prologue to *Job* of a personal devil, but rather is he a kind of cosmic force of a high order, when his function is properly understood. He could be called, in fact, *the* Satan, or in an alternative translation, the Adversary, thus throwing the emphasis not so much on the Entity himself but rather on his function, which is almost entirely that of the astrological Saturn in his higher aspect; and here it is noteworthy that H.P. Blavatsky has referred to the book of *Job* as a symbolic story of Initiation.

Jacob and the Angel.

In this connection, the story of Jacob and the Angel in the Bible provides significant reading. There we are told of how Jacob wrestled all night in the darkness with a mysterious antagonist, who, in the outcome, is revealed as an Angel, and it was precisely because Jacob accepted the challenge, because he recognized that this

unseen adversary was not an enemy but a friend, that he could say, "I will not let thee go unless thou bless me", thus enabling the Angel (who was in reality the "Angel" of Saturn) to disclose himself, to bless Jacob and also give him a New Name — a very significant expression in the context of Initiation.

The Problem of Evil in Theosophical Teachings.

But, even when all this has been said, the problem of evil is not yet fully solved. There is more in it than an apparently evil but ultimately beneficent Force opposing and wrestling with man for his own good. There has also to be taken into account the existence of a malignant Force bent on a policy of deliberate, calculated evil, pursued for its own sake; and we must now consider this dark and tragic problem in the light of theosophical teachings.

Students of *The Secret Doctrine* and of other works which derive directly from it will be aware that in earlier Earth Cycles Evolution proceeded, so far as the human race was concerned, not through self-initiated effort on the part of individual man, but in what we might call blind, automatic response to forces playing upon him from outside; and this continued up to approximately the middle of the present Cycle or Round, the Fourth of our Terrene Chain, at which the necessity arose for the development of the power of Self-determination on man's part; and it is at this point that a special Group of Beings entered upon the scene. They belonged to one group of what Theosophy speaks of as the Creative Hierarchies. This is not the occasion on which to enter into a detailed discussion of their nature and function, and it must suffice here to say that the existence of the various grades or degrees of these great Creative Hierarchies has been acknowledged in all the higher

forms of religion, including Christianity. (2)

The particular group to which I have referred had passed, in earlier Cycles of our Earth Scheme, through what corresponded then to what we now call the human stage, and consequently are now several degrees higher than ourselves on the evolutionary ladder. In Western Occultism they are, in certain connections, known as the Luciferic Spirits, and correspond — in some respects at least — to what the *The Secret Doctrine* calls the Asuras, and it is significant that they are occultly connected with Capricorn.

The whole question of their nature and function is complex, obscure and ambiguous, and *The Secret Doctrine* itself is by no means as clear on the matter as could be wished, and therefore no individual interpretation can be regarded as more than personal, provisional and tentative.

Briefly, one of their main functions, so far as man is concerned, was to stimulate in man the faculty of what Theosophy calls the Lower Manas, the rational, logical, analytical aspects of Mind, and so bring into play the sense of Free-Will, Self-determination and Self-consciousness with its sense of Separateness. It is obvious that this has its dangers, since it opens the way to conflict and clash of interest between various individuals and groups, and this, in fact, is precisely what has occurred, and is perhaps the reason why the Asuras have come to be regarded as evil entities; but H.P.Blavatsky will have none of this, and points out that their name derives in reality from Surya, the Sun, and that the negative prefix *a* was applied to them mistakenly by those who misunderstood their true function.

As a matter of fact, the arousing of individual Self-consciousness, with its sense of Separateness and Self-interest, with all its attendant dangers and apparent evils, was a necessary stage in the evolutionary process; and, in its higher aspect, the work of the Asuras is, in a very real sense, a reflection of that of Saturn in its higher form as we have already considered it.

In the earlier human races of which Theosophy tells us, man had not yet developed the power of Self-determination and Free-will. He lived and evolved under the direct guidance and inspiration of the great semi-divine Kings, who were also Priest-Initiates, beings who had passed through their purely human stages of evolution in earlier Cycles and who had now incarnated to help the main body of the people who were still in the earlier stages of their human evolution. In no sense whatever were the people of the time self-dependent, self-determining beings. The Royal Initiates took the lead and guided, in every way, and the people merely followed.

But the time had come for humanity to pass from psychological childhood to the adult stage, and so the Royal Initiates began gradually to withdraw, and the work of the Luciferic or Asuric spirits became more and more prominent; and it was here, because of the emergence of Self-centredness and Freedom of Choice that the possibility of Conflict and Cleavage arose, and this, in its turn, opened the door to the emergence of evil in the second and lower sense of the word.

