

ABBREVIATIONS

- Sommario* Angelo Mercati, *Il sommario del processo di Giordano Bruno*, Città del Vaticano, 1942.
- Test. uman.* *Testi umanistici su l'ermetismo*, testi di Ludovico Lazzarelli, F. Giorgio Veneto, Cornelio Agrippa di Nettesheim, a cura di E. Garin, M. Brini, C. Vasoli, P. Zambelli, Rome, 1955.
- Thorndike Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, Columbia University Press, 1923-41 (six vols.).
- Walker D. P. Walker, *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella*, The Warburg Institute, University of London, 1958.

Chapter I

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS

THE great forward movements of the Renaissance all derive their vigour, their emotional impulse, from looking backwards. The cyclic view of time as a perpetual movement from pristine golden ages of purity and truth through successive brazen and iron ages still held sway and the search for truth was thus of necessity a search for the early, the ancient, the original gold from which the baser metals of the present and the immediate past were corrupt degenerations. Man's history was not an evolution from primitive animal origins through ever growing complexity and progress; the past was always better than the present, and progress was revival, rebirth, renaissance of antiquity. The classical humanist recovered the literature and the monuments of classical antiquity with a sense of return to the pure gold of a civilisation better and higher than his own. The religious reformer returned to the study of the Scriptures and the early Fathers with a sense of recovery of the pure gold of the Gospel, buried under later degenerations.

These are truisms, and it is also obvious that both these great returning movements were not mistaken as to the date of the earlier, better period to which they turned. The humanist knew the date of Cicero, knew the correct date of his golden age of classical culture; the reformer, even if not clear as to the date of the Gospels, knew that he was trying to return to the earliest centuries of Christianity. But the returning movement of the Renaissance with which this book will be concerned, the return to a pure golden age of magic, was based on a radical error in dating.

Yates, F. (1964) Giordano Bruno
and the Hermetic Tradition, Univ.
Chicago Press, pp. 1-116

The works which inspired the Renaissance Magus, and which he believed to be of profound antiquity, were really written in the second to the third centuries A.D. He was not returning to an Egyptian wisdom, not much later than the wisdom of the Hebrew patriarchs and prophets, and much earlier than Plato and the other philosophers of Greek antiquity, who had all—so the Renaissance Magus firmly believed—drunk from its sacred fountain. He is returning to the pagan background of early Christianity, to that religion of the world, strongly tinged with magic and oriental influences, which was the gnostic version of Greek philosophy, and the refuge of weary pagans seeking an answer to life's problems other than that offered by their contemporaries, the early Christians.

The Egyptian God, Thoth, the scribe of the gods and the divinity of wisdom, was identified by the Greeks with their Hermes and sometimes given the epithet of "Thrice Great".¹ The Latins took over this identification of Hermes or Mercurius with Thoth, and Cicero in his *De natura deorum* explains that there were really five Mercuries, the fifth being he who killed Argus and consequently fled in exile to Egypt where he "gave the Egyptians their laws and letters" and took the Egyptian name of Theuth or Thoth.² A large literature in Greek developed under the name of Hermes Trismegistus, concerned with astrology and the occult sciences, with the secret virtues of plants and stones and the sympathetic magic based on knowledge of such virtues, with the making of talismans for drawing down the powers of the stars, and so on. Besides these treatises or recipes for the practice of astral magic going under the name of Hermes, there also developed a philosophical literature to which the same revered name was attached. It is not known when the Hermetic framework was first used for philosophy, but the *Asclepius* and the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which are the most important of the philosophical *Hermetica* which have come down to us, are probably to be dated between A.D. 100 and 300.³ Though cast in a pseudo-Egyptian framework, these works have been thought by many scholars to contain very few genuine Egyptian elements. Others would allow for some influence of native Egyptian beliefs upon them.⁴ In any case,

¹ Festugière, I, pp. 67 ff. ² Cicero, *De nat. deor.*, III, 22.

³ C.H., I, p. v. (preface by Nock); Festugière, III, p. 1.

⁴ As Bloomfield says, "Scholarship has veered from one extreme to the other on this question of the Egyptian elements in Hermeticism" (see

however, they were certainly not written in remotest antiquity by an all-wise Egyptian priest, as the Renaissance believed, but by various unknown authors, all probably Greeks,¹ and they contain popular Greek philosophy of the period, a mixture of Platonism and Stoicism, combined with some Jewish and probably some Persian influences. They are very diverse, but they all breathe an atmosphere of intense piety. The *Asclepius* purports to describe the religion of the Egyptians, and by what magic rites and processes the Egyptians drew down the powers of the cosmos into the statues of their gods. This treatise has come down to us through the Latin translation formerly attributed to Apuleius of Madaura.² The *Pimander* (the first of the treatises in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the collection of fifteen Hermetic dialogues³) gives an account of the creation of the world which is in parts reminiscent of *Genesis*. Other treatises describe the ascent of the soul through the spheres of the planets to the divine realms above them, or give ecstatic descriptions of a process of regeneration by which the soul casts off the chains which bind it to the material world and becomes filled with divine powers and virtues.

In the first volume of his work, *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*,⁴ Festugière has analysed the state of mind of the epoch, roughly the second century after the birth of Christ, in which the *Asclepius* and the Hermetic treatises which have reached us in the *Corpus Hermeticum* collection were written. Externally that world

¹ According to Nock and Festugière; see C.H., *loc. cit.*; Festugière, I, pp. 85 ff.

² The attribution, which is incorrect, dates from the ninth century; see C.H., II, p. 259: on the Coptic version, see below, p. 431, note 2.

³ It is not known when the *Corpus Hermeticum* was first put together as a collection, but it was already known in this form to Psellus in the eleventh century; see C.H., I, pp. xlvi-l (preface by Nock).

⁴ Festugière, I, pp. 1 ff.

M. W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Michigan, 1952, p. 342, and the references there given). Festugière allows hardly anything to it and concentrates almost entirely on the Greek influences in the *Hermetica*. A cautious summary by Bloomfield (*op. cit.*, p. 46) is as follows: "These writings are chiefly the product of Egyptian Neoplatonists who were greatly influenced by Stoicism, Judaism, Persian theology and possibly by native Egyptian beliefs, as well as, of course, by Plato, especially the *Timaeus*. They were perhaps the bible of an Egyptian mystery religion, which possibly in kernel went back to the second century B.C." The mystery cult theory is opposed by Festugière, I, pp. 81 ff.

was highly organised and at peace. The *pax Romana* was at the height of its efficiency and the mixed populations of the Empire were governed by an efficient bureaucracy. Communications along the great Roman roads were excellent. The educated classes had absorbed the Graeco-Roman type of culture, based on the seven liberal arts. The mental and spiritual condition of this world was curious. The mighty intellectual effort of Greek philosophy was exhausted, had come to a standstill, to a dead end, perhaps because Greek thinking never took the momentous step of experimental verification of its hypotheses—a step which was not to be taken until fifteen centuries later with the birth of modern scientific thinking in the seventeenth century. The world of the second century was weary of Greek dialectics which seemed to lead to no certain results. Platonists, Stoics, Epicureans could only repeat the theories of their various schools without making any further advances, and the tenets of the schools were boiled down in textbook form, in manuals which formed the basis of philosophical instruction within the Empire. In so far as it is Greek in origin, the philosophy of the Hermetic writings is of this standardised type, with its smattering of Platonism, Neoplatonism, Stoicism, and the other Greek schools of thought.

This world of the second century was, however, seeking intensively for knowledge of reality, for an answer to its problems which the normal education failed to give. It turned to other ways of seeking an answer, intuitive, mystical, magical. Since reason seemed to have failed, it sought to cultivate the *Nous*, the intuitive faculty in man. Philosophy was to be used, not as a dialectical exercise, but as a way of reaching intuitive knowledge of the divine and of the meaning of the world, as a gnosis, in short, to be prepared for by ascetic discipline and a religious way of life. The Hermetic treatises, which often take the form of dialogues between master and disciple, usually culminate in a kind of ecstasy in which the adept is satisfied that he has received an illumination and breaks out into hymns of praise. He seems to reach this illumination through contemplation of the world or the cosmos, or rather through contemplation of the cosmos as reflected in his own *Nous* or *mens* which separates out for him its divine meaning and gives him a spiritual mastery over it, as in the familiar gnostic revelation or experience of the ascent of the soul through the spheres of the planets to become immersed in the divine. Thus that religion of

the world which runs as an undercurrent in much of Greek thought, particularly in Platonism and Stoicism, becomes in Hermetism actually a religion, a cult without temples or liturgy, followed in the mind alone, a religious philosophy or philosophical religion containing a gnosis.

The men of the second century were thoroughly imbued with the idea (which the Renaissance imbibed from them) that what is old is pure and holy, that the earliest thinkers walked more closely with the gods than the busy rationalists, their successors. Hence the strong revival of Pythagoreanism in this age. They also had the impression that what is remote and far distant is more holy¹; hence their cult of the "barbarians", of Indian gymnosophists, Persian Magi, Chaldean astrologers, whose approach to knowledge was felt to be more religious than that of the Greeks.² In the melting-pot of the Empire, in which all religions were tolerated, there was ample opportunity for making acquaintance with oriental cults. Above all, it was the Egyptians who were revered in this age. Egyptian temples were still functioning, and devout seekers after religious truth and revelation in the Graeco-Roman world would make pilgrimages to some remotely situated Egyptian temple and pass the night in its vicinity in the hope of receiving some vision of divine mysteries in dreams.³ The belief that Egypt was the original home of all knowledge, that the great Greek philosophers had visited it and conversed with Egyptian priests, had long been current, and, in the mood of the second century, the ancient and mysterious religion of Egypt, the supposed profound knowledge of its priests, their ascetic way of life, the religious magic which they were thought to perform in the subterranean chambers of their temples, offered immense attractions. It is this pro-Egyptian mood of the Graeco-Roman world which is reflected in the Hermetic *Asclepius* with its strange description of the magic by which the Egyptian priests animated the statues of their gods, and its moving prophecy that the most ancient Egyptian religion is destined to come to an end. "In that hour", so the supposed Egyptian priest, Hermes Trismegistus, tells his disciple, Asclepius, "In that hour, weary of life, men will no longer regard the world as the worthy object of their admiration and reverence. This All, which is a good thing, the best that can be seen in the past, the present,

¹ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 14 ff. ² *Ibid.*, I, pp. 19 ff. ³ *Ibid.*, I, pp. 46 ff.

and the future, will be in danger of perishing; men will esteem it a burden; and thenceforward this whole of the universe will be despised and no longer cherished, this incomparable work of God, glorious construction, all-good creation made up of an infinite diversity of forms, instrument of the will of God who, without envy, lavishes his favour upon his work, in which is assembled in one all, in a harmonious diversity, all that can be seen which is worthy of reverence, praise and love."¹ Thus Egypt, and its magical religion, becomes identified with the Hermetic religion of the world.

So we can understand how the content of the Hermetic writings fostered the illusion of the Renaissance Magus that he had in them a mysterious and precious account of most ancient Egyptian wisdom, philosophy, and magic. Hermes Trismegistus, a mythical name associated with a certain class of gnostic philosophical revelations or with magical treatises and recipes, was, for the Renaissance, a real person, an Egyptian priest who had lived in times of remote antiquity and who had himself written all these works. The scraps of Greek philosophy which he found in these writings, derived from the somewhat debased philosophical teaching current in the early centuries A.D., confirmed the Renaissance reader in his belief that he had here the fount of pristine wisdom whence Plato and the Greeks had derived the best that they knew.

This huge historical error was to have amazing results.

It was on excellent authority that the Renaissance accepted Hermes Trismegistus as a real person of great antiquity and as the author of the Hermetic writings, for this was implicitly believed by leading Fathers of the Church, particularly Lactantius and Augustine. Naturally, it would not have occurred to anyone to doubt that these overwhelmingly authoritative writers must be right, and it is indeed a remarkable testimony to the prominence and importance of the Hermetic writings and to the early and complete success of the Hermes Trismegistus legend as to their authorship and antiquity that Lactantius, writing in the third century, and Augustine in the fourth, both accept the legend unquestioningly.

After quoting Cicero on the fifth Mercury as he "who gave

letters and laws to the Egyptians", Lactantius, in his *Institutes*, goes on to say that this Egyptian Hermes "although he was a man, yet he was of great antiquity, and most fully imbued with every kind of learning, so that the knowledge of many subjects and arts acquired for him the name of Trismegistus. He wrote books and those in great number, relating to the knowledge of divine things, in which he asserts the majesty of the supreme and only God, and makes mention of Him by the same names which we use—God and Father."² By these "many books", Lactantius certainly means some of the Hermetic writings which have come down to us, for he makes several quotations from some of the treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and also from the *Asclepius*.³ The very early date at which Lactantius would place Hermes Trismegistus and his books may be inferred from a remark in his *De ira Dei* where he says that Trismegistus is much more ancient than Plato and Pythagoras.⁴

There are many other quotations from, and references to Hermes Trismegistus in Lactantius' *Institutes*. He evidently thought that Hermes was a valuable ally in his campaign of using pagan wisdom in support of the truth of Christianity. In the quotation just made, he has pointed out that Hermes, like the Christians, speaks of God as "Father"; and in fact the word Father is not infrequently used of the supreme being in the Hermetic writings. Still more telling, however, was Hermes' use of the expression "Son of God" for the demiurge. To demonstrate this remarkable confirmation of the truth of Christianity by this most ancient writer, Lactantius quotes, in Greek, a passage from the *Asclepius* (one of the quotations which has preserved for us fragments of the lost Greek original):

Hermes, in the book which is entitled *The Perfect Word*, made use of these words: "The Lord and Creator of all things, whom we have thought right to call God, since He made the second God visible and sensible. . . . Since, therefore, He made Him first, and alone, and one only, He appeared to Him beautiful, and most full of all good things; and He hallowed Him, and altogether loved Him as His own Son."⁴

¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, I, vi; English translation by W. Fletcher, *The Works of Lactantius*, Edinburgh, 1871, I, p. 15.

² On quotations by Lactantius from the *Hermetica*, see *C.H.*, I, p. xxxviii; II, pp. 259, 276-7.

³ Lactantius, *De ira Dei*, XI; Fletcher's translation, II, p. 23.

⁴ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, IV, vi; Fletcher's translation, I, p. 220. Lactantius is quoting from *Asclepius*, 8 (*C.H.*, II, p. 304).

The Perfect Word, or *Sermo Perfectus*, is a correct translation of the original Greek title of the *Asclepius*,¹ and the passage which Lactantius quotes in Greek corresponds roughly to a passage in our Latin translation. Thus the *Asclepius*, the work which contains the weird description of how the Egyptians fabricated their idols and the Lament for the Egyptian religion, becomes sanctified because it contains a prophecy concerning the Son of God.

It was not only in the *Asclepius* that the Hermetic writers used the expression "Son of God". At the beginning of *Pimander*, which is the Hermetic account of creation, the act of creation is said to be through a luminous Word, who is the Son of God.² When discussing the Son of God as the creative Word, with quotations from the Scriptures, Lactantius brings in Gentile confirmation, pointing out that the Greeks speak of Him as the Logos, and also Trismegistus. He was doubtless thinking of the passage on the creative Word as the Son of God in the *Pimander*, and he adds that "Trismegistus, who by some means or other searched into almost all truth, often described the excellence and the majesty of the Word."³

Indeed, Lactantius regards Hermes Trismegistus as one of the most important of the Gentile seers and prophets who foresaw the coming of Christianity, because he spoke of the Son of God and of the Word. In three passages of the *Institutes* he cites Trismegistus with the Sibyls as testifying to the coming of Christ.⁴ Lactantius nowhere says anything against Hermes Trismegistus. He is always the most ancient and all-wise writer, the tenor of whose works is agreeable to Christianity and whose mention of God the Son places him with the Sibyls as a Gentile prophet. In

¹ See *C.H.*, II, pp. 276-7.

² See below, p. 23.

³ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, IV, xi; Fletcher's translation, I, p. 226.

⁴ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, I, vi; IV, vi; VIII, xviii; Fletcher's translation, I, pp. 14-19; 220-2; 468-9.

The Sibylline Oracles themselves were no more genuinely antique than the *Hermetica*. Forged Sibylline prophecies of Jewish origin appeared at some uncertain date, and were later manipulated by the Christians. It seems difficult to distinguish what is of Jewish and what is of Christian origin in the *Oracula Sibyllina*. See M. J. Lagrange, *Le judaïsme avant Jésus-Christ*, Paris, 1931, pp. 505-11; A. Puech, *Histoire de la littérature grecque chrétienne*, Paris, 1928, II, pp. 603-15; and the note by G. Bardy in *Oeuvres de Saint Augustin*, Desclée de Brouwer, Vol. 36, 1960, pp. 755-9.

general passages Lactantius condemns the worshipping of images, and he also thinks that the demons used by Magi are evil fallen angels.¹ These things are, however, never associated by him with Trismegistus, who always appears as a revered authority on divine truths. It is no wonder that Lactantius became a favourite Father for the Renaissance Magus who wished to remain a Christian.

Augustine was, however, a difficulty for the Renaissance Magus who wished to remain a Christian, for Augustine in the *De Civitate Dei* delivers a severe condemnation of what "Hermes the Egyptian, called Trismegistus" wrote concerning idols, that is to say of the passage in the *Asclepius*, which he quotes at length, on how the Egyptians in their magical religion animated the statues of their gods by magic means, by drawing spirits into them.² Augustine is using, not a Greek text of the *Asclepius*, as Lactantius had done, but the same Latin translation which we have, and which must therefore be at least as early as the fourth century.³ As mentioned before, this translation used to be attributed to Apuleius of Madaura.

The context in which Augustine makes his attack on the idolatrous passage in the *Asclepius* is important. He has been attacking magic in general and in particular the views on spirits or *daemones* held by Apuleius of Madaura.⁴

Apuleius of Madaura is a striking example of one of those men, highly educated in the general culture of the Graeco-Roman world who, weary of the stale teachings of the schools, sought for salvation in the occult, and particularly in the Egyptian type of the occult. Born *circa* A.D. 123, Apuleius was educated at Carthage and at Athens and later travelled to Egypt where he became involved in a lawsuit in which he was accused of magic. He is famous for his wonderful novel, popularly known as *The Golden Ass*,⁵ the hero of which is transformed by witches into an ass, and after many sufferings in his animal form, is transformed back into human shape after an ecstatic vision of the goddess Isis, which comes to him on a lonely seashore whither he has wandered in

¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, II, xv.

² Augustine, *De civ. Dei*, VIII, xxxiii-xxxvi. He is quoting from *Asclepius*, 23, 24, 37; see *C.H.*, II, pp. 325 ff.

³ *C.H.*, II, p. 259. ⁴ *De civ. Dei*, VIII, xlii-xxlii.

⁵ This is the title of the sixteenth-century English translation by William Adlington.

despair. Eventually he becomes a priest of Isis in an Egyptian temple. The whole mood of this novel, with its ethical theme (for the animal form is a punishment for transgression), its ecstatic initiation or illumination, its Egyptian colouring, is like the mood of the Hermetic writings. Though Apuleius was not really the translator of the *Asclepius*, that work would certainly have appealed to him.

Augustine calls Apuleius a Platonist, and he attacks him for the views on airy spirits or *daemones* which he held to be intermediaries between gods and men in his work on the "demon" of Socrates. Augustine regards this as impious, not because he disbelieves in airy spirits or demons but because he thinks they are wicked spirits or devils. He then goes on to attack Hermes Trismegistus for praising the Egyptians for the magic by which they drew such spirits or demons into the statues of their gods, thus animating the statues, or making them into gods. Here he quotes verbally the god-making passage in the *Asclepius*. He then discusses the prophecy that the Egyptian religion will come to an end, and the lament for its passing, which he interprets as a prophecy of the ending of idolatry by the coming of Christianity. Here too, therefore, Hermes Trismegistus is a prophet of the coming of Christianity, but all credit for this is taken away by Augustine's statement that he had this foreknowledge of the future from the demons whom he worshipped.

Hermes presages these things as the devil's confederate, suppressing the evidence of the Christian name, and yet foretelling with a sorrowful intimation, that from it should proceed the wreck of all their idolatrous superstitions: for Hermes was one of those who (as the apostle says), "Knowing God, glorified Him not as God, nor were thankful, but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was full of darkness. . . ."¹

Yet, continues Augustine, "this Hermes says much of God according to the truth", though in his admiration for the Egyptian idolatry he was blind, and his prophecy of its passing he had from the devil. In contrast, he quotes a true prophet, like Isaiah, who said, "The idols of Egypt shall be moved at His presence, and the heart of Egypt shall melt in the midst of her."²

Augustine says nothing whatever about Hermes' mention of the

¹ *De civ. Dei*, VIII, xxiii, quoted in the English translation by John Healey. The quotation is from Romans, I, xxi.

² Isaiah, XIX, i.

"Son of God", and his whole treatment of the subject is perhaps, in part, a reply to Lactantius' glorification of Hermes as a Gentile prophet.

Augustine's views on Hermes naturally presented a difficulty for the many devout admirers of the Hermetic writings in the Renaissance. Various courses were open to them. One was to affirm that the idolatrous passage in the *Asclepius* was an interpolation made in the Latin translation by the magician, Apuleius, and was not in the lost Greek original by Hermes. This course was adopted by several Hermetists of the sixteenth century, as will be seen later.¹ But to the Renaissance Magus, the magic in the *Asclepius* was the most attractive part of the Hermetic writings. How was a Christian Magus to get round Augustine? Marsilio Ficino did it by quoting Augustine's condemnation, and then ignoring it, though timidly, by practising magic. Giordano Bruno was to take the bolder course of maintaining that the magical Egyptian religion of the world was not only the most ancient but also the only true religion, which both Judaism and Christianity had obscured and corrupted.

There is another passage on Hermes Trismegistus in the *De Civitate Dei*, widely separated from the one on the Egyptian idolatry and in quite a different context. Augustine is affirming the extreme antiquity of the Hebrew tongue and that the Hebrew prophets and patriarchs are much earlier than any of the Gentile philosophers, and the wisdom of the patriarchs earlier than the Egyptian wisdom.

And what was their [the Egyptian's] goodly wisdom, think you? Truly nothing but astronomy, and such other sciences as rather seemed to exercise the wit than to elevate the knowledge. For as for morality, it stirred not in Egypt until Trismegistus' time, who was indeed long before the sages and philosophers of Greece, but after Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, yea and Moses also; for at the time when Moses was born, was Atlas, Prometheus' brother, a great astronomer, living, and he was grandfather by the mother's side to the elder Mercury, who begat the father of this Trismegistus.²

Augustine thus confirmed with the great weight of his authority the extreme antiquity of Hermes Trismegistus, who was "long before the sages and philosophers of Greece". And by giving him

¹ See below, pp. 169, 172-3.

² *De civ. Dei*, XVIII, xxix; quoted in John Healey's translation.

this curious genealogy, whereby he is dated three generations later than a contemporary of Moses, Augustine raised a question which was to be much debated concerning the relative dates of Moses and Hermes. Was Hermes slightly later than Moses, though much earlier than the Greeks, as Augustine said? Was he contemporary with Moses, or earlier than Moses? All these views were to be held by later Hermetists and Magi. The need to date him in relation to Moses was stimulated by the affinities with *Genesis* which must strike every reader of the Hermetic *Pimander*.

From other early Christian writers, more about Hermes Trismegistus could be learned,¹ particularly from Clement of Alexandria, who, in his striking description of the procession of the Egyptian priests, says that the singer at the head of the procession carried two books of music and hymns by Hermes; the horoscopus carried four books by Hermes on the stars. In the course of this description, Clement states that there are forty-two books by Hermes Trismegistus, thirty-six of which contain the whole of the philosophy of the Egyptians, the other six being on medicine.² It is very improbable that Clement knew any of the *Hermetica* which have come down to us,³ but the Renaissance reader believed that he had in the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius* precious survivors of that great sacred library of which Clement speaks.

About 1460, a Greek manuscript was brought to Florence from Macedonia by a monk, one of those many agents employed by Cosimo de' Medici to collect manuscripts for him. It contained a copy of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, not quite a complete copy, for it included fourteen only of the fifteen treatises of the collection, the last one being missing.⁴ Though the Plato manuscripts were

¹ See the collection of *Testimonia* in Scott, Vol. I.

² Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, VI, iv, xxxv-xxxviii. Cf. Festugière, I, pp. 75 ff.

³ Clement does not mention the Hermetic writings, from which Scott concludes (I, pp. 87-90) that either he did not know them, or knew that they were not of very ancient date.

⁴ The manuscript from which Ficino made his translation is in the Biblioteca Laurenziana (Laurentianus, LXXI 33 (A)). See Kristeller, *Studies*, p. 223; the eleventh chapter in this book is a republication in revised form of an article which Kristeller first published in 1938 and which was the pioneer study of Ficino's translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*. All students of Hermetism in the Renaissance are deeply indebted to Kristeller's work.

already assembled, awaiting translation, Cosimo ordered Ficino to put these aside and to translate the work of Hermes Trismegistus at once, before embarking on the Greek philosophers. It is Ficino himself who tells us this, in that dedication to Lorenzo de' Medici of the Plotinus commentaries in which he describes the impetus given to Greek studies by the coming of Gemistus Pletho and other Byzantine scholars to the Council of Florence, and how he himself was commissioned by Cosimo to translate the treasures of Greek philosophy now coming into the West from Byzantium. Cosimo, he says, had handed over to him the works of Plato for translation. But in the year 1463 word came to Ficino from Cosimo that he must translate Hermes first, at once, and go on afterwards to Plato; "mihi Mercurium primo Termaximum, mox Platonem mandavit interpretandum".¹ Ficino made the translation in a few months, whilst the old Cosimo, who died in 1464, was still alive. Then he began on Plato.²

It is an extraordinary situation. There are the complete works of Plato, waiting, and they must wait whilst Ficino quickly translates Hermes, probably because Cosimo wants to read him before he dies. What a testimony this is to the mysterious reputation of the Thrice Great One! Cosimo and Ficino knew from the Fathers that Hermes Trismegistus was much earlier than Plato. They also knew the Latin *Asclepius* which whetted the appetite for more ancient Egyptian wisdom from the same pristine source.³ Egypt was before Greece; Hermes was earlier than Plato. Renaissance

¹ Dedication by Ficino to Lorenzo de' Medici of his epitome and commentaries on Plotinus; Ficino, p. 1537.

² "Mercurium paucis mensibus eo uiuente (referring to Cosimo) peregi. Platonem tunc etiam sum aggressus"; Ficino, *loc. cit.* Cf. Kristeller, *Studies*, p. 223; A. Marcel, *Marsile Ficin*, Paris, 1958, pp. 255 ff.

³ In order to understand this enthusiasm, a history of Hermetism in the Middle Ages and in the Renaissance before Ficino is needed. For some indications of the influence of the *Asclepius* in the Middle Ages, see C.H. II, pp. 267-75. Interest in Hermetism (based chiefly on *Asclepius* and on the pseudo-Hermetic *Liber Hermetis Mercurii Triplicis de VI rerum principis* is one of the marks of the twelfth-century Renaissance. For the influence of these works on Hugh of St. Victor, see the *Didascalicon*, translated Jerome Taylor, Columbia, 1961, introduction pp. 19 ff. and notes.

Many of the magical, alchemical, and astrological writings going under the name of Hermes were of course known in the Middle Ages, see below, pp. 48-9.

respect for the old, the primary, the far-away, as nearest to divine truth, demanded that the *Corpus Hermeticum* should be translated before Plato's *Republic* or *Symposium*, and so this was in fact the first translation that Ficino made.

Ficino gave his translation the title of *Pimander*, which is really the title of only the first treatise in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, but which he extended to cover the whole *Corpus*, or rather the first fourteen of its items which were all that his manuscript contained. He dedicated the translation to Cosimo, and this dedication, or *argumentum* as he calls it, reveals the state of mind, the attitude of profound awe and wonder, in which he had approached this marvellous revelation of ancient Egyptian wisdom.

In that time in which Moses was born flourished Atlas the astrologer, brother of Prometheus the physicist and maternal uncle of the elder Mercury whose nephew was Mercurius Trismegistus.¹

So the *argumentum* begins, with a slightly garbled version of the Augustinian genealogy of Hermes, which at once places him in extreme antiquity, and almost in a Mosaic context.

Augustine has written of Mercurius, continues Ficino, also Cicero and Lactantius. He repeats the information from Cicero that Mercurius "gave laws and letters" to the Egyptians, adding that he founded the city called Hermopolis. He was an Egyptian priest, the wisest of them all, supreme as philosopher for his vast knowledge, as priest for his holiness of life and practice of the divine cults, and worthy of kingly dignity as administrator of the laws, whence he is rightly called Termaximus, the Three Times Great.²

He is called the first author of theology: he was succeeded by Orpheus, who came second amongst ancient theologians: Aglaophemus, who had been initiated into the sacred teaching of Orpheus, was succeeded in the theology by Pythagoras, whose disciple was Philolaus, the teacher of our Divine Plato. Hence there is one ancient theology (*prisca theologia*) . . . taking its origin in Mercurius and culminating in the Divine Plato.³

It is in this preface to the *Pimander* that Ficino gives for the first time his genealogy of wisdom which he worked out, not

¹ *Argumentum* before Ficino's *Pimander* (Ficino, p. 1836).

² This explanation of the meaning of "Thrice Great" is found in the Middle Ages; see below, pp. 48-9.

³ Ficino, *loc. cit.*

mainly from Gemistus Pletho, who does not mention Trismegistus, but from the Fathers, particularly Augustine, Lactantius, and Clement. He was to repeat the genealogy of wisdom many times later: Hermes Trismegistus always has either the first place in it, or is second only to Zoroaster (who was Pletho's favourite as the first *prisca theologus*), or is bracketed first with Zoroaster.¹ The genealogy of the *prisca theologia* forcibly demonstrates the extreme importance which Ficino assigned to Hermes as the *fons et origo* of a wisdom tradition which led in an unbroken chain to Plato. Much other evidence could be quoted from his works of Ficino's unquestioning belief in the primacy and importance of Hermes, and this attitude impressed an early biographer of the Florentine philosopher who says that "he (Ficino) held it as a secure and firm opinion that the philosophy of Plato took its origin from that of Mercurius, whose teachings seemed to him closer to the doctrine of Orpheus and in certain ways to our own Theology (that is, to Christianity) than those of Pythagoras."²

Mercurius wrote many books pertaining to the knowledge of divine things, continues Ficino in his preface to the *Pimander*, in which he reveals arcane mysteries. Nor is it only as a philosopher that he speaks but sometimes as a prophet he sings of the future. He foresaw the ruin of the early religion and the birth of a new faith, and the coming of Christ. Augustine doubts whether he did

¹ In the *Theologia Platonica*, Ficino gives the genealogy as (1) Zoroaster, (2) Mercurius Trismegistus, (3) Orpheus, (4) Aglaophemus, (5) Pythagoras, (6) Plato (Ficino, p. 386). In the preface to the Plotinus commentaries, Ficino says that divine theology began simultaneously with Zoroaster among the Persians and with Mercurius among the Egyptians; then goes on to Orpheus, Aglaophemus, Pythagoras, Plato (*ibid.*, p. 1537).

This equating of Zoroaster with Hermes brings Ficino's genealogy into some conformity with that of Gemistus Pletho, for whom the most ancient source of wisdom is Zoroaster, after whom he puts a different string of intermediaries to those given by Ficino, but arrives eventually, like Ficino, at Pythagoras and Plato. See the passages quoted from Pletho's commentary on the *Laws* and from his reply to Scholarios in F. Masai, *Pléthon et le Platonisme de Mistra*, Paris, 1956, pp. 136, 138.

For a valuable study of Ficino's genealogies of wisdom, see D. P. Walker, "The *Prisca Theologia* in France", *J.W.C.I.*, 1954 (XVII), pp. 204-59.

² *Vita di Ficino*, published from a manuscript of circa 1591 in Marcel, *op. cit.*, p. 716.

not know this through the stars or the revelation of demons, but Lactantius does not hesitate to place him among the Sibyls and the prophets.¹

These remarks (which we have paraphrased, not fully translated, from the *argumentum*) show Ficino's effort to avoid Augustine's condemnation of his hero for the Egyptian idolatry in the *Asclepius*, which he does by emphasising the favourable view of Lactantius. He next goes on to say that of the many works which Mercurius wrote, two principally are divine, the one called *Asclepius*, which Apuleius the Platonist translated into Latin, and the one called *Pimander* (that is the *Corpus Hermeticum*), which has been brought out of Macedonia into Italy and which he himself, by command of Cosimo, has now translated into Latin. He believes that it was first written in Egyptian and was translated into Greek to reveal to the Greeks the Egyptian mysteries.

The *argumentum* ends on a note of ecstasy which reflects those gnostic initiations with which the *Hermetica* are concerned. In this work, so Ficino believes, there shines a light of divine illumination. It teaches us how, rising above the deceptions of sense and the clouds of fantasy, we are to turn our mind to the Divine Mind, as the moon turns to the sun, so that Pimander, that is the Divine Mind, may flow into our mind and we may contemplate the order of all things as they exist in God.

In the introduction to his edition of the *Hermetica*, Scott outlined Ficino's attitude to these works as follows:

Ficino's theory of the relation between Hermes Trismegistus and the Greek philosophers was based partly on data supplied by early Christian writers, especially Lactantius and Augustine, and partly on the internal evidence of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the Latin *Asclepius* of Pseudo-Apuleius. He saw . . . that the resemblance between the Hermetic doctrines and those of Plato was such as to imply some historical connection; but accepting it as a known fact that the author of the *Hermetica* was a man who lived about the time of Moses, he inverted the true relation and thought that Plato had derived his theology, through Pythagoras, from Trismegistus. And his view was adopted, at least in its main outlines, by all who dealt with the subject down to the end of the sixteenth century.²

¹ In his work on the Christian religion (*De Christ. relig.*, XXV), Ficino puts Hermes with the Sibyls as testifying with them to the coming of Christ (Ficino, p. 29).

² Scott, I, p. 31. The end of the sixteenth century is too early a date at which to put the ending of this illusion; see below, chapter XXI.

This is undoubtedly a fact, and one which all students of the Renaissance Neoplatonism which Ficino's translations and works inaugurated would do well to bear in mind. It has not been sufficiently investigated what was the effect on Ficino of his awe-struck approach to the *Hermetica* as the *prisca theologia*, the pristine fount of illumination flowing from the Divine *Mens*, which would lead him to the original core of Platonism as a gnosis derived from Egyptian wisdom.

Contemporaries shared with Ficino his estimate of the extreme importance of the Hermetic writings for, as P. O. Kristeller has pointed out, his *Pimander* had an immense diffusion.¹ A very large number of manuscripts of it exist, more than of any other work by Ficino. It was printed for the first time in 1471 and went through sixteen editions to the end of the sixteenth century, not counting those in which it appears with the other works. An Italian translation of it by Tommaso Benci was printed at Florence in 1548. In 1505, Lefèvre d'Étaples brought together into one volume Ficino's *Pimander* and the translation of the *Asclepius* by Pseudo-Apuleius. The bibliography of the editions, translations, collections, commentaries on the Hermetic writings in the sixteenth century is long and complicated,² testifying to the profound and enthusiastic interest aroused by Hermes Trismegistus throughout the Renaissance.

The ban of the mediaeval Church on magic had forced it into dark holes and corners, where the magician plied his abominated art in secrecy. Respectable people might sometimes employ him surreptitiously and he was much feared. But he was certainly not publicly admired as a religious philosopher. Renaissance magic, which was a reformed and learned magic and always disclaimed any connection with the old ignorant, evil, or black magic, was often an adjunct of an esteemed Renaissance philosopher. This new status of magic was undoubtedly mainly due to that great flood of literature which came in from Byzantium, so much of which dated from those early centuries after Christ in which the reigning philosophies were tinged with occultism. The learned and assiduous reader of such authors as Iamblichus, Porphyry, or even

¹ Kristeller, *Studies*, pp. 223 ff.; *Suppl. Fic.*, I, pp. lvii-lviii, cxxix-cxxx.

² Scott, I, pp. 31 ff., and see further below, pp. 170-0, 179, 181-2.

of Plotinus, could no longer regard magic as the trade of ignorant and inferior persons. And the genealogy of ancient wisdom, which Ficino did so much to propagate, was also favourable to a revival of magic, for so many of the *prisci theologi* were *prisci magi*, and the literature which supported their claims also really dated from the occultist early centuries A.D. To the most ancient Zoroaster, who sometimes changes place with Hermes as the earliest in the chain of wisdom, were attributed the *Chaldean Oracles*, which were not, as supposed, documents of extreme antiquity but dated from the second century A.D.¹ The incantatory magic supposed to have been taught by Orpheus, who comes second in the chain of *prisci theologi*, was based on the Orphic hymns, most of which date from the second or third century A.D.² Thus Hermes Trismegistus was not the only most ancient theologian or Magus whose sacred literature was badly misdated.

Nevertheless it is probable that Hermes Trismegistus is the most important figure in the Renaissance revival of magic. Egypt was traditionally associated with the darkest and strongest magic, and now there were brought to light the writings of an Egyptian priest which revealed an extraordinary piety, confirming the high opinion of him which the Christian Father, Lactantius, had expressed, and whom the highest authorities regarded as the source of Plato. It was, almost certainly, the discovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which demonstrated the piety of Hermes and associated him so intimately with the reigning Platonic philosophy, which rehabilitated his *Asclepius*, condemned by Augustine as containing bad demonic magic. The extraordinarily lofty position

¹ Pletho firmly believed in the extreme antiquity of these Oracles (see Masai, *op. cit.*, pp. 136, 137, 375, etc.) which are for him the early fount of Zoroastrian wisdom the streams from which eventually reached Plato. This exactly corresponds to Ficino's attitude to the *Hermetica*. It was not difficult for Ficino to mingle the waters of these two pristine founts, since they were roughly contemporaneous and similar in their atmosphere. Speaking of the *Hermetica*, Nock says, "Comme les *Oracles Chaldaïques*, ouvrage du temps de Marc-Aurèle, ils nous révèlent une manière de penser, ou plutôt une manière d'user de la pensée, analogue à une sorte de procédé magique . . ." (*C.H.*, I, p. vii).

The *Chaldean Oracles* were edited by W. Kroll, *De oraculis chaldaicis in Breslauer Philolog. Abhandl.*, VII (1894), pp. 1-76.

² On the *Orphica* in the Renaissance, see D. P. Walker, "Orpheus the Theologian and the Renaissance Platonists", *J.W.C.I.*, 1953 (XVI), pp. 100-20.

assigned to Hermes Trismegistus in this new age rehabilitated Egypt and its wisdom, and therefore the magic with which that wisdom was associated.

Chapter II

FICINO'S PIMANDER AND THE ASCLEPIUS

IN this chapter I shall give compressed accounts of the contents of four selected treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, chosen only from amongst those fourteen which Ficino translated and to which he gave the general title *Pimander*. I shall indicate the more important points from Ficino's commentaries on these works, trying to bring out his awe-struck wonder at the intuitions into Mosaic and even Christian truths which this most ancient Egyptian author seemed to him to have had mysteriously revealed to him. Finally, a compressed account of the contents of the *Asclepius* will be given. In this way it is hoped to bring before the reader some impression of the two works which Ficino in his *argumentum* before the *Pimander* associates together as the two "divine books" of Hermes Trismegistus, namely the book "On the Power and Wisdom of God" (the fourteen treatises of his *Pimander*) and the book "On the Divine Will" (the *Asclepius*). It is, I believe, necessary for the understanding of the Renaissance attitude to the magic in the *Asclepius* to read that work in the context of the extraordinary piety and knowledge of divine things which the *Pimander* seemed to reveal.

The reader whose interest may be aroused in the true nature of these works as documents for pagan gnosticism in the early centuries A.D. may be referred to Festugière's massive volumes on *La Révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste* in which he treats exhaustively of their philosophical sources and brilliantly reconstructs the social

and religious atmosphere of their period.¹ The writers could have used some Hebrew sources,² as well as the current Graeco-Roman philosophy, and, in view of their real date after Christ, they could have heard something of Christianity and of the Christian's "Son of God".³ But for our purposes here, the critical and historical problems of the Hermetic literature are irrelevant, for they would have been entirely unknown to Ficino and his readers, and we are going to try to approach these documents imaginatively as Ficino and the whole Renaissance after him approached them, as revelations of most ancient Egyptian wisdom by a writer who lived long before Plato and even longer before Christ. To keep up this illusion I shall give the five treatises here analysed "Egyptian" titles, and I shall refer throughout to their author as "Hermes Trismegistus". For it seems to me that it is only by entering with some degree of sympathy into the huge illusion of their vast antiquity and Egyptian character that one can hope to realise the tremendous impact which these works made on the Renaissance reader.

Before, however, we plunge into the great Egyptian illusion, some critical remarks are necessary.

These writings are really by different unknown authors and no doubt of considerably varying dates. Even the individual treatises are often composites, made up of different tracts grouped together into a whole. Their contents are therefore very various, and often contradictory. No really coherent system can be drawn from them as a whole. Nor are they intended to be a system of rationally

¹ Needless to say, the works of Reitzenstein, particularly his *Poimandres* (Leipzig, 1904) are still fundamental for this subject. W. Scott's prefaces and critical apparatus in his edition of the *Hermetica* have been consulted as well as the prefaces and notes in the Nock-Festugière edition. Other useful works are A. D. Nock, *Conversion*, Oxford, 1933; C. H. Dodd, *The Bible and the Greeks*, London, 1935; R. Mc. L. Wilson, *The Gnostic Problem*, London, 1958.

² There is general agreement that the first treatise of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the *Pimander*, contains some Jewish elements but opinions differ as to the amount of the writers' indebtedness to Hellenised Judaism.

³ Most scholars are of the opinion that there is very little, if any, Christian influence in the *Hermetica*. Dodd, who stresses the Jewish influence, thinks that "features of the *Hermetica* in which Christian influence might be suspected, can be accounted for by Hellenistic-Jewish ideas which lie behind both the *Hermetica* and the New Testament" (*op. cit.*, p. xv, note).

thought out philosophy. They are records of individual souls seeking revelation, intuition into the divine, personal salvation, gnosis, without the aid of a personal God or Saviour, but through a religious approach to the universe. It is this religious approach, their character as documents of religious experiences, which give the *Hermetica* a unity which they entirely lack as a thought system.

The cosmological framework which they take for granted is always astrological, even where this is not expressly stated. The material world is under the rule of the stars, and of the seven planets, the "Seven Governors". The laws of the nature within which the religious gnostic lives are the astrological laws, and they are the setting of his religious experience.

There is, however, a fundamental difference in the attitude to the star-ruled world among the various authors of the *Hermetica*. Festugière has classified these writings as belonging to two types of gnosis, namely pessimist gnosis, or optimist gnosis.¹ For the pessimist (or dualist) gnostic, the material world heavily impregnated with the fatal influence of the stars is in itself evil; it must be escaped from by an ascetic way of life which avoids as much as possible all contact with matter, until the lightened soul rises up through the spheres of the planets, casting off their evil influences as it ascends, to its true home in the immaterial divine world. For the optimist gnostic, matter is impregnated with the divine, the earth lives, moves, with a divine life, the stars are living divine animals, the sun burns with a divine power, there is no part of Nature which is not good for all are parts of God.

The following accounts of the contents of the five Hermetic writings chosen are partly analysis, partly direct quotation.² I have made many omissions and have sometimes slightly rearranged the order. There is a good deal of diffuseness and repetition in these works, and I have tried to give their main gist as briefly as possible.

(1) The Egyptian Genesis. *Pimander*. (*Corpus Hermeticum* I³; partly optimist and partly dualist gnosis.)

¹ Festugière, I, p. 84; II, pp. x-xi (classification of the individual *Hermetica* as optimist or pessimist in note to p. xi).

² They are in the nature of *précis*, with some direct quotation, and the reader must be warned not to use them as complete translations. In making them, I have had before me Festugière's French translation and Ficino's Latin translation. Unfortunately it is not possible to use Scott's English translation owing to the liberties which he took with the text.

³ *C.H.*, I, pp. 7-19; Ficino, pp. 1837-9.

Pimander, who is the *Nous*, or divine *mens*, appears to Trismegistus when his corporeal senses are bound as in a heavy sleep. Trismegistus expresses his longing to know the nature of beings and to know God.