Black Magic and Black Magicians.

As we look at the matter today, men who do evil fall into one or other of three main categories. First, there are those who do it unintentionally and often

unconsciously. Most of these, when they become aware of the enormity of what they are doing, desist and do their best to make such amends as are possible. Secondly, there are those – and most of the so-called “sinners” are in this class – who know quite well that they should not do the things which, actually, they frequently do, but who “sin” mainly through human frailty; and afterwards, when they have, so to say, “come to themselves”, they feel remorse, and their penance takes the form of a long and difficult process of amendment of character, often with partial and temporary failures by the way, this constituting in fact the earlier stages of what Theosophy calls the Path.

But in addition to these, there are other individuals, highly developed in some ways, though assuredly not in the truly spiritual sense, who choose evil deliberately and in the full knowledge of the nature and consequences of their acts in relation to their fellow men and the world as a whole. They work for the aggrandisement of the separate personal self, for the exploitation of others and not for the good of the whole. As the Theosophist would express it, they are deliberately and consciously working against Evolution. Of them we cannot say “Forgive them for they know not what they do” for the whole point of their sin is that they know perfectly well what they are doing.

This brings us face to face with the terrible problem of “Evil Spirits”, or, as they are sometimes called, “Black Magicians”, a sensational and melodramatic expression which it would be an advantage to avoid if a more suitable one could be found. This is the darker or lower aspect of Saturn, which will here be called, more appropriately, Satan, and it is to this company that the figure of Mephistopheles properly belongs.

In this connection, and at this stage, then, we have to take account of the appearance on the scene of a certain relatively small number of individuals occultly connected with the Asuras, though definitely not the true Asuras, but rather revealing the true Asuric qualities in a reversed or perverted form and, though they too are sometimes referred to as Asuras, this is erroneous and confusing; and they, and others like them, have been with us, more or less, ever since.

Are there, then, such beings as Evil Spirits? To this, the answer is "Unfortunately, yes". Although there is no single dominating and presiding Prince of Darkness or such figure as a Lord of Evil, there are innumerable individual "devils" in the Mephistophilean sense already described, and their existence has been confirmed, in one form or another, in all (or almost all) religious systems.

St. Paul, to take only one example, knew of them, and when he spoke of the "Spirits of Wickedness in high places" he was not thinking of the Duces or the Führers or Military Dictators who are so active in the outer world, but of entities of the type just mentioned.

In some ways, in power of will and intellect, they are developed beyond our average humanity and can influence the world either directly or through such human beings as they find to be sufficiently negative and impressionable to be suitable instruments or puppets; and thus they deliberately use their abnormal powers of will and mind to further their own individual selfish purposes, and against the great evolutionary flow as a whole. With Milton's Satan they can say "Evil be thou my good". This is, of course, a great mystery. Why, we may ask, are they allowed to pursue such a

course? To this there is no full or completely satisfactory answer, yet some considerations may be of help.

In the first place, Evil (in this darker and lower sense) contains always, within itself, the seeds of its own destruction. In the long term view, it is always destined to final failure and annihilation. Secondly, the ultimate beneficent Power behind the whole scheme of things, can take and utilize even the machinations of evil beings in order to bring about ultimate good. Goethe's Mephistopheles is, in fact, utilized in precisely this way in order to bring about the eventual redemption of Faust, as is made quite clear at the end of the Second Part of the drama. Indeed, Mephistopheles himself realizes this when in a moment of unusual insight and self-revelation he describes himself as "a portion of that power that always works for evil and always brings about what is good".

*Ein Teil von jener Kraft, Die stets das Böse
will und stets das Gute schafft.*

With this we can compare the Portugese proverb: "God can write straight, even on crooked lines".

The Cosmic Aspect of Saturn.

We must now return to the higher aspect of Saturn. In this aspect, he is often spoken of as the oldest of the gods, an epithet which can be taken in two different senses, both essentially cosmic.

In the first of these, he is the First-Born, the "Son of the Cosmic Morning", the first of the "Sons of God who shouted with joy when the foundations of the world were laid" and who are more or less directly related to

the Seven Spirits before the Throne, and, in the earlier theosophical books, to the Planetary Logoi, a somewhat vague term which is apt to lead to misunderstanding.

But in addition to being the First-Born, the Cosmic Saturn is also, from another angle, the last of the "Sons of God" to pass back "into the bosom of the Father" or Absolute Divinity, at the end of the Great Day of cosmic manifestation or *Manvantara*.