Pimander's aspect changes, and Trismegistus sees a limitless vision which is all light. Then a kind of obscurity or darkness appears, out of which comes a kind of fire in which is heard an indescribable sound, like a fiery groan, while from the light issues a holy Word, and a fire without mixture leaps from the moist region up to the sublime, and the air, being light, follows the fiery breath. "That light", says *Pimander*, "is I myself, *Nous*, thy God . . . and the luminous Word issuing from the *Nous* is the Son of God."

Trismegistus then sees within himself, in his own *Nous* or *mens*, the light and an innumerable number of Powers, a limitless world and the fire enveloped in an all powerful force. He asks *Pimander*, "Whence then arise the elements of nature?" and *Pimander* replies, "From the Will of God, which received into itself the Word. . . . And the *Nous*-God, existing as life and light, brought forth a second *Nous*-Demiurge, who being the god of fire and breath, fashioned the Governors, seven in number, who envelop with their circles the sensible world." The Word united itself with the *Nous*-Demiurge, being of the same substance, and the *Nous*-Demiurge conjointly with the Word moves the Seven Governors on which all the lower elemental world depends.

After the *Nous*-Demiurge-Word of fire and breath had fashioned the Seven Governors and set them in motion, there comes in Trismegistus' account the creation of Man, which is the direct action of the *Nous*-Father.

"Now the *Nous*, Father of all beings, being life and light, brought forth a Man similar to himself, whom he loved as his own child. For the Man was beautiful, reproducing the image of his Father: for it was indeed with his own form that God fell in love and gave over to him all his works. Now, when he saw the creation which the Demiurge had fashioned in the fire, the Man wished also to produce a work, and permission to do this was given him by the Father. Having thus entered into the demiurgic sphere, in which he had full power, the Man saw the works of his brother, and the Governors fell in love with him, and each gave to him a part in their own rule. Then, having learned their essence and

having received participation in their nature, he wished to break through the periphery of the circles and to know the power of Him who reigns above the fire.

Then Man, who had full power over the world of mortal beings and of animals, leant across the armature of the spheres, having broken through their envelopes, and showed to the Nature below the beautiful form of God. When she saw that he had in him the inexhaustible beauty and all the energy of the Governors, joined to the form of God, Nature smiled with love, for she had seen the features of that marvellously beautiful form of Man reflected in the water and his shadow on the earth. And he, having seen this form like to himself in Nature, reflected in the water, he loved her and wished to dwell with her. The moment he wished this he accomplished it and came to inhabit the irrational form. Then Nature having received her loved one, embraced him, and they were united, for they burned with love."

Man having taken on a mortal body, in order to live with Nature, is alone of all terrestrial beings of a double nature, mortal through his body, immortal through the essential Man. Although in fact immortal and having power over all things, he has also through his body the condition of mortality, being under Destiny and the slave of the armature of the spheres. "Now", says Pimander, "I will reveal to you a mystery which has been hidden until now. Nature being united to Man in love produced an amazing prodigy. Man, as I said, had in him the nature of the assembly of the Seven, composed of fire and breath. Nature from her union with Man brought forth seven men corresponding to the natures of the Seven Governors, being both male and female and rising up towards the sky." The generation of the seven first men was made in the following fashion. Female was the earth, water the generative element; the fire brought things to maturity, and from ether Nature received the vital breath, and she produced the bodies with the form of Man. As for Man, from life and light which he had been, he changed to soul and intellect, the life changing to soul and the light to intellect. And all the beings of the sensible world remained in this state until the end of a period.

At the end of this period, continues Pimander, the link which bound all things was broken by the will of God. Man and all animals, which till then had been both male and female, separated into two sexes and God spoke the word, increase and multiply.

Then Providence, through destiny and the armature of the spheres, established the generations, and all living things multiplied, each according to their species.

Pimander gives Trismegistus advice as to how he is to comport himself in life in view of the mystery which has been imparted to him. He is to know himself, because "he who knows himself goes towards himself", that is towards his true nature. "You are light and life, like God the Father of whom Man was born. If therefore you learn to know yourself as made of light and life . . . you will return to life." Only the man who has intellect (not all men have it) can thus know himself. And Trismegistus must live a pure and holy life, rendering the Father propitious to him through filial love and uttering benedictions and hymns.

Trismegistus gives thanks to Pimander for having revealed all things to him, but wishes also to know about the "ascension". Pimander explains that at death the mortal body dissolves into its corporeal elements but the spiritual man goes up through the armature of the spheres leaving at each sphere a part of his mortal nature and the evil it contains. Then, when entirely denuded of all that the spheres had imprinted on him, he enters into the "ogdoadidic" nature, hears the Powers singing hymns to God and becomes mingled with the Powers.

Trismegistus is now dismissed by Pimander, "after having been invested with powers and instructed in the nature of the All and the supreme vision." He begins to preach to the people urging them to leave their errors and to take part in immortality.

And Trismegistus "engraved within himself the benefit of Pimander".¹

Ficino, in his commentary on this treatise, is immensely struck by remarkable resemblances to the book of *Genesis*. "Here Mercurius is seen to be treating of the Mosaic mysteries", he begins, and then goes on to make obvious comparisons. Moses saw a darkness over the face of the abyss and the Spirit of God brooding over the waters: Mercurius sees a darkness and the Word of God warming the humid nature. Moses announced the creation by the powerful Word of God. Mercurius actually states that that shining Word, which illuminates all things, is the Son of God. And if it is

¹ "Ego autem Pimandri beneficium inscripsi penetrabilibus animi . . ." (Ficino's translation, Ficino, p. 1839).

possible to ascribe to a man born before the Incarnation such knowledge, he saw the Son being born of the Father and the Spirit proceeding from the Father and the Son. He saw the creation being made by the Divine Word, and man being made in the image of God, then his fall from the intelligible sphere into the body. He actually uses almost the same words as Moses when describing God's command to the species to increase and multiply. Then he instructs us how we may rise again to that intelligible and immortal nature from which we have degenerated. Moses was the law-giver of the Hebrews, Mercurius of the Egyptians, and he gives holy advice to his flock on how to live, praising the Father of all with hymns and thanksgivings and contemplating the life and the light.¹

As the above abstract of the commentary on the *Pimander* shows it was above all what he took to be the resemblances to Moses (not so much to Plato) in this work which profoundly impressed Ficino. This was why, so he must have thought, the Fathers made such a point of dating Trismegistus in relation to Moses, because he seemed like an Egyptian Moses. Ficino continued to ponder over these marvels in later years; in the *Theologia Platonica* he actually allowed himself to wonder whether, after all, Hermes Trismegistus was Moses. After speaking in that work of the account of creation in the *Timaeus* he adds: "Trismegistus Mercurius teaches more clearly such an origin of the generation of the world. Nor need we wonder that this man knew so much, if this Mercurius was the same man as Moses, as Artapanus the historian shows with many conjectures."²

And Trismegistus is even better than Moses because he saw, long before the Incarnation, that the creative Word was the Son of God. "Ille (Moses) potenti verbo domini cuncta creata nunciat, hic (Mercurius) verbum illud lucens, quod omnia illuminet . . . filium Dei esse asseverat. . . ." Probably Ficino is here thinking of a comparison with the beginning of St. John's Gospel. As Ficino hurriedly translated the *Pimander* for Cosimo he would have realised how right Lactantius had been when he said that Tris-

¹ Ficino, *loc. cit.*

² *Theologia Platonica*, VIII, I (Ficino, p. 400).

Ficino probably got his information about Artapanus from Eusebius, *De praeparatione evangelicæ*, IX, 27, 6. Artapanus was a Hellenised Jew; see Festugière, I, pp. 70, 384.

megistus "by some means or other searched into almost all truth" and "often described the excellence and the Majesty of the Word", calling him "Son of God", not only in the *Pimander*, but also in the *Asclepius*.

Thus an odour of sanctity surrounds the author of the Egyptian Genesis, who is so like Moses, who prophesies Christianity, and who teaches a devout way of life in loving devotion to God the Father.

Nevertheless it is most obvious that there are, as Ficino significantly fails to point out, radical differences of many kinds between the Mosaic Genesis and the Egyptian Genesis. Particularly do they differ most profoundly in their account of the nature of Man and the character of his Fall.

It is true that the Mosaic Genesis, like the Egyptian Genesis, says that Man was made in the image of God and was given dominion over all creatures, but it is never said in the Mosaic Genesis that this meant that Adam was created as a divine being, having the divine creative power. Not even when Adam walked with God in the Garden of Eden before the Fall is this said of him. When Adam, tempted by Eve and the serpent, wished to eat of the Tree of Knowledge and become like God, this was the sin of disobedience, punished by the exile from the Garden of Eden. But in the Egyptian Genesis the newly created Man, seeing the newly created Seven Governors (the planets) on whom all things depend, wishes to create, to make something like that. Nor is this treated as a sin of disobedience.¹ He is allowed into the society of the Seven Governors who love him and impart to him their powers. This Egyptian Adam is more than human; he is divine and belongs to the race of the star demons, the divinely created governors of the lower world. He is even stated to be "brother" to the creative Word—Demiurge—Son of God, the "second god" who moves the stars.

It is true that he falls, but this fall is in itself an act of his power. He can lean down through the armature of the spheres, tear open

¹ Festugière thinks that though man's desire to create was not a fault, since permission to do so was given to him by the Father, yet his entry immediately afterwards into the demiurgic sphere of the Seven Governors was already a punishment, a beginning of his fall into matter (*Révélation*, III, pp. 87 ff.). Dodd's interpretation (*op. cit.*, p. 153) is similar. Both writers stress the difference between Hermetic man and Mosaic man, the one created divine, the other created out of the dust of the earth. The fall of Hermetic man is more like the fall of Lucifer than the fall of Adam.

their envelopes and come down to show himself to Nature. He does this of his own free will moved by love of the beautiful Nature which he himself helped to create and maintain, through his participation in the nature of the Seven Governors. He was moved to do this by love of his own image, reflected in the face of Nature (just as God loved Man, seeing in him his own beautiful image). And Nature recognises his power, the powers of the Seven Governors in him, and is united to him in love.

It is true that this is a Fall which involves loss, that Man in coming down to Nature and taking on a mortal body puts this mortal body, puts his mortal part, under the dominion of the stars, and it is perhaps punished by the separation into two sexes (after the curious period of the Seven sexless men engendered by Man and Nature). But man's immortal part remains divine and creative. He consists, not of a human soul and a body, but of a divine, creative, immortal essence and a body. And this divinity, this power, he recovers in the vision of the divine *mens*, which is like his own divine *mens*, shown him by Pimander. Pimander leaves Trismegistus after he has been "invested with powers and instructed in the nature of the All and the supreme vision."

In short, the Egyptian Genesis tells the story of the creation and fall of a divine man, a man intimately related to the star-demons in his very origin, Man as Magus. The Egyptian Genesis tallies well with that famous outbreak in the *Asclepius* on man as the *magnum miraculum* (with which Pico della Mirandola was to open his Oration on the Dignity of Man):

What a great miracle is Man, O Asclepius, a being worthy of reverence and honour. For he passes into the nature of a god as though he were himself a god; he has familiarity with the race of demons, knowing that he is issued from the same origin; he despises that part of his nature which is only human, for he has put his hope in the divinity of the other part.¹

(2) Egyptian Regeneration. *The Secret Discourse on the Mountain of Hermes Trismegistus to his Son Tat.* (*Corpus Hermeticum*, XIII²; dualist gnosis.)

Tat asks his father, Trismegistus, to teach him about the doctrine of regeneration, for he has fortified his spirit against the illusion of the world and is ready for the final initiation. Trismegistus tells

¹ See below, p. 35.

² C.H., II, pp. 200-09; Ficino, pp. 1854-6.

him that regenerated man is born of intelligent wisdom in silence and the seed is the True Good, sown in him by the Will of God. The man thus born again "will be god, the son of God, all in all, composed of all the Powers." Trismegistus has had the regenerative experience. With growing excitement, Tat implores him to pass it on to him. "Who is the operator in the work of regeneration?" he asks, and the reply is, "The Son of God, a man like other men, by the will of God." Tat asks what truth is, and he is told that it is "that which is not polluted, which has no limit, no colour, no form, is motionless, naked, shining, which can only be apprehended by itself, the unalterable Good, the Incorporeal." It cannot be perceived by the senses and can only be known by the effects of its power and energy, which demands that a person must be capable of understanding birth in God. "Am I not capable of this, O Father?" cries Tat, and the answer is that he must draw it to himself and it will come; wish it and it will be produced; arrest the activity of the bodily senses and the divinity will be born in him; purify himself from the "irrational punishments of matter". Terrible and numerous are these "punishments", and the chief of them are twelve in number, namely Ignorance, Sadness, Incontinence, Concupiscence, Injustice, Cupidity, Deceit, Envy, Fraud, Anger, Precipitation, Malice. These are the punishments which, through his imprisonment in the body, force the interior man to suffer through the senses.

Now, in a religious silence, Tat experiences the work of regeneration and the Powers of God come into him and drive out the Punishments. Knowledge replaces Ignorance; Joy repulses Sadness; Continence, Incontinence; Endurance, Concupiscence; Justice, Injustice; Generosity, Cupidity; Truth, Deceit. With the arrival of Truth comes the Good, accompanied by Life and Light, and all the remaining Punishments are driven out. The Decade of the Powers has cancelled the Dodecade of the Punishments.

When his regenerative experience is completed, Trismegistus leads Tat out of the "tent" (translated *tabernaculum* by Ficino) under which he had been and which was constituted by the circle of the zodiac. As Festugière explains, the twelve vices or "punishments" come from the twelve signs of the zodiac which oppressed Tat when he was still material and under the influence of matter. Festugière compares this with the ascent through the spheres in the *Pimander*, where there are seven vices with the planets which

the initiate abandons on his upward path.¹ The punishments of matter are thus really the influences of the stars, for which are substituted, in the regenerative experience, Virtues which are Divine Powers which free the soul from the material weight of the heaven and its influences. The Powers are One in the Word, and the soul thus regenerated becomes itself the Word and a Son of God.²

Trismegistus has passed on to Tat the experience which he himself has had, and the Powers sing in Tat the Hymn of Regeneration. "Let all nature listen to the hymn. . . . I will sing the Lord of Creation, the All, the One. Open, oh heavens, winds retain your breath, let the immortal circle of God listen to my word. . . . Powers which are in me sing to the One, the All. . . . I give thee thanks, Father, energy of the Powers; I give thee thanks, God, power of my energies. . . . This is what the Powers cry which are in me. . . . This is what the man who belongs to thee cries through the fire, through the air, through the earth, through the water, through the breath, through all thy creatures. . . ."

In his commentary on this treatise,³ Ficino compares the driving out of the *ultores* and their replacement by the *Potestates Dei* with the Christian experience of regeneration in Christ, the Word and the Son of God. In fact, as Festugière points out,⁴ this gnostic experience does seem to be something like a gift of grace which cancels the predestination of the stars.

I append a table of the Punishments and Powers as translated into Latin by Ficino. He translated Incontinence as Inconstancy and, in the text of the translation, forgot Concupiscence which, however, he gives as Luxuria in the list of Punishments in his commentary. Since he does not list the Powers in the commentary, we have no opposite for his Luxuria, which should, of course, be Castitas (or, if the Endurance of the text had been translated, Fortitudo).

¹ Festugière, III, pp. 90, 154, 156, etc. See also the valuable discussion of this treatise, and of the association of the vices with the zodiac and the planets, in M. W. Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins*, Michigan, 1952, pp. 48 ff.

² On the Powers, see Festugière, III, pp. 153 ff.

³ Ficino, p. 1856.

⁴ Festugière, IV, p. 253.

<i>Punishments</i>	<i>Powers</i>
Ignorantia	Cognitio Dei
Tristitia	Gaudium
Inconstantia	Constantia
Cupiditas	Continentia
Luxuria	Castitas ? Fortitudo ?
Injustitia	Justitia
Deceptio	Veritas
Invidia	Bonum
Fraus	Lumen
Ira	Vita
Temeritas	
Malitia	

It is probable that this Gospel according to Hermes Trismegistus meant a great deal to Ficino, who desperately feared the stars. Like the creation by the Word in *Pimander*, it may well have seemed to him to accord with St. John. "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men", and to as many as received Him "to them gave He power to become the sons of God."¹

(3) Egyptian Reflection of the Universe in the Mind. *The Mind to Hermes. (Corpus Hermeticum XI²; optimist gnosis.)*

(The *mens* is supposed throughout to be addressing Hermes.)

Eternity is the Power of God, and the work of Eternity is the world, which has no beginning, but is continually becoming by the action of Eternity. Therefore nothing that is in the world will ever perish or be destroyed, for Eternity is imperishable.

And all this great body of the world is a soul, full of intellect and of God, who fills it within and without and vivifies the All.

Contemplate through me (that is through the *mens*) the world, and consider its beauty. See the hierarchy of the seven heavens and their order. See that all things are full of light. See the earth, settled in the midst of the All, the great nurse who nourishes all terrestrial creatures. All is full of soul, and all beings are in movement. Who has created these things? The One God, for God is One. You see that the world is always one, the sun, one, the moon, one, the divine activity, one; God too, is One. And since all is living, and life is also one, God is certainly One. It is by the

¹ St. John, I, iv, xii.

² C.H., I, pp. 147-57; Ficino, pp. 1850-52.

action of God that all things come into being. Death is not the destruction of the assembled elements in a body, but the breaking of their union. The change is called death because the body dissolves, but I declare to you, my dear Hermes, that the beings who are thus dissolved are but transformed.

All beings are in God but not as though placed in a place, for it is not thus that they are placed in the incorporeal faculty of representation. Judge of this from your own experience. Command your soul to be in India, to cross the ocean; in a moment it will be done. Command it to fly up to heaven. It will not need wings; nothing can prevent it. And if you wish to break through the vault of the universe and to contemplate what is beyond—if there is anything beyond the world—you may do it.

See what power, what swiftness you possess. It is so that you must conceive of God; all that is, he contains within himself like thoughts, the world, himself, the All. Therefore unless you make yourself equal to God, you cannot understand God: for the like is not intelligible save to the like. Make yourself grow to a greatness beyond measure, by a bound free yourself from the body; raise yourself above all time, become Eternity; then you will understand God. Believe that nothing is impossible for you, think yourself immortal and capable of understanding all, all arts, all sciences, the nature of every living being. Mount higher than the highest height; descend lower than the lowest depth. Draw into yourself all sensations of everything created, fire and water, dry and moist, imagining that you are everywhere, on earth, in the sea, in the sky, that you are not yet born, in the maternal womb, adolescent, old, dead, beyond death. If you embrace in your thought all things at once, times, places, substances, qualities, quantities, you may understand God.

Say no longer that God is invisible. Do not speak thus, for what is more manifest than God. He has created all only that you may see it through the beings. For that is the miraculous power of God, to show himself through all beings. For nothing is invisible, even of the incorporeals. The intellect makes itself visible in the act of thinking, God in the act of creating.

Ficino's commentary on this treatise is merely a short résumé.

The reader will notice that the view of the world on which this Egyptian revelation (really optimist type of gnosis) is based differs

fundamentally from the preceding revelation (based on a pessimist type of gnosis). In the revelation of Hermes to Tat, matter was evil and the work of regeneration consisted in escaping from its power through the infusion into the soul of divine Powers or Virtues. Here the world is good, for it is full of God. The gnosis consists in reflecting the world within the mind, for so we shall know the God who made it.

Yet also in the pessimist gnosis, described in the regeneration of Tat, the world was reflected in his mind. After his regeneration, he cried to God through the creatures, and became Eternity, the Aion, as here. The principle of world-reflection in the mind thus belongs to both types of gnosis, but with a different emphasis. In the one the adept is released by his vision from evil powers in matter and there is a strong ethical element. In the other, the vision is of God in nature, a kind of pantheism; the material world is full of the divine, and the gnosis consists in fully grasping it, as it is, and holding it within the mind.

For the Renaissance enthusiast, believing all to be the work of one man, the most ancient Egyptian, Hermes Trismegistus, these distinctions would be blurred.

(4) Egyptian Philosophy of Man and of Nature: Earth Movement. *Hermes Trismegistus to Tat on the Common Intellect. (Corpus Hermeticum XII¹; optimist gnosis.)*

The intellect, O Tat, is drawn from the very substance of God. In men, this intellect is God; and so some men are gods and their humanity is near to the divinity. When man is not guided by intellect, he falls below himself into an animal state. All men are subject to destiny but those in possession of the word, in whom intellect commands, are not under it in the same manner as others. God's two gifts to man of intellect and the word have the same value as immortality. If man makes right use of these, he differs in no way from the immortals.

The world, too, is a god, image of a greater god. United to him and conserving the order and will of the Father, it is the totality of life. There is nothing in it, through all the duration of the cyclic return willed by the Father, which is not alive. The Father has willed that the world should be living so long as it keeps its cohesion; hence the world is necessarily god. How then could it

¹ C.H., I, pp. 174-83; Ficino, pp. 1852-4.

be that in that which is god, which is the image of the All, there should be dead things? For death is corruption and corruption is destruction, and it is impossible that anything of God could be destroyed.

Do not the living beings in the world die, O Father, although they are parts of the world?

Hush, my child, for you are led into error by the denomination of the phenomenon. Living beings do not die, but, being composite bodies they are dissolved; this is not death but the dissolution of a mixture. If they are dissolved, it is not to be destroyed but to be renewed. What in fact is the energy of life? Is it not movement? What is there in the world which is immobile? Nothing.

But the earth at least, does it not seem to be immobile?

No. On the contrary, alone of all beings it is both subject to a multitude of movements and stable. It would be absurd to suppose that this nurse of all beings should be immobile, she who gives birth to all things, for without movement it is impossible to give birth. All that is in the world, without exception, is in movement, and that which is in movement is also in life. Contemplate then the beautiful arrangement of the world and see that it is alive, and that all matter is full of life.

Is God then in matter, O Father?

Where could matter be placed if it existed apart from God? Would it not be a confused mass, unless it were put to work? And if it is put to work by whom is that done? The energies which operate in it are parts of God. Whether you speak of matter or bodies or substance, know that these things are energies of God, of God who is the All. In the All there is nothing which is not God. Adore this Word, my child, and render it a cult.

Again, Ficino's commentary on this is little more than a résumé.

The piece again gives "Egyptian" philosophy of the optimist gnosis, repeating much that is in other treatises. The fundamental tenet that man through his intellect is divine, and that gnosis consists in becoming, or rebecoming a god in order to see God, comes out clearly.