In this sense, he is the Great Reaper who gathers in, at the end of the Cycle, all the fruits or harvest of Cosmic Evolution. As the Great Reaper, he is also the Man with the Scythe, and is esoterically connected with Old Age and Death; and all who are familiar with the orchestral work *The Planets* by Gustav Holst will remember that section of the work where Saturn is portrayed as the Bringer of Old Age; and in this connection it is significant that people who are, astrologically, in the sign of Capricorn, live on, in many cases, into extreme old age.

The Saturn of the Mysteries is also associated with Coldness, indicating that advanced stage or age when the fires of life begin to die down and the coldness of old age creeps on; and, on a higher level, as Death, he is related to the Mystic Death of the Mysteries, the 'death' of the personality-ego, the separate, self-centred consciousness, out of which arises, in its splendour, the Christos, the authentic Self in man, the Self of the Ages.

The Cosmic Saturn can also be regarded as the remotest of the gods, his Kingdom, in this sense, representing the outermost limits of Cosmic Manifestation, the Cosmic Ring-pass-not beyond which there is nothing but the Abyss, the Ultimate, though

this statement, of course, must not be taken literally, as a scientific astronomical fact.

Of this it need only be said here that all manifestation in its various forms and degrees is the result of limitation, and that the Cosmos itself is the result of limitation, having come into manifestation through a voluntary act of Self-limitation on the part of the Solar Logos.

The various stages of man's progress on the upward arc of spiritual evolution represent the transcendence of one limitation after another.

To transcend all limitation is to transcend all manifestation, and, microcosmically or macrocosmically as the case may be, to pass back into the unity of the Ultimate, Absolute Godhead, the Brahman.

The Fate of the Black Magician.

It is natural that we should wonder concerning the fate of the Black Magicians earlier mentioned. Are they irretrievably lost? Not necessarily. Even they may eventually work out their own salvation if they so will, though only at the cost of great difficulty and suffering.

Towards the close of the Second Part of Goethe's *Faust*, there is a scene in which, at the death of Faust, angels bear away aloft to the celestial regions the spirit and higher soul of Faust, leaving Mephistopheles foiled of his prey; and, as they soar aloft, the angels let go a shower of roses which, as they fall on Mephistopheles, burn and scorch him. Fearful and furious, he shakes them off and flees from them in terror. But, in reality, the fire of the roses was intended as a purifying fire, and if Mephistopheles had but accepted them and suffered

them to exercise their purifying work upon him, painful though it might be, the way would have been open for his own eventual redemption. But since he refused the ordeal and fled from it, he missed his chance of regeneration and so remains a devil — for the time being at least.

Nevertheless, we cannot regard even Mephistopheles as finally and irretrievably lost; and this, indeed, was Goethe's own view; for we know that at one time he intended to write a scene showing Mephistopheles as being eventually redeemed and regenerated; and though, in actual fact, he never did so, this was not because his views on the subject had changed, but simply because this was one of several scenes which he never at any time felt himself equal to writing.

"Lost Souls".

But the question still remains: "Is a loss of soul something that could really take place?" and the answer is that Theosophy has always regarded this as a possibility, in the sense of a lost or wasted incarnation, one entirely destitute of even the slightest spiritual harvest. Most human lives, however poorly or unworthily lived, should be able to register some spiritual gain, even though pitiably small; but we cannot rule out the possibility of a lost incarnation in the sense just defined; but to understand this we must keep in mind the distinction made in Theosophy between the Personality or Soul (in the ordinary sense of the word) and the Spirit, the true, higher, eternal and only real Self in man. In other words, there can be such a thing as a lost soul or personality but never a lost Spirit. An individual can deliberately pursue evil, perhaps even through a series of incarnations, struggling, as *The Voice of the Silence* expresses it, to "break the Silver Thread

that binds it to the Master" (the higher or divine Self or *Atman*); and, in extreme cases, it may even eventually succeed in doing so; and from that moment, as a personality-ego, it pursues a downward course, which can have only one end. It may endeavour to fight off, or at least delay, this end, but it knows itself to be on the path to disintegration and extinction as a personal self or soul, but — let it be said again — not as a Spirit.

Happily and fortunately, cases of this kind must be very rare indeed, and such an individual would have to be endowed with quite exceptional strength of mind (the theosophical Lower *Manas*) and tenacity of purpose.

We cannot fully understand the effect of this on the Higher or Spiritual Self. There is, of course, no such thing as evil in the Spirit as such, and the result most probably would only show itself negatively, that is to say, in the absence of something which should be there, and result, so far as the Spirit itself is concerned, in a prolonged and serious set-back or delay; for the Spirit itself, in a profound and subtle way, looks forward and upward to its own consummation, though it cannot be said to be evolving in the ordinary sense of the word.