The emphasis of "Egyptian" natural philosophy (optimist gnosis) on the divinity, eternity, and life of the world and of matter is also strongly restated. In this divine and living world, nothing can die and everything moves, including the earth.

This philosophy, in which divine man through his divine intellect participates in the intellect infused throughout the living world of divine nature, is the ideal philosophy for Man as Magus, as the *Asclepius* will show.

(5) Egyptian Religion. The *Asclepius*¹ or *The Perfect Word* (that the latter is the correct title would have been known from Lactantius who calls it *Sermo Perfectus*; optimist gnosis).

Hermes Trismegistus, Asclepius, Tat, and Hammon meet together in an Egyptian temple. No others were admitted, for it would be impious to divulge to the masses a teaching entirely filled with the divine majesty. When the fervour of the four men and the presence of God had filled the holy place, the divine love (*divinus Cupido*)² began to speak through the lips of Hermes.

All descends from heaven, from the One who is the All, by the intermediary of the heaven. Attend carefully to this, with full application of your divine intellect, for the doctrine of the divinity is like a torrential flood coming down from the heights with violent impetuosity. From the celestial bodies there are spread throughout the world continual effluvia, through the souls of all species and of all individuals from one end to the other of nature. Matter has been prepared by God to be the receptacle of all forms; and nature, imprinting the forms by means of the four elements, prolongs up to heaven the series of beings.

All species reproduce their individuals, whether demons, men, birds, animals, and so on. The individuals of the human race are diverse; having come down from on high where they had commerce with the race of demons they contract links with all other species. That man is near to the gods who, thanks to the spirit which relates him to the gods, has united himself to them with a religion inspired by heaven.

And so, O Asclepius, man is a *magnum miraculum*, a being worthy of reverence and honour. For he goes into the nature of a god as though he were himself a god; he has familiarity with the race of demons, knowing that he is of the same origin; he despises that part of his nature which is only human for he has put his hope in the divinity of the other part.³

Man is united to the gods by what he has of the divine, his intellect; all other creatures are bound to him by the celestial plan

¹ C.H., II, pp. 296-355. ² *Ibid.*, p. 297. ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 301-2.

and he attaches them to himself by knots of love. This union of gods with men is not for all men but only for those who have the faculty of intellection. Thus alone among creatures, man is double, one part like God, the other formed of the elements. The reason why man was condemned to this double nature is as follows.

When God had created the second god, he seemed to him beautiful and he loved him as the offspring of his divinity¹ ("as his Son" according to Lactantius, who regards this as one of the passages in which Hermes prophesies Christianity).² But there had to be another being who could contemplate what God had made and so he created man. Seeing that man could not regulate all things unless he gave him a material envelope he gave him a body. Thus man was formed from a double origin, so that he could both admire and adore celestial things and take care of terrestrial things and govern them.

The soul of the gods is said to be all intellect, but this is true only of the superior gods, for there are many gods, some intelligible, some sensible.

The chief or principal gods are as follows (I here combine two passages on the principal gods).

The Ruler of Heaven is Jupiter; and through the intermediary of heaven he dispenses life to all beings. (Possibly an earlier statement that it is breath or *spiritus* which keeps life in all the beings of the world relates to this supremacy of Jupiter, the god of Air.) Jupiter occupies a place intermediary between heaven and earth.

The Sun, or Light, for it is through the intermediary of the solar circle that light is spread to all. The Sun illuminates the other stars not so much by the power of his light as by his divinity and sanctity. He must be held as the second god. The world is living and all things in it are alive and it is the sun which governs all living things.

Next in the order of gods are the Thirty-Six, which are called Horoscopes,³ that is stars fixed in the same place who have for their chief a god called Pantomorph or Omniform who imposes their particular forms on the individual of each species. No individual form can be born exactly the same as another; these forms change as many times an hour as there are moments within the circle in the interior of which resides the great god Omniform. (These thirty-six gods are the decans, or divisions of ten degrees into

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 304-5. ² See above, p. 7. ³ *C.H.*, II, p. 319.

which the 360 degrees of the circle of the zodiac are divided.¹ Note in the Egyptian theological system here presented the great importance of the sun and the zodiac with its decans.)

Finally, in the list of gods come the seven spheres who have as their ruler Fortune or Destiny. Air is the instrument or organ of all these gods.

Having spoken of the society which unites gods and men, you must know, O Asclepius, the power and force of man. Just as the Lord and Father is the creator of the gods of heaven, so man is the author of the gods who reside in the temples. Not only does he receive life, but he gives it in his turn. Not only does he progress towards God, but he *makes gods*.

Do you mean the statues, O Trismegistus?

Yes, the statues, Asclepius. They are animated statues full of *sensus* and *spiritus* who can accomplish many things, foretelling the future, giving ills to men and curing them.²

(I attach here a later passage on the man-made gods.)

What we have said about man is already marvellous, but most marvellous of all is that he has been able to discover the nature of the gods and to reproduce it. Our first ancestors invented the art of making gods. They mingled a virtue, drawn from material nature, to the substance of the statues, and "since they could not actually create souls, after having evoked the souls of demons or angels, they introduced these into their idols by holy and divine rites, so that the idols had the power of doing good and evil." These terrestrial or man-made gods result from a composition of herbs, stones, and aromatics which contain in themselves an occult virtue of divine efficacy. And if one tries to please them with numerous sacrifices, hymns, songs of praise, sweet concerts which recall the harmony of heaven, this is in order that the celestial element which has been introduced into the idol by the repeated practice of the celestial rites may joyously support its long dwelling amongst men. That is how man makes gods.³ Hermes adds as examples of such gods, the worship of Asclepius, of his own ancestor, Hermes, and of Isis (implying the cult of the statues of these divinities); and he mentions here, too, the Egyptian worship of animals.

(I revert now to an earlier part of the *Asclepius*.)

¹ On the decans, see below, pp. 45-7.

² *C.H.*, II, pp. 325-6. ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 347-9.

Yet the religion of Egypt, and its wise and true cult of the divine All in One, is destined to pass away.

THE LAMENT¹ (OR THE APOCALYPSE)

There will come a time when it will be seen that in vain have the Egyptians honoured the divinity with a pious mind and with assiduous service. All their holy worship will become inefficacious. The gods, leaving the earth, will go back to heaven; they will abandon Egypt; this land, once the home of religion, will be widowed of its gods and left destitute. Strangers will fill this country, and not only will there no longer be care for religious observances, but, a yet more painful thing, it will be laid down under so-called laws, under pain of punishments, that all must abstain from acts of piety or cult towards the gods. Then this most holy land, the home of sanctuaries and temples, will be covered with tombs and the dead. O Egypt, Egypt, there will remain of thy religion only fables, and thy children in later times will not believe them; nothing will survive save words engraved on stones to tell of thy pious deeds. The Scythian or the Indian, or some other such barbarous neighbour will establish himself in Egypt. For behold the divinity goes back up to heaven; and men, abandoned, all die, and then, without either god or man, Egypt will be nothing but a desert. . . .

Why weep, O Asclepius? Egypt will be carried away to worse things than this; she will be polluted with yet graver crimes. She, hitherto most holy, who so much loved the gods, only country of the earth where the gods made their home in return for her devotion, she who taught men holiness and piety, will give example of the most atrocious cruelty. In that hour, weary of life, men will no longer regard the world as worthy object of their admiration and reverence. This All, which is a good thing, the best that can be seen in the past, the present and the future, will be in danger of perishing; men will esteem it a burden; and thenceforward they will despise and no longer cherish this whole of the universe, incomparable work of God, glorious construction, good creation made up of an infinite diversity of forms, instrument of the will of God who, without envy, pours forth his favour on all his work, in

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 326 ff.

which is assembled in one whole, in a harmonious diversity, all that can be seen that is worthy of reverence, praise and love. For darkness will be preferred to light; it will be thought better to die than to live; none will raise his eyes towards heaven; the pious man will be thought mad, the impious, wise; the frenzied will be thought brave, the worst criminal a good man. The soul and all the beliefs attached to it, according to which the soul is immortal by nature or foresees that it can obtain immortality as I have taught you—this will be laughed at and thought nonsense. And believe me, it will be considered a capital crime under the law to give oneself to the religion of the mind. A new justice will be created and new laws. Nothing holy, nothing pious, nothing worthy of heaven and of the gods who dwell there, will be any more spoken of nor will find credence in the soul.

The gods will separate themselves from men, deplorable divorce. Only the evil angels will remain who will mingle with men, and constrain them by violence—miserable creatures—to all the excesses of criminal audacity, engaging them in wars, brigandage, frauds, and in everything which is contrary to the nature of the soul. Then the earth will lose its equilibrium, the sea will no longer be navigable, the heaven will no longer be full of stars, the stars will stop their courses in the heaven. Every divine voice will be silenced, and will be silent. The fruits of the earth will moulder, the soil will be no longer fertile, the air itself will grow thick with a lugubrious torpor.

Such will be the old age of the world, irreligion, disorder, confusion of all goods. When all these things have come to pass, O Asclepius, then the Lord and Father, the god first in power and the demiurge of the One God, having considered these customs and voluntary crimes, endeavouring by his will, which is the divine will, to bar the way to vices and universal corruption and to correct errors, he will annihilate all malice, either by effacing it in a deluge or by consuming it by fire, or destroying it by pestilential maladies diffused in many places. Then he will bring back the world to its first beauty, so that this world may again be worthy of reverence and admiration, and that God also, creator and restorer of so great a work, may be glorified by the men who shall live then in continual hymns of praise and benedictions. That is what the rebirth of the world will be; a renewal of all good things, a holy and most solemn restoration of Nature herself,

imposed by force in the course of time . . . by the will of God.

We have no commentary by Ficino on the *Asclepius*, for the commentary supposedly by him which is printed with the *Asclepius* in his collected works is now known to have been not by Ficino, but by Lefèvre d'Étaples.¹ In that commentary Lefèvre d'Étaples expresses strong disapproval of the "god-making" passage.² This disapproval can now be totally dissociated from Ficino, since it was not he who wrote the commentary.

The best guide to what Ficino thought of the *Asclepius* is thus the *argumentum* before his translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, called by him *Pimander*, where he says that of the many works of Hermes Trismegistus, two are "divine", the one the work on the Divine Will, the other on the Power and Wisdom of God. The first of these is called the *Asclepius*, the second *Pimander*.³

Thus the *Asclepius* is for Ficino, a "divine" work on the Will of God, intimately associated with the other "divine" work by this most holy and ancient Egyptian, the *Pimander*, on the Power and Wisdom of God.

My purpose in bringing together in this chapter accounts of four works in the *Corpus Hermeticum* together with an account of the *Asclepius* has been to suggest how, for Ficino and his readers, what they thought to be the Mosaic piety of the Egyptian Genesis,

¹ In 1505, Lefèvre d'Étaples published at Paris Ficino's *Pimander* together with the *Asclepius* with commentaries by himself. The two works were thereafter often published together, and eventually passed together into the collected editions of Ficino's works, in which it is not mentioned that the commentaries on the *Asclepius* are not by Ficino but by Lefèvre d'Étaples. For instance, in the edition of Ficino's *Opera* from which all the quotations in this book are made, Ficino's *Pimander*, with his commentaries (Ficino, pp. 1836-57) is immediately followed (pp. 1858-72) by the *Asclepius* with commentaries which the unwary reader naturally supposes are also by Ficino. P. O. Kristeller first cleared up this error in *Suppl. Fic.*, I, pp. cxxx ff.; see also Kristeller, *Studies*, pp. 223 ff.

² See Ficino, pp. 1866-7, 1870, for the commentaries on the *Asclepius* (really by Lefèvre d'Étaples) in which the Egyptian idolatry and magical practices described in that work are condemned. Cf. D. P. Walker, "The *Prisca Theologia* in France", *J.W.C.I.*, 1954 (XVII), p. 238.

³ "E multis denique Mercurii libris, duo sunt diuine praecepue, unus de Voluntate diuina, alter de Potestate, & sapientia Dei. Ille Asclepius, hic Pimander inscribitur." Ficino's *argumentum* before his *Pimander* (Ficino, p. 1836).

and the Christian piety of Egyptian regeneration, would have rehabilitated in their eyes the Egyptian religion of the *Asclepius*. They would observe that much of the same philosophy and general outlook of works in the *Corpus Hermeticum* is repeated in the *Asclepius*. Thus the latter work would seem the revelation of the religious cult which went with the "religion of the mind", or religion of the mind in relation to the world, which this holy Egyptian, both in various passages in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and in the *Asclepius*, associated prophetically with the "Son of God". In the light of the newly discovered *Corpus*, and its translation in Ficino's eagerly read *Pimander*, it would have seemed that Augustine must have been mistaken in interpreting the Lament as a true prophecy, though inspired by devils, of the coming of Christianity to abolish Egyptian idolatry. Surely, on the contrary, the work which Lactantius had called the *Sermo Perfectus* contained the final initiation into the religious cult practised by the holy Hermes.

And that cult involved the practice of astral magic. The statues in the temples, the "terrestrial gods", were animated by knowing the occult properties of substances, by arranging them in accordance with the principles of sympathetic magic, and by drawing down into them the life of the celestial gods by invocations. So it would become a legitimate practice for a philosopher, even a devout practice associated with his religion, to "draw down the life of the heaven" by sympathetic astral magic, as Ficino advised in his work on magic, the *De vita coelitus comparanda*.

The rehabilitation of the *Asclepius*, through the discovery of the *Corpus Hermeticum*, is, I believe, one of the chief factors in the Renaissance revival of magic. And this can only be understood by reading the *Asclepius* in the context of Ficino's *Pimander*, and the pious interpretations of it in his commentary.

The attitude to the famous Lament of the *Asclepius* would also change. This moving and beautiful piece of pro-Egyptian rhetoric is suffused with a moral indignation reminiscent of Hebrew prophecy, by which the author may indeed have been influenced. The passing of the holy Egyptian religion is identified with a breaking up of the moral law, and its eventual restoration with the restoration of morality. The decay of the "religion of the world" brought with it the decay of ethics and utter moral confusion. Hence the pious and good man should hope for its promised return, and the Lament could begin to look quite differently from the way

Augustine saw it, could begin to seem like an injunction to infuse into a decayed Christianity something of the Egyptian spirit of piety and morality.

The first thing which meets the eye of the worshipper, or the tourist, who enters the cathedral of Siena is the portrait of Hermes Trismegistus on the famous mosaic pavement (frontispiece). On either side of Hermes stand two Sibyls, holding their prophecies of the coming of Christianity, and behind these two are ranged the rest of the ten, all with their prophecies. Obviously here we have Hermes Trismegistus with the Sibyls, as in Lactantius, as the great Gentile prophet of Christianity. The inscription under his feet dates the revered figure even earlier than Augustine or Lactantius had done, for it describes him as "Hermes Mercurius Contemporaneous Moyses". An oriental-looking figure wearing a turban and perhaps intended to be Moses his "contemporary" stands in a deferential attitude, almost bowing, on Hermes' right; and behind this figure is a grave personage perhaps intended to represent some pious Egyptian participator in the Hermetic dialogues, Asclepius, for example, or Tat.

The left hand of Hermes rests on a tablet, supported by sphinxes, on which is this inscription:

DEUS OMNIUM CREATOR
SECUM DEUM FECIT
VISIBILEM ET HUNC
FECIT PRIMUM ET SOLUM
QUO OBLECTATUS EST
VALDE AMAVIT PROPRIUM
FILIIUM QUI APPELLATUR
SANCTUM VERBUM.

As Scott has pointed out,¹ this inscription is an abbreviated Latin translation of the passage in the *Asclepius* as quoted from the Greek by Lactantius and which that Father emphasised so strongly for its mention of the "Son of God". "The Lord and Creator of all things, whom we have the right to call God, since he made the second God visible and sensible. . . . Since, therefore, he made him first, and alone, and one only, he appeared to him beautiful, and most full of all good things; and he hallowed him

¹ Scott, I, p. 32.

and altogether loved him as his own Son."¹ All the points in the inscription are found here, except the last one "qui appellatur Sanctum Verbum", which brings in Hermes' other prophecy about the Word as the Son of God—also pointed out by Lactantius—at the beginning of *Pimander*.²

The suppliant Moses (if this figure is indeed intended to be Moses) holds a book which is also held by Hermes. On this book is written:

SUSCIPITE O LICTERAS ET LEGES EGIPTII

"Take up letters and laws, O Egyptians". The phrase is obviously derived from Cicero's description, which Lactantius quotes, of Hermes Trismegistus as he who gave to the Egyptians their letters and laws (*Aegyptiis leges et litteras tradidisse*).³ But the phrase is most significantly changed in the inscription.

TAKE UP THY LETTERS AND LAWS O EGYPTIANS

would seem to mean a supplication from the lawgiver of the Hebrews (if the suppliant figure is Moses) to the lawgiver of the Egyptians to revive Egyptian piety and morality.

The mosaics of Hermes Trismegistus and the Sibyls were laid down in the duomo of Siena during the fourteen-eighties.⁴ The representation of Hermes Trismegistus in this Christian edifice, so prominently displayed near its entrance and giving him so lofty a spiritual position, is not an isolated local phenomenon but a symbol of how the Italian Renaissance regarded him and a prophecy of what was to be his extraordinary career throughout Europe in the sixteenth century and well on into the seventeenth century.

¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, IV, vi; Fletcher's English translation, I, p. 221; *C.H.*, II, pp. 304-5; see above, p. 7.

² *C.H.*, I, p. 8; Ficino p. 1837. Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, IV, viii, ix; Fletcher's translation, I, pp. 224, 226.

³ Cicero, *De nat. deor.*, III, 22; quoted by Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, I, vi (Fletcher's translation, I, p. 15). The quotation from Cicero is made in a passage in which Lactantius is putting Hermes with the Sibyls, so it could have been suggested to the designer of the mosaic by Lactantius, not directly by Cicero.

⁴ See R. H. Cust, *The Pavement Masters of Siena*, London, 1901, pp. 23, 31. Hermes was known as a Gentile prophet in the Middle Ages and this is not the earliest representation of him with the Sibyls; but it is the first which shows him in his full Renaissance glory.

Chapter III

HERMES TRISMEGISTUS AND
MAGIC

THE Hermetic literature divides into two branches. On the one hand there are the philosophical treatises, such as those in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, and the *Asclepius*, to which can be added some other specimens of this literature, particularly the fragments preserved in the anthology of excerpts compiled by Stobaeus.¹ On the other hand there is the astrological, alchemical, and magical literature, much of which also went under the name of Hermes Trismegistus. These two branches cannot be kept entirely separate from one another.² Not only do we have in the *Asclepius* an actual description of magical practices in the admiring reference to the methods by which the Egyptians "made gods", but also even the loftiest and most mystical of the philosophical Hermetic treatises presuppose, as we have seen, an astrological pattern in the cosmos. Gnosticism and magic go together. The pessimist gnostic needs to know the magical passwords and signs by which he may rid himself of the evil material

¹ Text of the Stobaeus fragments, with French translation, in *C.H.*, vols. III and IV.

² Scott tried to make such a separation, treating the philosophical *Hermetica* as quite distinct from, and infinitely superior to, the "masses of rubbish" going under the name of Hermes (Scott, I, p. 1). Festugière, on the other hand, devotes the first volume of his *Révélation* to "L'Astrologie et les Sciences Occultes" in which he treats of the magical and astrological texts as the necessary preliminary to the study of the philosophical *Hermetica*. Cf. also Thorndike, I, pp. 287 ff.

power of the stars in his upward ascent through the spheres. The optimist gnostic has no fear to draw down by sympathetic magic, invocations, talismans, those same powers of the universe which he believes to be good.

The methods of sympathetic magic¹ presuppose that continual effluvia of influences pouring down onto the earth from the stars of which the author of the *Asclepius* speaks. It was believed that these effluvia and influences could be canalised and used by an operator with the requisite knowledge. Every object in the material world was full of occult sympathies poured down upon it from the star on which it depended. The operator who wished to capture, let us say, the power of the planet Venus, must know what plants belonged to Venus, what stones and metals, what animals, and use only these when addressing Venus. He must know the images of Venus and know how to inscribe these on talismans made of the right Venus materials and at the right astrological moment. Such images were held to capture the spirit or power of the star and to hold or store it for use. Not only the planets had attached to each of them a complicated pseudo-science of occult sympathies and image-making, but the twelve signs of the zodiac each had their plants, animals, images, and so on, and indeed so had all the constellations and stars of the heavens. For the All was One, united by an infinitely complex system of relationships. The magician was one who knew how to enter into this system, and use it, by knowing the links of the chains of influences descending vertically from above, and establishing for himself a chain of ascending links by correct use of the occult sympathies in terrestrial things, of celestial images, of invocations and names, and the like. The methods and the cosmological background presupposed are the same whether the magician is using these forces to try to obtain concrete material benefits for himself, or whether he is using them religiously, as in the hieratic magic described in the *Asclepius*, for insight into the divine forces in nature and to assist his worship of them.

Into the Hellenistic astrology which is the background of the philosophical *Hermetica* an Egyptian element had been absorbed, namely the thirty-six decans, or thirty-six gods who ruled over the divisions into ten of the 360 degrees of the circle of the

¹ For a good summary of the subject, see Festugière, I, pp. 89 ff.

zodiac.¹ That strange people, the Egyptians, had divinised time, not merely in the abstract sense but in the concrete sense that each moment of the day and night had its god who must be placated as the moments passed. The decans, as they came to be called in Hellenistic times, were really Egyptian sidereal gods of time who had become absorbed in the Chaldean astrology and affiliated to the zodiac. They all had images, which vary in different lists of them, and these lists of the powerful images of the decans had come out of the archives of the Egyptian temples. The decans had various aspects. They had definite astrological significance, as "Horoscopes" presiding over the forms of life born within the time periods over which they presided, and they were assimilated to the planets domiciled in their domain, and to the signs of the zodiac, three decans going with each sign as its three "faces". But they were also gods, and powerful Egyptian gods, and this side of them was never forgotten, giving them a mysterious importance. The high place which the author of the *Asclepius* assigns to the "Thirty-Six Horoscopes" in his list of gods is a genuinely Egyptian feature of that work, and in one of the Stobaeus fragments we hear, within the familiar framework of a conversation between Hermes and his son Tat, of the great importance of the Thirty-Six.

We have said, my child, that there is a body which envelops the whole ensemble of the world: you should represent it to yourself as a circular figure, for thus is the All.

I represent to myself such a figure, as you say, O father.

Represent now to yourself that, below the circle of this body, are ranged the thirty-six decans, in the middle between the universal circle and the circle of the zodiac, separating these two circles, and, as it were sustaining the circle of the All and circumscribing the zodiac, moving along the zodiac with the planets, and having the same force as the movement of the All, alternatively with the Seven. . . . Pay attention to this: since the decans command over the planets and we are under the domination of the seven, do you not see how there

¹ On the decans, see Festugière, I, pp. 115 ff.; Bouché-Leclercq, *L'Astrologie grecque*, Paris, 1899, pp. 215 ff.; F. Boll, *Sphaera*, Leipzig, 1903, pp. 15 ff., 176 ff.; O. Neugebauer, *The Exact Sciences in Antiquity* (Princeton, 1952), Harper Torchbook Reprint, 1962, pp. 81 ff. The specialised study of the decan images is that by W. Gundel, *Dekane und Dekansterbilder*, Studien der Bibliothek Warburg, XIX, 1936.

comes to us a certain influence of the decans, whether through the children of the decans, or through the intermediary of the planets?²

The decans appear here as powerful divine or demonic forces, close to the circle of the All, and above the circles of the zodiac and the planets and operating on things below either directly through their children or sons, the demons, or through the intermediary of the planets.

Thus the philosophical *Hermetica* belong into the same framework of thought as the practical *Hermetica*, the treatises on astrology or alchemy, the lists of plants, animals, stones and the like grouped according to their occult sympathies with the stars, the lists of images of planets, signs, decans, with instructions as to how to make magical talismans from them. The following are only a few examples from this vast and complex literature ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus. There is a treatise supposedly by Hermes on the names and powers of the twelve signs of the zodiac²; others on which plants go with the signs and the planets³; a book of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius on the occult virtues of animals⁴; a treatise on astrological medicine dedicated by Hermes to Ammon the Egyptian which describes how to treat illnesses caused by bad stellar influences by building up links with the methods of sympathetic magic and talismans to draw down, either an increase of good virtue from the star which has been causing the trouble or bringing in influences from another star.⁵

The name of Hermes Trismegistus seems to have been particularly strongly connected with the lists of images of the decans. The

² *C.H.*, III, pp. 34,36 (Stobaeus Excerpt, VI). In the notes to this passage (*ibid.*, p. L), Festugière explains the children or sons of the decans as demons. Cf. also *Révélation*, I, pp. 118-20; Scott, III, p. 374 (where a diagram is given to illustrate the fact that, according to this passage, the decans are outside and above the circle of the zodiac).

³ See Thorndike, I, p. 291; Festugière, I, pp. 111-12.

⁴ Thorndike, *loc. cit.*; Festugière, *ibid.*, pp. 143 ff.

⁵ Festugière, *ibid.*, pp. 207 ff., discussing the "Livre court médical d'Hermès Trismégiste selon la science astrologique et l'influx naturel des animaux, publié à l'adresse de son disciple Asklépios." As can be seen from this French translation of the title, this type of treatise often brings in the same characters as those whom we meet in the philosophical *Hermetica*. This treatise on animals is addressed by Hermes to Asclepius, like the *Asclepius*.

⁶ See Thorndike, I, p. 291; Festugière, I, pp. 130-1.

Liber Hermetis Trismegisti,¹ a treatise on astrology and astrological magic which has been brought to light in recent years begins with the decans, and the *Liber Sacer*,² or sacred book, of Hermes, is a list of decan images, and of the stones and plants in sympathy with each decan, with instructions as to how to engrave the images on the correct stone, which is to be fixed into a ring together with the relative plant; the wearer of the ring must abstain from all foods antipathetic to the decan.

In short, Hermes Trismegistus is indeed a name to conjure with in all this type of literature concerned with occult sympathies and talismans. Again in his capacity as Hermes-Thoth, inventor of language, of words which bind and unbind, he plays a rôle in magic,³ and some of the magical prayers and invocations assigned to him are like those in the *Corpus Hermeticum*.

The name of Hermes Trismegistus was well known in the Middle Ages and was connected with alchemy, and magic, particularly with magic images or talismans.⁴ The Middle Ages feared whatever they knew of the decans as dangerous demons, and some of the books supposedly by Hermes were strongly censured by Albertus Magnus as containing diabolical magic.⁵ The Augustinian censure of the demon-worship in the *Asclepius* (by which he may have meant in particular, decan-worship) weighed heavily upon that work. However, mediaeval writers interested in natural philosophy speak of him with respect; for Roger Bacon he was the "Father of Philosophers",⁶ and he is sometimes given a genealogy which makes him even more ancient than Ficino or the designer of the Siena mosaic thought. In the preface to a twelfth-century translation of an alchemical work, it is stated that there were three Hereses, namely Enoch, Noah, and the king, philosopher, and prophet who reigned in Egypt after the Flood and was called Hermes Triplex. The same genealogy of

¹ Festugière, I, pp. 112 ff. The *Liber Hermetis* was discovered by Gundel and published by him in 1936.

² Festugière, I, pp. 139 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 283 ff.

⁴ Thorndike, II, pp. 214 ff.; Festugière, I, pp. 105 ff.

⁵ In his *Speculum astronomiae*; see Albertus Magnus, *Opera*, ed. Borgnet, X, p. 641; and cf. Thorndike, II, p. 220. Albertus Magnus is one of the mediaeval writers who perhaps knew the Latin *Asclepius* (see C.H., II, pp. 268-9).

⁶ Thorndike, II, p. 219.

"Hermes Mercurius Triplex" is also given in a thirteenth-century treatise on astrology, and the same explanation of why he is "three-fold".¹ It will be remembered that Ficino in his *argumentum* before the *Pimander* gives a similar explanation of "Trismegistus" as referring to Hermes in his triple capacity of priest, philosopher, and king or law-giver. The mediaeval genealogy, however, takes Hermes Triplex back before Moses to the time of Noah.

There is an extremely comprehensive treatise on sympathetic and astral magic, with particular reference to talismans, which goes under the name of *Picatrix*. Though the authorship of *Picatrix* is not assigned to Hermes Trismegistus, the work frequently mentions him with great respect and it is important because it may have been one of Ficino's authorities on talismans and sympathetic magic.

Like many of the magical works attributed to Hermes which reached the Western Middle Ages and the Renaissance, the *Picatrix* was originally written in Arabic,² probably in the twelfth century. There was a big influence of Hermetic and gnostic literature and ideas on the Arabic world and particularly among the Arabs of Harran. Talismanic magic was practised by these Arabs, and the influence came through the Sabeans who were immersed in Hermetism, in both its philosophical and religious, and its magical aspects. *Picatrix* is by an Arabic writer under strong Sabeans, that is to say, Hermetic, influence, and he gives

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215, 222. These are perhaps echoes of the twelfth-century pseudo-Hermetic *Liber Hermetis Mercurii Triplicis de VI rerum principiiis*, which has been published by Th. Silverstein in *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Âge*, 1955 (22), pp. 217-302. On the influence of this work, see above, p. 13, note 3.

² The Arabic text of *Picatrix*, ed. H. Ritter, is published in *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*, Vol. XII, 1933, A German translation by H. Ritter and M. Plessner of the Arabic text is published in *Studies of the Warburg Institute*, University of London, Vol. 27, 1962; an outline in English of the contents of the Arabic text is given in this volume.

Besides these editions, see on the *Picatrix*, H. Ritter, *Picatrix, ein arabisches Handbuch hellenistischer Magie*, in *Vorträge der Bibliothek Warburg*, 1922; Thorndike, II, pp. 813 ff.; Festugière, I, pp. 389, 397 (in the appendix on Arabic Hermetic literature by Louis Massignon); Garin, *Cultura*, pp. 159 ff.

his lists of magic images, his practical advice on magical procedures, in an elaborate philosophical setting, the philosophy expounded being in many respects similar to that which we find in some treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and in the *Asclepius*. Ficino and his friends would be able to recognise in the *Picatrix* many of the ideas and philosophico-religious sentiments expressed by the wonderful author of *Pimander*, the Egyptian Moses and the prophet of Christianity, and yet here this philosophy is in a context of practical magic, how to make talismans, how to draw down the influences of the stars by establishing the chains of links and correspondencies with the upper world.

The Latin translation of *Picatrix*¹ is shorter than the Arabic text; in the proem it is stated that the work has been translated from Arabic into Spanish by order of Alfonso the Wise, but this Spanish translation has not survived. The Latin *Picatrix* was certainly circulating a good deal in the Italian Renaissance.² There was a copy of *Picatrix* in Pico della Mirandola's library.³ It was known to Ludovico Lazzarelli,⁴ a most ardent Hermetist contemporary with Pico. Giovanni Francesco Pico, nephew of the great Pico, shows some knowledge of it in a work written after his uncle's death.⁵ Symphorien Champier, who edited a new edition of the *Hermetica* but was anxious to dissociate Christian Hermetism from the magic of the *Asclepius*, speaks of *Picatrix* (in 1514) with disapproval and accuses Peter of Abano of having borrowed from it.⁶ The popularity of this text-book of magic is

¹ Of this Latin translation there is as yet no edition. But it is the Latin translation which was used in the Renaissance, not the Arabic original, and, since it differs somewhat from the Arabic original, it must be used by students of Renaissance writers.

The manuscript of the Latin *Picatrix* which I have used is Sloane, 1305. Though a seventeenth-century manuscript, it corresponds closely to earlier manuscripts (see Thorndike, II, p. 822) and it has the advantage of being written in a clear and legible hand.

² E. Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, Florence, 1954, pp. 175 ff.; *Cultura*, pp. 159 ff.

³ P. Kibre, *The Library of Pico della Mirandola*, New York, 1936, p. 263; cf. Garin, *Cultura*, p. 159.

⁴ See Ludovico Lazzarelli, "Testi scelti", ed. M. Brini, in *Test. uman.*, p. 75.

⁵ G. F. Pico, *Opera*, Bâle, 1572-3, II, p. 482; cf. Thorndike, VI, p. 468.

⁶ In his criticism of the errors of Abano; cf. Thorndike, II, p. 814; V, pp. 119, 122.

attested by the fact that Rabelais directed one of his shafts at it when he spoke of "le reuerend pere en Diable Picatrix, recteur de la faculté diabolique".¹ The secretive way in which such a book circulated is described by Agrippa D'Aubigné in a letter written between 1572 and 1575 in which he says that King Henri III of France had imported some magical books from Spain which he was allowed to see, after much difficulty and not without solemnly swearing not to copy them; amongst them were "les commantaires de Dom Jouan Picatrix de Tollede".²

Thus there is a good deal of evidence that this *Picatrix*, though it was never printed, had a considerable circulation in manuscript during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Since there is no manuscript of it earlier than the fifteenth century,³ it is possible that it began to circulate in the same century as that which saw the apotheosis of Hermes Trismegistus.

The *Picatrix* opens with pious prayers and promises to reveal profound secrets. For knowledge is the best gift of God to man, to know what is the root and principle of all things. The primal truth is not a body, but it is One, One Truth, One Unity. All things come from it and through it receive truth and unity in the perpetual movement of generation and corruption. There is a hierarchy in things, and lower things are raised to higher things; and higher things descend to lower things. Man is a little world reflecting the great world of the cosmos, but through his intellect the wise man can raise himself above the seven heavens.

From this short sample of the philosophy of *Picatrix*, it can be seen that the magician bases himself upon a gnosis, an insight into the nature of the All.

The order of nature is further expounded in two passages.⁴ God or the *prima materia* is without form. There derives from the formless incorporeal One the series of

Intellectus or *mens*

Spiritus

Materia, or material nature, the elements and the *elementata*.

¹ *Pantagruel*, III, 23; cited by Thorndike, II, p. 814.

² Agrippa d'Aubigné, *Œuvres complètes*, ed. E. Réaume and F. de Caussade, Paris, 1873, I, p. 435.

³ On the manuscripts, see Thorndike, II, pp. 822-4.

⁴ *Picatrix*, Lib. I, cap. 7, and Lib. IV, cap. I (Sloane 1305, ff. 21 verso ff.; ff. 95 recto ff.).

Spiritus descends from the above to the below and resides in the place where it is caught (*ubi captus est*). Or, as it is put in another chapter¹ "the virtues of the superior bodies are the form and power of the inferiors, and the form of the inferiors is of a material related to the virtues of the superiors; and they are as it were joined together, because their corporeal material (of terrestrial things) and their spiritual material (of the stars) are one material." The whole art of magic thus consists in capturing and guiding the influx of *spiritus* into *materia*.

The most important of the means of doing this is through the making of talismans, images of the stars inscribed on the correct materials, at the right times, in the right frame of mind, and so on. The whole of the first two long and complicated books of *Picatrix* is devoted to this most difficult art which demands a deep knowledge of astronomy, mathematics, music, metaphysics, and indeed practically everything, for the introduction of *spiritus* into talismans is a most tricky business and no one can succeed in it unless he is a resolute philosopher.

Lists of the images suitable for use on talismans are given, of which the following are a few examples from the lists of planet images.²

Two images of Saturn.

"The form of a man with a crow's face and foot, sitting on a throne, having in his right hand a spear and in his left a lance or an arrow."

"The form of a man standing on a dragon, clothed in black and holding in his right hand a sickle and in his left a spear."

Two images of Jupiter.

"The form of a man sitting on an eagle, clothed in a garment, with eagles beneath his feet. . . ."

"The form of a man with a lion's face and bird's feet, below them a dragon with seven heads, holding an arrow in his right hand. . . ."

An image of Mars.

"The form of a man, crowned, holding a raised sword in his right hand."

An image of Sol.

"The form of a king sitting on a throne, with a crown on his head and beneath his feet the figure (magic character) of the sun."

¹ *Picatrix*, Lib. II, cap. 12 (Sloane 1305, ff. 52 *recto* ff.).

² The planet images are listed in Lib. II, cap. 10 (Sloane 1305, ff. 43 *recto* ff.).

An image of Venus.

"The form of a woman with her hair unbound riding on a stag, having in her right hand an apple, and in her left, flowers, and dressed in white garments."

An image of Mercury.

"The form of a man having a cock on his head, on a throne, having feet like those of an eagle, with fire in the palm of his left hand and having below his feet this sign (a magic character)."

An image of Luna.

"The form of a woman with a beautiful face on a dragon, with horns on her head, with two snakes wound around her. . . . A snake is wound around each of her arms, and above her head is a dragon, and another dragon beneath her feet, each of these dragons having seven heads."

As can be seen from these examples, the magic images of the planets are usually recognisably related to the classical forms of these gods and goddesses but with strange and barbaric additions and modifications.

There is a full list in *Picatrix* of the images of the thirty-six decans,¹ grouped with the signs of the zodiac to which they belong. The images of the decans of Aries.

First decan. "A huge dark man with red eyes, holding a sword, and clad in a white garment."

Second decan. "A woman clad in green and lacking one leg."

Third decan. "A man holding a golden sphere and dressed in red."

And so the list goes on, for all the thirty-six decans belonging to the twelve signs, all with weird and barbaric images.

Having fully dealt with talismans and their manufacture in his first two books, the author of *Picatrix* discusses in his third book² what stones, plants, animals, and so on go with the different planets, signs, and so on, giving full lists, what parts of the body go with the signs, what are the colours of the planets, how to invoke the spirits of the planets by calling on their names and powers, and so on. The fourth book³ deals with similar matters, and with fumigations and ends with orations to the planets.

The work is thus a most complete text-book for the magician,

¹ The lists of decan images are in Lib. II, cap. 11 (Sloane 1305, ff. 48 *verso* ff.).

² Sloane 1305, ff. 37 *recto* ff.

³ Sloane 1305, ff. 95 *recto* ff.

giving the philosophy of nature on which talismanic and sympathetic magic is based together with full instructions for its practice. Its objects are strictly practical; the various talismans and procedures are used to gain specific ends, for the cure of diseases, for long life, for success in various enterprises, for escaping from prison, for overcoming one's enemies, for attracting the love of another person, and so on.

Hermes Trismegistus is often mentioned, as the source for some talismanic images and in other connections, but there is in particular one very striking passage in the fourth book of *Picatrix* in which Hermes is stated to have been the first to use magic images and is credited with having founded a marvellous city in Egypt.

There are among the Chaldeans very perfect masters in this art and they affirm that Hermes was the first who constructed images by means of which he knew how to regulate the Nile against the motion of the moon. This man also built a temple to the Sun, and he knew how to hide himself from all so that no one could see him, although he was within it. It was he, too, who in the east of Egypt constructed a City twelve miles (*miliaria*) long within which he constructed a castle which had four gates in each of its four parts. On the eastern gate he placed the form of an Eagle; on the western gate, the form of a Bull; on the southern gate the form of a Lion, and on the northern gate he constructed the form of a Dog. Into these images he introduced spirits which spoke with voices, nor could anyone enter the gates of the City except by their permission. There he planted trees in the midst of which was a great tree which bore the fruit of all generation. On the summit of the castle he caused to be raised a tower thirty cubits high on the top of which he ordered to be placed a light-house (*rotunda*) the colour of which changed every day until the seventh day after which it returned to the first colour, and so the City was illuminated with these colours. Near the City there was abundance of waters in which dwelt many kinds of fish. Around the circumference of the City he placed engraved images and ordered them in such a manner that by their virtue the inhabitants were made virtuous and withdrawn from all wickedness and harm. The name of the City was Adocentyn.¹

Passed through the vivid imagination of the Arab of Harran, we seem to have here something which reminds us of the hieratic

¹ *Picatrix*, Lib. IV, cap. 3 (Sloane 1305, f. III recto). In the Arabic original, the name of the City is "al-Aṣmūnain"; see the German translation of the Arabic text (cited above, p. 49, note 2), p. 323.

religious magic described in the *Asclepius*. Here are the man-made gods, statues of the animal- and bird-shaped gods of Egypt, which Hermes Trismegistus has animated by introducing spirits into them so that they speak with voices and guard the gates of this magical Utopia. The colours of the planets flash from the central tower, and these images around the circumference of the City, are they perhaps images of the signs of the zodiac and the decans which Hermes has known how to arrange so that only good celestial influences are allowed into the City? The law-giver of the Egyptians is giving laws which must perforce be obeyed, for he constrains the inhabitants of the City to be virtuous, and keeps them healthy and wise, by his powerful manipulation of astral magic. The tree of generation in the City may perhaps also mean that he controls the generative powers, so that only the good, the wise, the virtuous and the healthy are born.

In his striking passage about the City of Adocentyn, the author of *Picatrix* soars above the level of his utilitarian prescriptions of individual talismans as cures for tooth-ache, aids to business progress, means for downing rivals, and the like, to a wider view of the possibilities of magic. One might say that this City shows us Hermes Mercurius Triplex in his triple rôle of Egyptian priest and god-maker, of philosopher-magician, and of king and law-giver. Unfortunately no date is given for the founding of Adocentyn, so we have no means of knowing whether this took place in the time of Noah and soon after the Flood, or in the time of Moses, or not much later than Moses. But the pious admirer of those two "divine" books by the most ancient Hermes—the *Pimander* and the *Asclepius*—might surely have been much struck, by this vivid description of a City in which, as in Plato's ideal *Republic*, the wise philosopher is the ruler, and rules most forcibly by means of the priestly Egyptian magic such as is described in the *Asclepius*. The City of Adocentyn in which virtue is enforced on the inhabitants by magic helps also to explain why, when the magical Egyptian religion decayed, manners and morals went to rack and ruin, as is so movingly described in the Lament. And in the prophecy in the *Asclepius*, after the Lament, of the eventual restoration of the Egyptian religion, it is said:

The gods who exercise their dominion over the earth will be restored one day and installed in a City at the extreme limit of Egypt, a City

which will be founded towards the setting sun, and into which will hasten, by land and by sea, the whole race of mortal men.¹

In the context of the *Asclepius*, the City of Adocentyn might thus be seen, both as the ideal Egyptian society before its fall, and as the ideal pattern of its future and universal renovation.

The author of *Picatrix* also states, at the beginning of the passage quoted above, that Hermes Trismegistus built a Temple to the Sun, within which he presided invisibly, though this Sun Temple is not explicitly connected with his City. Hermes as a builder of a Temple to the Sun could also connect in the mind of the pious reader of *Pimander* (by which I mean, of course, the fourteen treatises of the *Corpus Hermeticum* which Ficino included under that title) and of the *Asclepius*, with the many passages on the sun in those works. For example, in the *Corpus Hermeticum V* it is stated that the sun is supreme among the gods of heaven²; in the *Corpus Hermeticum X*, the author, using Platonic terminology, compares the sun to the Good and its rays to the influx of the intelligible splendour.³ And in the list of the gods of Egypt in the *Asclepius* the Sun ranks as far greater than one of the planets.⁴ He is above the thirty-six horoscopes in the list of gods, and the thirty-six are above the spheres of the planets. To find Hermes Trismegistus in the *Picatrix* as the builder of a Temple of the Sun, would thus accord perfectly with the teaching of that holy *priscus theologus* in the *Pimander* and in the *Asclepius*.

When Marsilio Ficino began to dabble in his magic, which included a tentative use of talismans, there were plenty of mediæval authorities which he might have used who give lists of talismanic images, amongst them Peter of Abano, who lists the decan images, and whom Ficino cites by name⁵ in his treatise *De vita coelitus comparanda*, a possible translation of which might be "On capturing the life of the stars". He would also find much encouragement for the practice of magic in certain of the Neo-

¹ *Asclepius* (C.H., II, p. 332).

² C.H., I, p. 61; Ficino, p. 1843.

³ C.H., I, p. 114; Ficino, p. 1847.

⁴ *Asclepius* (C.H., II, pp. 318 ff.). Jupiter, as the heaven, and the Sun, rank as the highest gods in the list, followed by the thirty-six decans; last and below these are the planets, in which Jupiter and Sol figure again but now only in a lower capacity as planets. See above, pp. 36-7.

⁵ See below, p. 73.

platonian authors whom he studied and translated, particularly Proclus, or Iamblichus "On the Egyptian Mysteries". Nevertheless, as D. P. Walker has shown, his chief incentive or exemplar was almost certainly the description of magic in the *Asclepius*.¹ Walker has suggested *Picatrix* as among the possible sources for Ficino's practical magic,² and as the above analysis of that work has shown, the pious admirer of the "divine" *Pimander* and the "divine" *Asclepius* would find much in this practical treatise on talismanic magic to remind him of the utterances of the most ancient Hermes Trismegistus in his two divine books. It could have been the *Picatrix*, read in the context of his Hermetic studies, which enabled the pious Christian Neoplatonic philosopher to make the transition to a practice of magic.