But these are matters which we need not, and perhaps should not, consider too closely or curiously; yet, in quitting this part of the subject, it is necessary always to remember, first that such cases are, as already said, very rare; secondly, that such souls are not burning unconsumed in the fires of an eternal Hell, but are engaged on a gradual descent in the scale of being, ending in final disintegration as a personal being; and thirdly, that it is not for us to say that any particular individual is such a "lost soul".

"All Manner of Thing shall be Well."

In conclusion, then, let us come back to Goethe. That great man was essentially an optimist. Yet his was no cheap or easy optimism. He was too profound and honest a thinker for that, and none knew better than he the struggle and pain which are the price of success in the Spiritual Ascent. Yet, however great the cost, we must not shirk or grudge it, or try to make the mind a kind of psychological cloister or ivory tower. Never must we fear or shun experience, for that is the great teacher, perhaps, most of all, tragic and hard experience.

This is something which it is urgently necessary for us to remember when we look out upon the contemporary world, where we see so much that is calculated to drive us to despondency, pessimism, alarm, and even at times almost to despair. In the short-term view, indeed, we can discern no rosy prospect; though perhaps this has always been so, more or less.

At any given time, the forces of evil may seem far stronger than those making for good. Yet this is only apparent and relatively brief. We look out upon the world and see its great Dictators who, in Shakespeare's words, "bestride the narrow world like a colossus"; yet to later days they are only a procession of shadowy, blood-stained figures flitting for a moment across the stage of history; and we recall the Psalmist's words: "Then understood I the end of these men, how thou dost set them in slippery places, and castest them down and destroyest them. Oh, how suddenly do they consume, perish and come to a fearful end. Like as a dream when one awaketh, so shalt thou make their image to vanish out of the city." (Psalm 73, Anglican Prayer Book version). In the ultimate, the powers for good, the visible and still more the invisible, are

stronger, and as we have already seen, they can take the works of evil men and turn them to eventual good; and though to outward regard their work may be temporarily delayed or brought to a halt or even reversed, they can never be fully or finally defeated. It is in this sense that we can say that "there is a soul of goodness in things evil" and, with Tennyson, that "somehow good will be the final goal of ill", or with the 14th. century mystic Dame Juliana of Norwich, that "All shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well".

It is for us, then, to accept the challenge, both the challenge of our individual circumstances and the challenge of the world as we see it around us today, and to make our own, two of the Rules for Aspirants to Self-Knowledge — that is, knowledge of the true and higher Self, the Atman. Both of these rules relate to the higher aspect of the Mystery — Saturn. They are:

Hold fast to the band of the Hidden Angel. His face is unknown to you, but he is no stranger. He leads you by perilous paths and ways of warfare, but he is no enemy, and the name of his abiding place is Peace.

Never fear the Great Angel when he would work his will with you through the darkness. His labours with you will last until he has brought you into the Light of Lights and you yourself have become that Light.

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NOTES

Note 1: Lucifer and Saturn.

This equation of Lucifer and Saturn may, I think, be allowed to stand, especially as warrant for it is forthcoming from *The Secret Doctrine* itself, wherein H.P. Blavatsky speaks of Satan (strictly Saturn) as "the Lord of Phosphorus ... and Lucifer, or Light-bearer", and again: "Satan (Saturn) ... the Harbinger of Light, bright, radiant Lucifer". (II, 513 1st. ed.; II, 540 3rd. ed.; IV, 82 Adyar ed.; and II, 243 1st. ed.; II, 254 3rd. ed.; III, 246 Adyar ed.)

From another aspect and in a different context, Lucifer possesses other features with which we are not here concerned.

Note 2: Angels and Archangels

In the Western esoteric teaching, the Hierarchy immediately above man in rank is spoken of as the Angels, but this term is also frequently employed in a wider and more general sense to designate all the Hierarchies as a whole; and sometimes a distinction is drawn between the Angels, in the sense just indicated, the *rupa* or form Angels, and the highest Hierarchies, the *arupa* or "formless" Angels (the word "formless" being here employed in a relative sense), the latter, in this case, being spoken of as the Archangels.

Unless this is kept in mind, the use by some theosophical writers of the term Angels for entities who are on what is sometimes called the Nature-Spirit line of evolution is apt to cause confusion.

In terms of some Western esoteric teachings, Lucifer, as Saturn, in his higher and true nature, belongs not just

to the Angels but to the Archangels.

The theological teaching that he sinned against God, aspiring to be "as God", rebelled and was cast out of Heaven to the lowest depths, and, in revenge, unceasingly prowls through the world seeking the ruin of souls, forms no part of the genuine teaching of the Mysteries.

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