Magic had never died out during the Middle Ages, in spite of the efforts of the ecclesiastical authorities to exercise some check over it and to banish its more extreme forms. Nor was it by any means only in Florence and under cover of Ficino's Neoplatonism, that the interest in the magic images of the stars was reviving in Italy. On the other side of the Appenines, in Ferrara, the Duke Borso d'Este had covered a great room in his palace with a cycle of paintings representing the months of the year and showing, in its central band, the signs of the zodiac with the images of the thirty-six decans most strikingly painted. In this room, the decoration of which was finished before 1470,³ we may see, in the lowest band of the frescoes the omniform life of the court of Ferrara and above it the images of the thirty-six strung out along the zodiac. The series begins with the three decans of Aries and their sign (Pl. 1a); though their forms are slightly variant from the images which we quoted from the list in *Picatrix* they are easily recognisable as in the main the same, the tall dark man in white (Pl. 1b), the woman who is hiding under her skirts the unfortunate fact that she has only one leg, the man holding a sphere or circle. Despite their charmingly modernised costumes, these are really the Egyptian gods of time, the demons banned by Augustine.

¹ See below, pp. 66-7.

² Walker, p. 36; Garin, *Cultura*, pp. 159 ff.

³ P. D'Ancona, *Les Mois de Schifanoia à Ferrara*, Milan, 1954, p. 9. The identification of the strange images grouped with the signs of the zodiac as being the images of the decans was first made by A. Warburg, "Italienische Kunst und Internationale Astrologie im Palazzo Schifanoja zu Ferrara", *Gesammelte Schriften*, Leipzig, 1932, II, pp. 459 ff.

We are not, however, here concerned with revivals of star images in other centres and outside the main current of Florentine Neoplatonism. We are concerned with how it was that Marsilio Ficino, who took such extreme care to present the revival of Plato and Neoplatonism as a movement which could be accorded with Christianity, allowed a fringe of magic to penetrate into this movement, thus inaugurating those philosophies of the Renaissance in which magical undercurrents are never far absent. The theory of the *prisca theologia*, of the piety and antiquity of Hermes Trismegistus, *priscus theologus* and Magus, offered an excuse for Ficino's modern philosophical magic. The attraction of the *Asclepius* had probably already been exerting its pull in the earlier Renaissance,¹ and when Ficino—dropping Plato in order to translate the *Corpus Hermeticum* first—found here a new revelation of the sanctity of Hermes and a confirmation of Lactantius' high opinion of him as the prophet of the "Son of God", he felt authorised to adopt the Lactantian view and tried to evade the Augustinian warning. The presence of Hermes Trismegistus inside the Duomo of Siena in the character of a Gentile prophet which Lactantius had given him, is symptomatic of the success of this rehabilitation.

We must not forget that the other *prisci theologi*, such as Orpheus or Zoroaster, were also Magi, and also authorised by their antiquity revivals of forms of magic. Yet Hermes Trismegistus is the most important of the *prisci magi* from the point of view of the incorporation of magic with philosophy, for in his case there was a body of supposedly most ancient philosophical writings to be studied, and these writings, in addition to their echoes of Moses and their prophetic understandings of Christianity before Christ, also prophetically shadowed the teachings of the divine Plato.

Lactantius wrote his *Divine Institutes* in the context of the rather superficially Christianised Empire of Constantine, and his apologetics in that work are directed towards persuading pagans to become Christians by emphasising how much in paganism is close to Christianity, or prophetic of Christianity. Between Lactantius and Augustine there had taken place the pagan reaction under the

¹ E. Garin, *Medioevo e Rinascimento*, p. 155, mentions Salutati and Manetti as writers influenced by the *Asclepius* before Ficino's revival of Hermetism.

apostate Emperor Julian, with its attempt to drive out the new upstart religion by a return to the philosophical "religion of the world" and to the mystery cults. In his "Hymn to Helios", Julian worships the Sun as the supreme god, the image of the intelligible Good; and he says that there are also in the heavens a multitude of other gods.

For as he (the Sun) divides the three spheres by four through the zodiac . . . so he divides the zodiac also into twelve divine powers; and again he divides every one of these twelve by three, so as to make thirty-six gods in all.¹

Throughout Origen's reply to Celsus it is evident how large a part Egyptianism had played in the type of Neoplatonic religion which came back in the pagan reaction. Celsus argues about how much "one may learn from the Egyptians", and Origen quotes the following passage from his lost work:

They (the Egyptians) say that the body of man has been put under the charge of thirty-six daemons, or ethereal gods of some sort. . . . Each daemon is in charge of a different part. And they know the names of the daemons in the local dialect, such as Chnoumen, Chnachoumen, Knat, Sikat, Biou, Erou, Erebiou, Rhamanoor, and Rheianoor, and all the other names which they use in their language. And by invoking these they heal the sufferings of the various parts. What is there to prevent anyone from paying honour both to these and to others if he wishes, so that we can be in good health rather than ill, and have good rather than bad luck, and be delivered from tortures and punishments?

To this Origen replies:

By these remarks Celsus is trying to drag our souls down to the daemons, as though they had obtained charge over our bodies. He has such a low opinion of paying an undivided and indivisible honour to the God of the universe that he does not believe that the only God who is worshipped and splendidly honoured is sufficient to grant the man who honours Him, in consequence of the actual worship he offers to Him, a power which prevents the attacks of daemons against the righteous person. For he has never seen how, when the formula "in the name of Jesus" is pronounced by true believers, it has healed not a few people from diseases and demonic possession and other distresses. . . . According to Celsus we might practise magic and

¹ Julian, *Works*, Loeb edition, I, pp. 405, 407.

sorcery rather than Christianity, and believe in an unlimited number of daemons rather than in the self-evident, and manifest supreme God. . . .¹

Writing after the pagan reaction, Augustine cannot accept Lactantius' hopeful view of Hermes Trismegistus as the holy prophet of Christianity, and utters his warning against the demon-worship of the *Asclepius*.

Yet even Augustine lent his support to the colossal misdating of that work, by which Hermes appears as prophesying the coming of Christianity, though he had this knowledge through the demons.

Believing in the immense antiquity of the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*, and following Lactantius' estimate of their holy and divine character, the pious Christian, Ficino, returns in his study of them, not, as he thinks, to the antiquity of a *priscus theologus* who prophetically saw into Christian truth (and authorised the practice of magic), but to the type of pagan philosophical gnosis with Egyptianising and magical tendencies, which characterised the anti-Christian reaction under Julian the Apostate.

The type of magic with which we are to be concerned differs profoundly from astrology which is not necessarily magic at all but a mathematical science based on the belief that human destiny is irrevocably governed by the stars, and that therefore from the study of a person's horoscope, the position of the stars at the time of his birth, one can foretell his irrevocably foreordained future. This magic is astrological only in the sense that it too bases itself upon the stars, their images and influences, but it is a way of escaping from astrological determinism by gaining power over the stars, guiding their influences in the direction which the operator desires. Or, in the religious sense, it is a way of salvation, of escape from material fortune and destiny, or of obtaining insight into the divine. Hence "astrological magic" is not a correct description of it, and hereafter, for want of a better term, I shall call it "astral magic".

It is in a very timid hesitating and cautious manner that Ficino embarks on a mild form of astral magic, attempting to alter, to escape from, his Saturnian horoscope by capturing, guiding towards himself, more fortunate astral influences. Yet this compara-

¹ Origen, *Contra Celsum*, VIII, 58-9; translated H. Chadwick, Cambridge, 1953, pp. 496-7.

tively harmless attempt at astral medical therapy was to open a flood-gate through which an astonishing revival of magic poured all over Europe.

Chapter IV

FICINO'S NATURAL MAGIC¹

FICINO, whose father was a physician, was himself a physician as well as a priest, and his *Libri de Vita*,² divided into three books and first published in 1489, is a treatise on medicine. It was absolutely inevitable that a medical treatise of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance should make use of astrological presuppositions universally taken for granted. Medical prescriptions were normally based on assumptions such as that the signs ruled different parts of the body, that different bodily temperaments were related to different planets. Much of Ficino's book could therefore be regarded, as he claimed, as normal medicine. Nevertheless he was also putting forward in it a subtle and imaginative kind of magic involving the use of talismans. He was nervously aware of possible dangers in this, and in his preliminary address he tells the reader that "if you do not approve of astronomical images" these may be omitted.³

The work is intended primarily for students who are liable

¹ Ficino's magic has been admirably discussed by D. P. Walker in his book on *Spiritual and Demonic Magic from Ficino to Campanella* to which I am greatly indebted in this chapter. I am also indebted to E. Garin's essay, "Le 'Elezioni' e il problema dell'astrologia" in *Umanesimo e esoterismo*, ed. E. Castelli, Archivio di Filosofia, Padua, 1960, pp. 7 ff.

² *Libri de vita* is the collective title of a work divided into three books, the third of which has the title *De vita coelitus comparanda*. On the many editions of the *Libri de vita*, which was evidently one of the most popular of Ficino's works, see Kristeller, *Suppl. Fic.*, I, pp. lxiv-lxvi. It is included in Ficino, *Opera*, pp. 530-73.

³ Ficino, p. 530 (address to the reader before Lib. III, *De vita coelitus comparanda*).

through over-intense application to their studies to grow ill or melancholy.¹ This is because the nature of their occupations brings them under the influence of Saturn, for contemplation and hard abstract study belong to Saturn who is also the planet of the melancholy temperament, and the star which is inimical to the vital forces of life and youth. Melancholy students who have used up their vital powers in their studies, and the old in whom these forces are in any case declining, are therefore advised to avoid as far as possible plants, herbs, animals, stones, and the like belonging to Saturn, and to use and surround themselves with plants, herbs, animals, stones, people, belonging to the more fortunate, cheerful, and life-giving planets, of which the chief are Sol, Jupiter, and Venus. Ficino has many enthusiastic passages on the valuable "gifts" making for health and good spirits to be obtained from these planets, which he poetically describes more than once as "the Three Graces".² The equation of beneficent astral influences with the Three Graces may be derived from a passage in the Emperor Julian's Hymn to the Sun.³ Gold is a metal full of Solar and Jovial spirit and therefore beneficial in combating melancholy. Green is a health-giving and life-giving colour, and the reader is urged to come to "Alma Venus"⁴ and to walk in the green fields with her, plucking her flowers, such as roses, or the crocus, the golden flower of Jupiter. Ficino also gives advice on how to choose a non-Saturnian diet, and thinks that the use of pleasant odours and scents is beneficial. We might be in the consulting room of a rather expensive psychiatrist who knows that his patients can afford plenty of gold and holidays in the country, and flowers out of season.

Talismans are not mentioned until the third book, which is the one which has the title *De vita coelitus comparanda*. Its first chapter opens with some obscure philosophy.⁵ It is clearly enough based on the well-known tripartite division of intellect, soul, and body,

¹ On Ficino and melancholy, see E. Panofsky and F. Saxl, *Dürer's Melencolia I*, *Studien der Bibliothek Warburg*, 2, 1923; L. Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady*, East Lansing, 1951.

² *Libri de vita*, II, III, 5, etc.; (Ficino, pp. 536-7).

³ Julian, *Works*, Loeb edition, I, p. 407.

⁴ *Libri de vita*, II, 14 (Ficino, pp. 520-1).

⁵ *Libri de vita*, III (*De vita coelitus comparanda*), I (Ficino, pp. 532-3).

but apart from that it is somewhat confusing. There is an intellect of the world and a body of the world, and between them is the soul of the world. In the divine *mens* or intellect are the Ideas; in the soul of the world are "seminal reasons" as many in number as there are ideas in the *mens*, and corresponding to them or reflecting them; to these seminal reasons in the soul there correspond the species in matter, or in the body of the world, which correspond to the reasons or depend on them, or are formed by them. If these material forms degenerate they can be reformed in the "middle place", presumably by manipulating the next highest forms on which they depend. There are congruities between the "reasons" in the soul of the world and the lower forms, which Zoroaster called divine links and Synesius, magic spells. These links depend not so much on stars and demons as on the soul of the world, which is everywhere present. Wherefore the "more ancient Platonists" formed images in the heavens, images of the forty-eight constellations, twelve in the zodiac, and thirty-six outside it, images also of the thirty-six "faces" of the zodiac. From these ordered forms depend the forms of inferior things.

Ficino states in the sub-title to the *Liber de vita coelitus comparanda* that it is a commentary on a book on the same subject by Plotinus. He does not specify here of what passage in the *Enneads* he is thinking, but P. O. Kristeller has observed that in one manuscript the *De vita coelitus comparanda* appears among the commentaries on Plotinus at *Ennead*, IV, 3, xi.¹ Plotinus here says:

I think . . . that those ancient sages, who sought to secure the presence of divine beings by the erection of shrines and statues, showed insight into the nature of the All; they perceived that, though this Soul (of the world) is everywhere tractable, its presence will be secured all the more readily when an appropriate receptacle is elaborated, a place especially capable of receiving some portion or phase of it, something reproducing it and serving like a mirror to catch an image of it.

It belongs to the nature of the All to make its entire content reproduce, most felicitously, the Reason-Principles in which it participates; every particular thing is the image within matter of a Reason-Principle which itself images a pre-material Reason-Prin-

¹ Kristeller, *Suppl. Fic.*, I, p. lxxxiv; cf. Garin, *article cited*, pp. 18 ff. Walker (p. 3, note 2) points out that *Enn.* IV, 4, 30-42, may also be relevant.

ciple: thus every particular entity is linked to that Divine Being in whose likeness it is made. . . .'

We seem to have here the two main topics of which Ficino is speaking, but put in a different order, which makes the thought-sequences a little clearer. (1) How the ancient sages who understood the nature of the All drew down divine beings into their shrines by attracting or securing a part of the soul of the world. This corresponds to Ficino's mention of magic links or spells, described by Zoroaster or Synesius, which are congruities between reasons in the soul of the world and lower forms. Ficino follows this by the mention of star images, as though these were a part of the magical linking system, and indeed stating that from the ordering of these celestial images the forms of lower things depend. (2) The outline of Neoplatonic theory—which Ficino puts before the allusion to magic, and Plotinus after it—of the reflection of the Ideas in the divine intellect in their images or forms in the soul of the world, whence they are again reflected (through the intermediaries in the soul of the world) in material forms.

What would make sense of Ficino's introduction of the reference to celestial images in his commentary on the Plotinus passage would be if he thinks that such images are in some way organically related to those "seminal reasons" or "reason principles" in the soul of the world which are the reflection in that "middle place" of the Ideas in the divine mind. Hence such images would become forms of the Ideas, or ways of approaching the Ideas at a stage intermediary between their purely intellectual forms in the divine *mens* and their dimmer reflection in the world of sense, or body of the world. Hence it was by manipulating such images in this intermediary "middle place" that the ancient sages knew how to draw down a part of the soul of the world into their shrines.

There is, further, in Ficino's words, the notion that the material forms in the world of sense can be, as it were, re-formed, when they have degenerated, by manipulation of the higher images on which they depend. In his analysis of this passage, E. Garin has defined this process as the imitation or reconstruction of the higher images in such a way that the divine influences are recaptured and re-conducted into the deteriorated sensible forms.² Thus the priestly

¹ Plotinus, *Enn.* IV, 3, xi; English translation by S. MacKenna, London, 1956, p. 270.

² Garin, *article cited*, pp. 21 ff.

Magus plays a semi-divine rôle, maintaining by his understanding of the use of images the circuit which unites the highest divine world with the soul of the world and the world of sense.

In his article on "Icones Symbolicae", E. H. Gombrich has analysed the mode of thought, so difficult for a modern to understand, by which, for a Renaissance Neoplatonist, an "ancient" image, one which reached him from traditions going back, so he believed, into a remote past, did actually have within it the reflection of an Idea.¹ An ancient image of Justice was not just a picture but actually contained within it some echo, taste, substance, of the divine Idea of Justice. This helps us to understand the way in which Ficino thinks of those star images descending from "the more ancient Platonists", though, in the case of such images, the relation to the Idea is even closer, through the cosmology of *mens, anima mundi, corpus mundi* in which the images have a definite place.

Thus Ficino's commentary on the Plotinus passage becomes, by devious ways, a justification for the use of talismans, and of the magic of the *Asclepius*, on Neoplatonic grounds—on the grounds that the ancient sages and the modern users of talismans are not invoking devils but have a deep understanding of the nature of the All, and of the degrees by which the reflections of the Divine Ideas descend into the world here below.

As D. P. Walker has pointed out,² at the end of the *De vita coelitus comparanda* Ficino returns to the commentary on the Plotinus passage with which he had begun the book, and now he states that Plotinus in that passage was merely imitating, or repeating, what Hermes Trismegistus had said in his *Asclepius*. This means that the *De vita coelitus comparanda* is a commentary only secondarily on Plotinus and primarily on Trismegistus, or rather, on the passage in the *Asclepius* in which he described the magical Egyptian worship.

When any (piece of) matter is exposed to superior things . . . immediately it suffers a supernal influence through that most powerful agent, of marvellous force and life, which is everywhere present . . .

¹ E. H. Gombrich, "Icones Symbolicae: the Visual Image in Neoplatonic Thought", *J.W.C.I.*, 1948 (XI), pp. 163-92.

² Walker, pp. 40-1.

as a mirror reflects a face, or Echo the sound of a voice. Of this Plotinus gives an example when, imitating Mercurius, he says that the ancient priests, or Magi, used to introduce something divine and wonderful into their statues and sacrifices. He (Plotinus) holds, together with Trismegistus, that they did not introduce through these things spirits separated from matter (that is demons), but *mundana numina*, as I said at the beginning, and Synesius agrees. . . . Mercurius himself, whom Plotinus follows, says that he composed through aerial demons, not through celestial or higher demons, statues from herbs, trees, stones, aromatics having within them a natural divine power (as he says). . . . There were skilful Egyptian priests who, when they could not persuade men by reason that there are gods, that is some spirit above men, invented that illicit magic which by enticing demons into statues made these appear to be gods. . . . I at first thought, following the opinion of the Blessed Thomas Aquinas, that if they made statues which could speak, this could not have been only through stellar influence but through demons. . . . But now let us return to Mercurius and to Plotinus. Mercurius says that the priests drew suitable virtues from the nature of the world and mixed these together. Plotinus follows him, and thinks that all can be easily conciliated in the soul of the world for it generates and moves the forms of natural things through certain seminal reasons infused with its divinity. Which reasons he calls gods for they are not separated from the Ideas in the supreme mind.¹

An interpretation of this passage is that Ficino used to agree with Thomas Aquinas, who explicitly condemns as demonic the magic in the *Asclepius*,² but since he has read Plotinus' commentary he understands that, though there may have been bad Egyptian priests who used demonic magic, Hermes Trismegistus was not one of them. His power came only from the world, from his insight into the nature of the All as a hierarchy in which the influence of the Ideas descends from the Intellect of the World, through the "seminal reasons" in the Soul of the World, to the material forms in the Body of the World.³ Hence, celestial images would have their power from the "world" not from demons, being

¹ *De vita coelitus comparanda*, 26 (Ficino, pp. 571-2). Another important description of the hieratic magic which Ficino knew well was Proclus' *De Sacrificiis et Magia* which he translated (Ficino, pp. 1928-9), and on which see Festugière, I, pp. 134-6; cf. also Walker, pp. 36-7; Garin, *article cited*, pp. 19-20.

² *Contra Gentiles*, III, civ-cvi.

³ cf. Walker, p. 43.

something in the nature of shadows of Ideas, intermediaries in the middle place between Intellect and Body, links in the chains by which the Neoplatonic Magus operates his magic and marries higher things to lower things.

Thus the magic of the *Asclepius*, reinterpreted through Plotinus, enters with Ficino's *De vita coelitus comparanda* into the Neoplatonic philosophy of the Renaissance, and, moreover, into Ficino's Christian Neoplatonism. The latter feat necessitated, as we have seen, much ingenious evasion of authoritative Christian pronouncements. When Ficino wrote the *De vita coelitus comparanda* he had perhaps recently been reading Origen against Celsus, which he cites in chapter XXI,¹ and where he might have noticed the quotation from Celsus where the pagan accuses the Christians of mocking the Egyptians "although they show many profound mysteries and teach that such worship (in the Egyptian magical religion) is respect to invisible ideas and not, as most people think, to ephemeral animals."² Eager to snatch at anything in favour of his hero, the holy Hermes Trismegistus, Ficino might have been encouraged by Origen's reply to this: "My good man, you commend the Egyptians with good reason for showing many mysteries which are not evil, and obscure explanations about their animals." Nevertheless, the context in which this remark is made is less encouraging, and Origen's whole effort was directed towards refuting Celsus' view of the history of religion, which was that an ancient good, religious tradition, of which the Egyptians were an example, had been corrupted, first by the Jews, and then still further destroyed by the Christians.

Ficino's magic is based on a theory of *spiritus* which has been admirably defined by D. P. Walker, to whose book the reader is referred for a full and scholarly discussion of this subject.³ Ficino bases the theory of how we are to "draw down the life of heaven" upon the *spiritus* as the channel through which the influence of the stars is diffused. Between the soul of the world and its body there is a *spiritus mundi* which is infused throughout the

¹ Ficino, p. 562.

² Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. H. Chadwick, Cambridge, 1953, p. 139.

³ Walker, pp. 1-24 and *passim*. Ficino's chief expositions of the *spiritus* theory in the *Libri de Vita* are in Lib. III (*De vita coelitus comparanda*), I, 3, 4, 11, 20, but the theory is assumed and referred to throughout.

universe and through which the stellar influences come down to man, who drinks them in through his own spirit, and to the whole *corpus mundi*. The *spiritus* is a very fine and subtle substance, and it was of this which Virgil spoke when he said:

Spiritus intus alit, totamque infusa per artus
mens agitat molem et magno se corpore miscet.¹

It is to attract the *spiritus* of a particular planet that animals, plants, food, scents, colours, and so on associated with that planet are to be used. The *spiritus* is borne upon the air and upon the wind, and it is a kind of very fine air and also very fine heat. It is particularly through the rays of the Sun and of Jupiter that our spirit "drinks" the spirit of the world.

Now there is nothing about the *spiritus* theory in the passage in the *Enneads* which seems to be the chief basis of Ficino's commentary, and, though it may be obscurely referred to elsewhere by Plotinus, I have not been able to find in that philosopher any such clear-cut definition of the *spiritus mundi* as the vehicle of stellar influences and the basis of magical operations such as Ficino seems to be working from. Where he could have found such a clear-cut theory, and specifically in relation to practical magic and to talismans, was in the *Picatrix*. As we saw in the last chapter, the theory of magic in that work depends on the series *intellectus, spiritus, materia*; the material of lower things being intimately related to the *spiritus* material in the stars.² Magic consists in guiding or controlling the influx of *spiritus* into *materia*, and one of the most important ways of doing this is through talismans, for a talisman is a material object into which the *spiritus* of a star has been introduced and which stores the *spiritus*. This theory of pneumatic magic, Ficino could have studied in *Picatrix*, together with the lists of things which attract *spiritus*, full instructions for making talismans, and lists of images for using on talismans. The possibility that Ficino may have used *Picatrix* is increased by the similarity of some of the images which he describes to some of those in *Picatrix*.

Ficino's images are mostly in chapter XVIII of the *De vita coelitus comparanda*. After mentioning the images of the signs of

¹ Virgil, *Aeneid*, VI, 726-7. Quoted by Ficino in *De vita coelitus comparanda*, 3 (Ficino, p. 535).

² See above, pp. 51-2.

the zodiac, he says that there are also images of the faces of the signs, drawn from the Indians, Egyptians, and Chaldeans (lists of decan images do come from these sources), as for example:

In the first face of Virgo a beautiful girl, seated, with ears of corn in her hand and nursing a child.¹

This decan image in this actual form, with the child, is drawn not from *Picatrix*, but from Albumazar, whom Ficino mentions as the source. It is the only decan image which he describes—all his other images are planet images—and he is not sure whether it is right to use it. He then says that if you want to obtain gifts from Mercury, you should make his image on tin or silver, with the sign of Virgo and characters of Virgo and Mercury; and the decan image for the first face of Virgo may be added "if this is to be used". This talisman would thus consist of the image of Mercury, some signs and characters, and perhaps the Virgo image with the child. Note that the talisman is not a medical talisman, but to obtain intellectual "gifts" from Mercury.

To obtain long life, you may make the image of Saturn on a sapphire in this form: "An old man sitting on a high throne or on a dragon, with a hood of dark linen on his head, raising his hand above his head, holding a sickle or a fish, clothed in a dark robe." (*Homo senex in altiore cathedra sedens uel dracone, caput tectus panno quodam lineo fusco, manus supra caput erigens, falcem manutens aut pisces, fusca indutus ueste.*²) This image is close to one in *Picatrix* and contains elements from two others. (Saturn images in *Picatrix*: *Forma hominis super altam cathedram elevatus & in eius capite pannum lineum lutosum, & in eius manu falcem tenentis: Forma hominis senex erecti, suas manus super caput ipsius erigentes, & in eis piscem tenentis . . . : Forma hominis super draconem erecti, in dextra manu falcem tenentis, in sinistra hastam habentis & nigris pannis induti.*³) For a long and happy life, says Ficino, you may make on a white, clear, stone an image of Jupiter as "A crowned man on an eagle or a dragon, clad in a yellow garment." (*Homo sedens super aquilam uel draconem coronatus . . . croceam induto uestem.*⁴) There is a very similar image of Jupiter in *Picatrix*.

¹ *De vita coelitus comparanda*, 18 (Ficino, p. 556).

² Ficino, pp. 556-7.

³ *Picatrix*, Lib. II, cap. 10; Sloane, 1305, f. 43 verso.

⁴ Ficino, p. 557.

(*Forma hominis super aquilam . . . omnia suis vestimenta sunt crocea.*¹)

For the curing of illnesses, Ficino advises the use of this image: "A king on a throne, in a yellow garment, and a crow and the form of the Sun" (*Rex in throno, crocea ueste, & coruum Solisque formam*).² The resemblance of this image to one in *Picatrix* is striking: *Forma regis supra cathedram sedentis, & in sui capite coronam habentis, et coruum ante se, et infra eius pedes istas figuras* (magic characters).³ In *Picatrix* this is not a medical talisman, as in Ficino, but will enable a king to overcome all other kings.

For happiness and strength of body, Ficino advises an image of a young Venus, holding apples and flowers, and dressed in white and yellow. (*Veneris imaginem puellarem, poma floresque manu tenentem, croceis & albis indutam.*⁴ The comparable Venus image in *Picatrix* is: *Forma mulieris capillis expansis & super ceruum equitantes in eius manu dextra malum habentis in sinistra vero flores et eius vestes ex coloribus albis.*⁵)

An image of Mercury described by Ficino is "A helmeted man sitting on a throne, with eagle's feet, holding a cock or fire in his left hand. . . . (*Homo sedens in throno galeratus cristatusque, pedibus aquilinis, sinistra gallum tenens aut ignem . . .*⁶ A comparable Mercury image in *Picatrix* is: *Forma hominis in eius capite gallum habentis, & supra cathedram erecti & pedes similes pedibus aquilae & in palma sinistra manus ignem habentis.*⁷) Ficino says that this image of Mercury is good for wit and memory, or, if carved in marble, is good against fevers.

The resemblances between Ficino's talismans and those in *Picatrix* are not absolutely conclusive evidence that he used that work. He knew, and mentions, other source for images,⁸ and the gods on his talismans are mainly composed of their normal forms,

¹ *Picatrix*, loc. cit. Sloane, 1305, loc. cit.

² Ficino, loc. cit.

³ *Picatrix*, loc. cit.; Sloane, 1305, f. 45 recto.

⁴ Ficino, loc. cit.

⁵ *Picatrix*, loc. cit.; Sloane, 1305, f. 44 verso.

⁶ Ficino, loc. cit.

⁷ *Picatrix*, loc. cit.; Sloane, 1305, loc. cit.

⁸ Particularly Peter of Abano. He never mentions *Picatrix* by name. Perhaps he thought that Abano was a safer source to mention. The later controversy accusing Abano of having borrowed from *Picatrix* (see above, p. 50) might have been indirectly aimed at Ficino.

such as Jupiter on an eagle, or Venus with flowers and apples. Nevertheless one does gain the impression that he had been looking through the chapter on planet images in *Picatrix*. What is interesting is that, on the whole, he seems to avoid decan images, concentrating almost entirely on planet images. This was noticed by W. Gundel, the great authority on decan images, who thinks that Ficino's partiality for planet images reflects a traditional rivalry between decan and planet images which Ficino decides in favour of the latter. "Bei Ficinus ist die alte Rivalität der grossen Systeme der dekan- und der planetengläubigen Astrologie zugunsten der Planeten entschieden."¹ One wonders if this choice was related to the avoidance of demonic magic. By avoiding the images of the decan demons and by using planet images—not to evoke the demons of the planets but only as images of "mundane gods", shadows of Ideas in the Soul of the world—the pious Neoplatonist could perhaps believe that he would be doing only a "world" magic, a natural magic with natural forces, not a demonic magic. Watching Ficino's anxieties and hesitations, one is amazed at the daring of those bold characters beyond the Appenines, in Ferrara or in Padua² who did not fear to decorate the walls of their apartments with the images of the terrible Thirty-Six.

It is very strange to follow the convolutions and involutions of Ficino's mind in this chapter XVIII. Before he introduces his lists of planetary talismans he has some curious remarks on the cross as a kind of talisman.³ The force of the heavens is greatest when

¹ Gundel, *Dekane und Dekansternbilder*, p. 280.

² The images of the decans are shown in the astrological scheme on the walls of the Salone at Padua; this scheme was first fully interpreted by F. Saxl (*Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaft*, 1925-6, pp. 49-68) through study of the astrology of Guido Bonatti and of the *Astrolabium planum* of Peter of Abano, the figures of which are derived from Albumazar. Cf. J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, trans. B. F. Sessions, New York, 1953, pp. 73-4.

³ "Tunc enim stellae magnopere sunt potentes, quando quatuor coeli tenent angulos imo cardines, orientis uidelicet occidentisque, & medii utrinque. Sic uero dispositae, radios ita coniungunt in se inuicem, ut crucem inde constituent. Crucem ergo ueteres figuram esse dicebant, tum stellarum fortitudine factam, tum earundem fortitudinis susceptaculum, ideoque habere summam in imaginibus potestatem, ac uires & spiritus suscipere Planetarum. Haec autem opinio ab Aegyptijs uel inducta est, uel maxime confirmata. Inter quorum characteres crux una erat insignis uitam eorum more futuram significans, eamque figuram pectori Serapidis

the celestial rays come down perpendicularly and at right angles, that is to say in the form of a cross joining the four cardinal points. The Egyptians hence used the form of the cross, which to them also signified the future life, and they sculptured that figure on the breast of Serapis. Ficino, however, thinks that the use of the cross among the Egyptians was not so much on account of its power in attracting the gifts of the stars, but as a prophecy of the coming of Christ, made by them unknowingly. Thus the sanctity of the Egyptians as prophets of Christianity through their use of the cross as a talisman comes in as an appropriate introduction to the list of talismanic images.

After this list, Ficino makes great play with the recommendation by doctors, particularly Peter of Abano, of the use of talismans in medicine. Then, after some references to Porphyry and Plotinus, he comes to Albertus Magnus, described as Professor of Astrology and Theology, who in his *Speculum astronomiae* has distinguished between false and true use of talismans.¹ Next he again worries over what Thomas Aquinas has said in the *Contra Gentiles*, finally reaching a position which he imagines is near to that of Thomas, namely that the talismans have their power mainly from the materials of which they are made, not from the images.² Yet if they are made under the influence of a harmony, similar to the celestial harmony, this excites their virtue.

In short, by devious means, Ficino has extracted his use of talismans from blame. I believe that he is thinking primarily of planetary talismans, and of these used not in a "demonic" manner but, as Walker has said, with "spiritual" magic, a magic using the *spiritus mundi*, to be attracted mainly through groupings of plants, metals, and so on, but also through use of planetary talismans which address the stars as world forces, or natural forces, and not as demons.³

"Why, then, should we not permit ourselves a universal image, that is an image of the universe itself? From which it might be

¹ Ficino, p. 558.

² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.; cf. Walker, p. 43.

³ But cf. Walker's discussion (pp. 44-53) of "Ficino and the demons".

insculpebant. Ego uero quod de crucis excellentia fuit apud Aegyptios ante Christum, non tam muneris stellarum testimonium fuisse arbitror, quam uirtutis praesagium, quam a Christo esset acceptura . . ." Ficino, p. 556.

hoped to obtain much benefit from the universe." This cry comes at the beginning of chapter XIX, after the long defence of planetary images, used in a "natural" way, in the preceding chapter. This universal image or "figure of the world" (*mundi figura*) may be made in brass, combined with gold and silver. (These are the metals of Jupiter, Sol, and Venus.) It should be begun in an auspicious time, when Sol enters the first degree of Aries. It should not be worked at on the Sabbath, the day of Saturn. It should be completed in Venus "to signify its absolute beauty". Colours as well as lines, or lineaments, should be inserted into the work. "There are three universal and singular colours of the world, green, gold, and blue, dedicated to the Three Graces of heaven", which are Venus, Sol, and Jupiter. "They judge therefore that in order to capture the gifts of the celestial graces, these three colours should be frequently used, and into the formula of the world which you are making should be inserted the blue colour of the sphere of the world. They think that gold should be added to the precious work made like the heaven itself, and stars, and Vesta, or Ceres, that is the earth, dressed in green."¹

There is a good deal which I have not been able to understand in this description. The figure seems to refer to a New Year as a new birthday of the world, or even to the first birthday of the world, the creation (Pico della Mirandola's *Heptaplus* is mentioned). But in general it may be said that the making of this magical or talismanic object belongs into the context of the *Libri de vita* as a whole which have all been concerned with various techniques for drawing down, or drinking in, the influences of the Sun, of Venus, and of Jupiter, as health-giving, rejuvenating, anti-Saturnian powers. The object described, or hinted at (for the description is very vague) would seem to be a model of the heavens constructed so as to concentrate on drawing down the fortunate influences of Sol, Venus, Jupiter. Certainly the colours of these planets are to predominate in it, and it may probably be presumed that their images are depicted in it. The inclusion of Ceres in green as the earth is understandable, but Vesta is strange.

Such an object, Ficino seems to say, may be worn, or placed opposite to be looked at,² suggesting that it is perhaps a medal, perhaps an elaborate jewel.

¹ Ficino, p. 559.

² "uel gestabit, uel oppositam intuebitur" (*ibid.*, *loc. cit.*).

He then says that the figure of the world may be constructed so as to reproduce the motion of the spheres, as was done by Archimedes, and has been done recently by a Florentine called Lorenzo. He is here referring to the astronomical clock made by Lorenzo della Volpaia¹ for Lorenzo de' Medici which contained representations of the planets. Such a figure of the world, says Ficino, is made not only to be gazed at but to be meditated upon in the soul. It is obviously a different kind of object to the one previously hinted at. It is a cosmic mechanism.

Finally, someone may construct, or will construct:

on the domed ceiling of the innermost cubicle of his house, where he mostly lives and sleeps, such a figure with the colours in it. And when he comes out of his house he will perceive, not so much the spectacle of individual things, but the figure of the universe and its colours.²

I understand this to mean a painting on the ceiling of a bedroom, a painting which is also still a figure of the world, with perhaps still the figures of the Three Graces, the three fortunate planets, Sol, Venus, and Jupiter predominating, and their colours of blue, gold, and green as the leading colours of the painting or fresco.

These various forms of the "figure of the world" are thus artistic objects which are to be used magically for their talismanic virtue. They are attempting to influence "the world" by favourable arrangements of celestial images, so as to draw down favourable influences and exclude non-favourable ones. In short, these unfortunately so vaguely hinted at works of art are functional; they are made for a purpose, for magical use. By arranging the figure of the world and its celestial images with knowledge and skill, the Magus controls the influences of the stars. Just as Hermes Trismegistus arranged the images in the City of Adocentyn, which was planned as an image of the world, so as to regulate the astral

¹ See A. Chastel, *Marsile Ficin et l'Art*, Geneva-Lille, 1954, p. 95. Lorenzo della Volpaia's clock is referred to by Poliziano, Vasari and others (references in Chastel, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-7, note 16). Chastel thinks that the whole of the passage on making an image of the world in the *De vita coelitus comparanda* is a description of Della Volpaia's clock. I do not think that this is the case. Ficino is describing three different kinds of objects made to represent the figure of the world, one type being the cosmic mechanism of which Della Volpaia's clock is an example.

² Ficino, *loc. cit.*

influences on the inhabitants in such a way as to keep them healthy and virtuous, so Ficino's "figures of the world" would be calculated to regulate the influences in the direction indicated in the *Libri de Vita*, towards a predominance of Solar, Jovial, and Venereal influences and towards an avoidance of Saturn and Mars.

The point in the description of the "figures of the world" to which I want to draw particular attention in view of later developments in this book is that these figures are not only to be looked at but reflected or remembered within. The man who stares at the figure of the world on his bedroom ceiling, imprinting it and its dominating colours of the planets on memory, when he comes out of his house and sees innumerable individual things is able to unify these through the images of a higher reality which he has within. This is the strange vision, or the extraordinary illusion, which was later to inspire Giordano Bruno's efforts to base memory on celestial images, on images which are shadows of ideas in the soul of the world, and thus to unify and organise the innumerable individuals in the world and all the contents of memory.

In his article on "Botticelli's Mythologies", E. H. Gombrich quotes a letter from Ficino to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco de' Medici, in which Ficino tells the young Lorenzo that he is giving him an "immense present".

For anyone who contemplates the heavens, nothing he sets his eyes upon seems immense, but the heavens themselves. If, therefore, I make you a present of the heavens themselves what would be its price?¹

Ficino goes on to say that the young man should dispose his "Luna", that is, his soul and body, in such a way as to avoid too much influence from Saturn and Mars, and to obtain favourable influences from the Sun, Jupiter, and Venus. "If you thus dispose the heavenly signs and your gifts in this way, you will escape the threats of fortune, and, under divine favour, will live happy and free from cares."

Gombrich discusses the "Primavera" (Pl. 2) in relation to such a

¹ Ficino, p. 805; cf. E. H. Gombrich, "Botticelli's Mythologies: a study in the Neoplatonic symbolism of his circle", *J.W.C.I.*, VIII (1945), p. 16.

disposition of the stars, suggesting that the Mercury on the extreme left is a planetary image, raising and dismissing the possibility that the Three Graces might be Sol, Jupiter, and Venus, and emphasising that the central figure is certainly a Venus. What I have now to suggest does not conflict with the general line of his approach.

Surely, the "immense present" which was a "present of the heavens themselves" which Ficino sent to Pierfrancesco was a construction of a similar nature to that described in chapter XIX of the *De vita coelitus comparanda* on "making a figure of the universe". It was an image of the world arranged so as to attract the favourable planets and to avoid Saturn. The "present" was probably not some actual object but advice as to how to make, internally in the soul or the imagination such a "figure of the world" and to keep the inner attention concentrated on its images, or possibly also how to have a real object or talisman designed to be used for reflection in the mind. Though painted earlier than the *De vita coelitus comparanda* was written, or at least published, Botticelli's "Primavera" is surely such an object, designed with such a purpose.

Far be it from me to attempt yet another detailed interpretation of the figures in the "Primavera". I want only to suggest that in the context of the study of Ficino's magic the picture begins to be seen as a practical application of that magic, as a complex talisman, an "image of the world" arranged so as to transmit only healthful, rejuvenating, anti-Saturnian influences to the beholder. Here, in visual form is Ficino's natural magic, using grouping of trees and flowers, using only planetary images and those only in relation to the "world", not to attract demons; or as shadows of Ideas in the Neoplatonic hierarchy. And, whatever the figures on the right may represent mythologically, is it not the *spiritus mundi* which blows through them, blown from the puffed cheeks of the aerial spirit, made visible in the wind-blown folds of the draperies of the running figure? The *spiritus* which is the channel for the influences of the stars has been caught and stored in the magic talisman.

How different is Botticelli's Alma Venus, with whom, as Ficino advises, we walk in the green and flowery meadows, drinking in the scented air, laden with *spiritus*—how different she is from the prim little talisman Venus, with an apple in one hand and flowers in the other! Yet her function is the same, to draw down the

Venerable spirit from the star, and to transmit it to the wearer or beholder of her lovely image.

Ficino's Orphic magic¹ was a return to an ancient *priscus theologus*, like his talismanic magic with its disguised, or revised, return to Hermes Trismegistus. Orpheus comes second after Trismegistus in the Ficinian lists of *prisci theologi*. The collection of hymns known as the *Orphica*, which was the main though not the only source of Orphic hymns known to the Renaissance, dates probably from the second or third century A.D., that is from roughly the same period as the *Hermetica*. They were probably hymns used by some religious sect of the period. Their content is usually to call upon a god, particularly the Sun, by his various names, invoking his various powers, and there is more than a touch of the magical incantation in them. Ficino and his contemporaries believed that the Orphic hymns were by Orpheus himself and were of extreme antiquity, reflecting the religious singing of a *priscus magus* who lived long before Plato. Ficino's revival of Orphic singing has deep importance for him because he believes he is returning to the practice of a most ancient theologian and one who foresaw the Trinity.² It thus has underlying it the same type of historical error as that which induced his profound respect for the *Hermetica*.

Ficino used to sing the Orphic songs, accompanying himself probably on a *lira da braccio*.³ They were set to some kind of simple monodic music which Ficino believed echoed the musical notes emitted by the planetary spheres, to form that music of the spheres of which Pythagoras spoke. Thus one could sing Sun hymns, or Jupiter hymns, or Venus hymns attuned to those planets, and this, being re-enforced by the invocation of their names and powers, was a way of drawing down their influences. The *spiritus* theory also lies behind this vocal or aural magic, as it does behind the sympathetic and talismanic magic. The Orphic magic is thus exactly parallel to the talismanic magic; it is used for the same reasons, to draw down chosen stellar influences; its medium or channel is again the *spiritus*. The only difference between the two magics, and it is of course a basic one, is that one

¹ On Ficino's Orphic magic, see Walker, pp. 12-24.

² See Walker, "Orpheus the Theologian and the Renaissance Platonists", *J.W.C.I.*, XVI (1953), pp. 100-20.

³ Walker (*Spiritual and Demonic Magic*), pp. 19, 22.

is visual, working through visual images (the talismans) whilst the other is aural and vocal, working through music and the voice.

Walker thinks that the incantatory and aural magic which is described in the *De vita coelitus comparanda* is really the same as the Orphic singing, though this is not expressly stated.¹ The two branches of Ficino's magic—sympathetic magic with natural groupings and talismans, and incantatory magic with hymns and invocations—are certainly both represented in that work.

The incantatory magic raises the same problem as the talismanic magic, namely, is it a natural magic, addressed to the gods as powers of the world, or a demonic magic, invoking the demons of the stars. The answer here is probably the same as in the case of the talismanic magic, namely that Ficino regarded his incantations as purely natural magic. At least we have Pico della Mirandola's word for it that the Orphic singing is natural magic for he calls it by this name in one of his *Conclusiones Orphicae*:

In natural magic nothing is more efficacious than the Hymns of Orpheus, if there be applied to them suitable music, and disposition of soul, and the other circumstances known to the wise.²

And in another of his Orphic Conclusions, Pico definitely states that the names of the gods, of which Orpheus sings, are not those of deceiving demons but "names of the natural and divine virtues"³ diffused throughout the world.

To complete our view of Ficino's natural magic, we thus have to think of him drawing down the stellar influences by musical incantations as well as by sympathetic arrangement of natural objects, talismans, exposing oneself to the air, and so on, for the *spiritus* is caught by planetary songs as well as in the other ways described. There may be an even closer connection between the Ficinian talismans and the Ficinian incantations, for in chapter XVIII, after his long and involved defence of his talismans, he seems to say that these are made "beneath a harmony similar to the celestial harmony"⁴ which excites their virtue. I do not know whether this passage can be taken to mean that a Ficinian talisman or talismanic type of picture, was made, or painted, to the

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

² Pico, p. 106; quoted by Walker, p. 22.

³ Pico, p. 106. See below, p. 90.

⁴ Ficino, p. 558.

accompaniment of suitable Orphic incantations which helped to infuse the *spiritus* into them.

In spite of all his precautions, Ficino did not avoid getting into trouble for the *Libri de vita*, as we learn from his *Apologia*¹ for that work. People had evidently been asking questions such as, "Is not Marsilius a priest? What has a priest to do with medicine and astrology? What has a Christian to do with magic and images?" Ficino counters by pointing out that in ancient times, priests always did medicine, mentioning Chaldean, Persian, and Egyptian priests; that medicine is impossible without astrology; that Christ Himself was a healer. But above all he emphasises that there are two kinds of magic, one demonic magic which is illicit and wicked, the other natural magic, which is useful and necessary. The only kind of magic which he has practised or advised is the good and useful kind—*magia naturalis*.²

How elegant, how artistic and refined is this modern natural magic!³ If we think of the Neoplatonic philosopher singing Orphic hymns, accompanying himself on his *lira da braccio* decorated with the figure of Orpheus taming the animals, and then compare this Renaissance vision with the barbarous mutterings of some invocation in *Picatrix*, the contrast between the new magic and the old is painfully evident.

Beudelus, Demeymes, Adulex, Metucgayn, Atine, Ffex, Uquizuz, Gadix, Sol, Veni cito cum tuis spiritibus.⁴

How remote is the gibberish of this demonic invocation to Sol in *Picatrix* from Ficino and his "natural" planetary songs! Or if we think of the flowers, jewels, scents with which Ficino's patients are advised to surround themselves, of the charmingly healthy and wealthy way of life which they are to follow, and compare this with the filthy and obscene substances, the stinking and disgusting mixtures recommended in *Picatrix*, the contrast is again most striking between the new elegant magic, recommended by the fashionable physician, and that old dirty magic. Again, it would

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 572-4. On the *Apologia*, see Walker, pp. 42 ff., 52-3.

² Ficino, p. 573; cf. Walker, p. 52.

³ E. Garin (*Medioevo e Rinascimento*, p. 172) draws a contrast between mediaeval "bassa magia" and "magia rinascimentale".

⁴ Sloane, 1305, f. 152 verso.

seem that the primitive talismanic image might be expanded by Renaissance artists into figures of immortal beauty, figures in which classical form has been both recovered and transmuted into something new.

And yet there is absolute continuity between the old magic and the new. Both rest on the same astrological presuppositions; both use in their methods the same groupings of natural substances; both employ talismans and invocations; both are pneumatic magic, believing in the *spiritus* as the channel of influence from the above to the below. Finally, both are integrated into an elaborate philosophical context. The magic of *Picatrix* is presented in a framework of philosophy; and Ficino's natural magic is fundamentally related to his Neoplatonism.

We have, in short, to think of Renaissance magic as both in continuity with mediaeval magic and also the transformation of that tradition into something new. The phenomenon is exactly parallel with that other phenomenon which Warburg and Saxl discovered and studied, namely how the images of the gods were preserved through the Middle Ages in astrological manuscripts, reached the Renaissance in that barbarised form, and were then reinvested with classical form through the rediscovery and imitation of classical works of art.¹ In the same way, astral magic comes down in the mediaeval tradition and is reinvested with classical form in the Renaissance through the rediscovery of Neoplatonic theurgy. Ficino's magic, with its hymns to the Sun, its Three Graces in an astrological context, its Neoplatonism, is closer in outlook, practice, and classical form to the Emperor Julian than it is to *Picatrix*. Yet the substance of it reached him through *Picatrix*, or some such similar text-books, and was transformed by him back into classical form through his Greek studies. One might say that the approach through the history of magic is perhaps as necessary for the understanding of the meaning and use of a Renaissance work of art as is the approach through the history of the recovery of classical form for the understanding of its form. The Three Graces (to take this perennial example) regained their classical form through the recovery and imitation of the true

¹ See Warburg's *Gesammelte Schriften*; Saxl's catalogues of illustrated astrological manuscripts and other writings (for bibliography, see F. Saxl, *Lectures*, Warburg Institute, University of London, 1957, I, pp. 359-62); and cf. J. Seznec, *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, pp. 37 ff.

classical form of the group. They perhaps also regained their talismanic virtue through the renaissance of magic.

And yet, just as a pagan Renaissance work of art is not purely pagan but retains Christian overtones or undertones (the classical example of this being Botticelli's Venus who looks like a Virgin), so it is also with Ficino's magic. This cannot be regarded as a purely medical practice which he kept quite separate from his religion because, as D. P. Walker has emphasised, it was in itself a kind of religion. Walker has quoted a passage from Ficino's close disciple and imitator, Francesco da Diacetto in which this comes out most clearly.¹ Diacetto describes how one who wishes to acquire "solarian gifts", should robe himself in a mantle of solarian colour, such as gold, and conduct a rite, involving burning of incense made from solar plants, before an altar on which is an image of the sun, for example "an image of the sun enthroned, crowned, and wearing a saffron cloak, likewise a raven and the figure of the sun." This is the solar talisman in the *De vita coelitus comparanda* which we thought might be derived from *Picatrix*.² Then, anointed with unguents made from solar materials he is to sing an Orphic hymn to the Sun, invoking him as the divine Henad, as the Mind, and as the Soul. This is the Neoplatonic triad under which the Emperor Julian worshipped the Sun. As Walker says the triad is not actually mentioned in the *De vita coelitus comparanda*. But it is alluded to by Plotinus in that passage in the *Enneads* on which Ficino's work is a commentary, as the example of the hierarchy of the Ideas.³ Diacetto's solar rites thus bring out something which is implicit in the *De vita coelitus comparanda* and they probably reflect Ficino's own practices. If so, Ficino's magic was a religious magic, a revival of the religion of the world.

¹ Francesco da Diacetto, *Opera omnia*, ed. Bâle, 1563, pp. 45-6; cf. Walker, pp. 32-3. On Diacetto, see Kristeller, *Studies*, pp. 287 ff.

² See above, p. 71. In this passage, the talismanic image of the sun is almost reverting to a "statue", worshipped with rites as in the *Asclepius*.

³ "The sun of that sphere . . . is an Intellectual-Principle, and immediately upon it follows the Soul depending from it . . . the Soul borders also upon the sun of this sphere, and becomes the medium by which it is linked to the over-world"; Plotinus, *Ennead*, IV, 3, XI; McKenna's translation, p. 270.



I(a) The Zodiacal Sign Aries with its three Decans.



I (b) The first Decan of Aries.

How could a pious Christian reconcile such a revival with his Christianity? No doubt the Renaissance religious syncretism, by which the Neoplatonic triad was connected with the Trinity would account for regarding sun-worship theoretically and historically as a religion having affinities with Christianity, but this would hardly account for the revival of it as a religious cult. The moving force behind this revival was probably, as Walker has suggested, Ficino's deep interest in the Egyptian magical religion described in the *Asclepius*. It was on this, and only secondarily on Plotinus, that the *De vita coelitus comparanda* was a commentary, seeking to justify it by finding a "natural" and Neoplatonic basis for it.

By the time that the *Libri de vita* were published, in 1489 Hermes Trismegistus would have been safely ensconced inside the Duomo at Siena, proudly displaying the quotation from his *Asclepius* in which he prophesied the Son of God, and being urged to take up again the Egyptian laws and letters. Lactantius has much to answer for, for it was his interpretation of Trismegistus as a holy Gentile prophet which Ficino adopted, and which he thought that he found marvellously confirmed in the *Pimander*. And it is this which may have encouraged him to take up magical religion, which he did not do, as we have seen, without much fear and trembling and anxious avoidance of demons.

When Hermes Trismegistus entered the Church, the history of magic became involved with the history of religion in the Renaissance.

2. Botticelli, "Primavera", Uffizi Gallery, Florence (p. 76).

PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA AND CABALIST MAGIC

PICO DELLA MIRANDOLA, contemporary of Ficino, though younger, began his philosophical career under Ficino's influence and imbibed from Ficino his enthusiasm for *magia naturalis* which he accepted and recommended much more forcibly and openly than did Ficino. But Pico is chiefly important in the history of Renaissance magic because he added to the natural magic another kind of magic, which was to be used with the *magia naturalis* as complementary to it. This other kind of magic which Pico added to the equipment of the Renaissance Magus was practical Cabala, or Cabalist magic. This was a spiritual magic, not spiritual in the sense of using only the natural *spiritus mundi* like natural magic, but in the sense that it attempted to tap the higher spiritual powers, beyond the natural powers of the cosmos. Practical Cabala invokes angels, archangels, the ten sephiroth which are names or powers of God, God himself, by means some of which are similar to other magical procedures but more particularly through the power of the sacred Hebrew language. It is thus a much more ambitious kind of magic than Ficino's natural magic, and one which it would be impossible to keep apart from religion.

For the Renaissance mind, which loved symmetrical arrangements, there was a certain parallelism between the writings of Hermes Trismegistus, the Egyptian Moses, and Cabala which was a Jewish mystical tradition supposed to have been handed down orally from Moses himself. In common with all Cabalists, Pico

firmly believed in this extreme antiquity of the Cabalistic teachings as going right back to Moses, as a secret doctrine which Moses had imparted to some initiates who had handed it on, and which unfolded mysteries not fully explained by the patriarch in *Genesis*. The Cabala is not, I believe, ever called a *prisca theologia* for this term applied to Gentile sources of ancient wisdom, and this was a more sacred wisdom, being Hebrew wisdom. And since, for Pico, Cabala confirmed the truth of Christianity, Christian Cabala was a Hebrew-Christian source of ancient wisdom, and one which he found it most valuable and instructive to compare with Gentile ancient wisdoms, and above all with that of Hermes Trismegistus who particularly lent himself to Pico's essays in comparative religion because he was so closely parallel to Moses, as the Egyptian law-giver and author of the inspired Egyptian *Genesis*, the *Pimander*.

Looking at the Hermetic writings and at Cabala with the eyes of Pico, certain symmetries begin to present themselves to our enraptured gaze. The Egyptian law-giver had given utterance to wonderful mystical teachings, including an account of creation in which he seemed to know something of what Moses knew. With this body of mystical teaching there went a magic, the magic of the *Aesclepius*. In Cabala, too, there was a marvellous body of mystical teaching, derived from the Hebrew law-giver, and new light on the Mosaic mysteries of creation. Pico lost himself in these wonders in which he saw the divinity of Christ verified. And with Cabala, too, there went a kind of magic, practical Cabala.

Hermetism and Cabalism also corroborated one another on a theme which was fundamental for them both, namely the creation by the Word. The mysteries of the *Hermetica* are mysteries of the Word, or the Logos, and in the *Pimander*, it was by the luminous Word, the Son of God issuing from the *Nous* that the creative act was made. In *Genesis*, "God spoke" to form the created world, and, since He spoke in Hebrew, this is why for the Cabalist the words and letters of the Hebrew tongue are subjects for endless mystical meditations, and why, for the practical Cabalist, they contain magical power. Lactantius may have helped to cement the union between Hermetism and Christian Cabalism on this point, for, after quoting from the Psalm "By the word of God were the heavens made", and from St. John, "In the beginning was the Word", he adds that this is supported from the Gentiles. "For

Trismegistus, who by some means or other searched into almost all truth, often described the excellence and the majesty of the Word", and he acknowledged "that there is an ineffable and sacred speech, the relation of which exceeds the measure of man's ability."¹

The marrying together of Hermetism and Cabalism, of which Pico was the instigator and founder, was to have momentous results, and the subsequent Hermetic-Cabalist tradition, ultimately stemming from him, was of most far-reaching importance. It could be purely mystical, developing Hermetic and Cabalist meditations on creation and on man into immensely complex labyrinths of religious speculation, involving numerological and harmonic aspects into which Pythagoreanism was absorbed. But it also had its magical side, and here, too, Pico was the founder who first united the Hermetic and Cabalist types of magic.

It was in 1486 that the young Pico della Mirandola went to Rome with his nine hundred theses, or points drawn from all philosophies which he offered to prove in public debate to be all reconcilable with one another. According to Thorndike, these theses showed that Pico's thinking "was largely coloured by astrology, that he was favourable to natural magic, and that he had a penchant for such occult and esoteric literature as the Orphic hymns, Chaldean oracles, and Jewish cabala";² also the writings of Hermes Trismegistus. The great debate never took place, and theologians raised an outcry over some of the theses, necessitating an Apology or defence which was published in 1487 together with most of the oration on the Dignity of Man, with which the debate was to have opened. That oration was to echo and re-echo throughout the Renaissance, and it is, indeed, the great charter of Renaissance Magic, of the new type of magic introduced by Ficino and completed by Pico.

In the following pages I shall be using Pico's theses, or *Conclusiones*, his Apology, and also the Oration.³ My objects are

¹ Lactantius, *Div. Inst.*, IV, ix; Fletcher's translation, I, p. 226.

² Thorndike, IV, p. 494.

³ Pico's *Conclusiones*, absolutely fundamental though they are for the whole Renaissance, are available in no modern edition. The references to them and to the *Apologia* in this chapter are to the 1572 edition of Pico's works (abbreviated as "Pico", see Abbreviations). The references to the

strictly limited. First, I shall draw out what Pico says about *magia* or *magia naturalis*, endeavouring to determine what he means by this. Secondly, to show that Pico distinguishes between theoretical Cabala and practical Cabala, the latter being Cabalist magic. And, thirdly, to prove that Pico thinks that *magia naturalis* needs to be supplemented by practical Cabala without which it is but a weak force. These three objectives overlap with one another, and it may not always be possible to keep the different threads distinct. And I must add that, though I am certain that by "practical Cabala" Pico means Cabalist magic, I shall not be able to elucidate what procedures he used for this, since this is a matter for Hebrew specialists to investigate.

Amongst Pico's nine hundred theses there are twenty-six *Conclusiones Magicae*. These are partly on natural magic and partly on Cabalist magic. I select here some of those on natural magic.

The first of the magical conclusions is as follows:

Tota Magia, quae in usu est apud Modernos, & quam merito exterminat Ecclesia, nullam habet firmitatem, nullum fundamentum, nullam veritatem, quia pendet ex manu hostium primae veritatis, potestatum harum tenebrarum, quae tenebras falsitatis, male dispositis intellectibus obfundunt.¹

All "modern magic", announces Pico in this first conclusion is bad, groundless, the work of the devil, and rightly condemned by the Church. This sounds uncompromisingly against magic as used in Pico's time, "modern magic". But magicians always introduce their subject by stating that, though there are bad and diabolical magics, their kind of magic is not of that nature. And I think that by "modern magic" Pico does not mean the new-style natural magic, but mediaeval and unreformed magics. For his next conclusion begins:

Magia naturalis licita est, & non prohibita. . . .²

¹ Pico, p. 104. ² *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

Oration as to the edition, with Italian translation, published by E. Garin (G. Pico della Mirandola, *De hominis dignitate, Heptaplus, De ente et uno, e scritti varii*, ed. E. Garin, Florence, 1942). An English translation of the Oration is included in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man*, ed. E. Cassirer, P. O. Kristeller, J. H. Randall, Chicago, 1948, pp. 223 ff. On the first version of the Oration, see Garin, *Cultura*, pp. 231 ff.

There is then a good magic, an allowable magic which is not forbidden, and it is *magia naturalis*.

What does Pico understand by *magia naturalis*? In the third conclusion he states that:

Magia est pars practica scientiae naturalis
in the fifth that:

Nulla est uirtus in coelo aut in terra seminaliter & separata quam & actuare & unire magus non possit
and in the thirteenth that:

Magiam operari non est aliud quam maritare mundum.¹

It is clear, I think, from these three conclusions that by the licit natural magic, Pico means the establishing of the "links" between earth and heaven by the right use of natural substances in accordance with the principles of sympathetic magic, and since such links would be inefficacious without the higher link of the talisman or the star image made efficacious with natural *spiritus*, the use of talismans must (or so I would think) be included in the methods by which Pico's natural Magus "unites" virtues in heaven with those on earth, or "marries the world" which is another way of putting the same notion.

That Pico's natural magic did not rest entirely on the arrangement of the natural substances is, moreover, proved from the twenty-fourth conclusion:

Ex secretioris philosophiae principiis, necesse est confiteri, plus posse characteres & figuras in opere Magico, quam possit quaecunque qualitas materialis.²

This is a definite statement that it is not the material substances which have most power, not the materials of which an object used in magic is made, but the actual magic "characters" and "figures" which are the most operative. He does not here use the word *images*, the correct term for talismanic images, but *characteres* are those magic characters (illustrated in works like *Picatrix*) and which are used as well as the talismanic image on some of the talismans quoted by Ficino. I am not sure whether "figures" can ever mean "images", or whether these too are in the nature of characters. But what is certain is that Pico is saying that it is the magical signs which are operative. Therefore his natural magic is

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 105.

² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

more than the arrangement of natural substances and includes such magical signs.

In his *Apologia*, Pico repeated the conclusions about the badness of bad magic and the goodness of his natural magic which is the uniting or marrying of things in heaven with things on earth, adding that these two definitions (about the "uniting" and "marrying") underlie, or are implied in, all his other magical conclusions, particularly the one about the characters and figures. He emphasised that the good natural magic which marries earth to heaven is all done naturally, by *virtutes naturales*, and that the activity of the magical characters and figures used is also a "natural" activity. In short, he is, I would think, trying to make it very clear that the *Magia* which he advocates is not a demonic magic but a natural magic.¹

Pico's natural magic is therefore, it would seem, probably the same as Ficino's magic, using natural sympathies but also magical images and signs, though on the understanding that this is to attract natural power, not demonic power. It is indeed possible that there are echoes of Pico's apology for his natural magic in Ficino's apology for the *Libri de Vita*, published two years later.

Another link between Ficino's and Pico's magics is in the latter's recommendation of Orphic incantations, regarded as natural magic. In his second Orphic conclusion, Pico states as already quoted that:

In natural magic nothing is more efficacious than the Hymns of Orpheus, if there be applied to them a suitable music, and disposition of soul, and the other circumstances known to the wise.²

¹ The passage is as follows: ". . . sicut dixi in prima conclusione, refellam omnem Magiam prohibitam ab Ecclesia, illam damnans et detestans, protestans me solum loqui de Magia naturali, et expressius per specialem conclusionem declarans: quod per istam Magiam nihil operamur, nisi solum actuando uel uniendo uirtutes naturales. Sic enim dicit conclusio undecima conclusionum Magicarum. Mirabilia artis Magicae, non sunt nisi per unionem & actuationem eorum, quae seminaliter & separate sunt in nature, quod dixi in 13 conclusione Quod Magiam operari non est aliud quam maritare mundum. Praedictam autem specificationem, & restrictionem intentionis meae, in conclusionibus Magicis, ad Magiam naturalem intendo esse applicandam, cuilibet conclusioni particulari, & ita cum dico, de actiuitate characterum & figurarum, in opere Magico loquor de uera actiuitate sua & naturali. Patet enim, quod talem habent secundum omnes philosophos tam in agendo, quam in modo agendi & patiendi." Pico, pp. 171-2 (*Apologia*).

² *Ibid.*, p. 106. See above, p. 79.

And in the third Orphic conclusion, he guarantees that this Orphic magic is not demonic:

The names of the gods of which Orpheus sings are not those of deceiving demons, from whom comes evil and not good, but are names of natural and divine virtues distributed throughout the world by the true God for the great advantage of man, if he knows how to use them.¹

It therefore seems that the Natural Magus, as envisaged by Pico, would use the same kind of methods as the Ficinian natural magic, natural sympathies, natural Orphic incantations, magic signs and images naturally interpreted. Amongst these procedures would almost certainly be the use of the talisman as Ficino interpreted it. Pico moved in the same world of imagery as Ficino, as his commentary on Benivieni's *Canzona de Amore* shows, and the Three Graces on his medal should perhaps be understood, at bottom, as in the nature of a Neoplatonised talismanic image against Saturn.²

In the oration on the Dignity of Man, which was to have opened the debate on the *Conclusiones* which never took place, Pico repeated all his main themes about magic: that magic is double, one kind being the work of demons, the other a natural philosophy³; that the good magic works by *simpatia*, through knowing the mutual rapports running through all nature, the secret charms by which one thing can be drawn to another thing, so that, as the peasant marries the vines to the elm, "so the Magus marries earth to heaven, that is to say the forces of inferior things to the gifts and properties of supernal things."⁴ And this meditation on the marvellous powers of Man, the Magus, opens with the words of Hermes Trismegistus to Asclepius; "Magnum, o Asclepi, miraculum est homo."⁵ That was the text for the whole sermon, and one which puts Pico's natural magic into the context of the magic of the *Asclepius*.

But, instead of muffling, like Ficino, the connection with the *Asclepius* under layers of commentary on Plotinus or rather mis-

¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

² In the commentary on Benivieni's poem (Pico, p. 742; *De hominis dignitate*, etc., ed. Garin, pp. 508-9), Pico does not actually equate the Three Graces with the three "good" planets, but, as a disciple of Ficino, he would certainly have known of this.

³ Pico, *De hominis dignitate*, etc., ed. Garin, p. 148.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 152. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 102.

leading quotations from Thomas Aquinas, Pico in those opening words boldly throws down the gauntlet, as though to say, "It is the magic of the *Asclepius* that I am really talking about, and I glory in Man the Magus as described by Hermes Trismegistus."

However, natural magic, according to Pico, is but a weak thing, and no really efficacious magic can be done with it, unless Cabalist magic is added to it.

Nulla potest esse operatio Magica alicuius efficaciae, nisi annexum habeat opus Cabalae explicitum uel implicitum.¹

So runs the fifteenth of the magical *Conclusiones*, a severe and uncompromising statement which really knocks out Ficino's magic as fundamentally ineffective because he did not use the higher forces.

Nulla nomina ut significatiua, & in quantum nomina sunt, singula & per se sumpta, in Magico opere uirtutem habere possunt, nisi sint Hebraica, uel inde proxime deriuata.²

This twenty-second magical conclusion is hard on a poor magician who is weak in Hebrew, like Ficino who only knew a few words of that language.

Opus praecedentium hymnorum (i.e. the Orphic Hymns) nullum est sine opere Cabalae, cuius est proprium praticare omnem quantitatem formalem, continuam & discretam.³

Even the Orphic singing, Ficino's pride and joy, is no good for a magical operation without Cabala, according to this twenty-first Orphic conclusion.

These cruel statements by the better-equipped young magician are at least, I think, an absolute guarantee that Ficino's natural magic was *not* demonic, as he claimed. Too pious and careful to attempt to use planetary or zodiacal demons, and too ignorant of Cabala to understand angelic magic, he was content with a natural magic which was harmless but weak. The Magus who combines natural magic with Cabala will be in a different position, for, as Pico explains in the Apology, there are two kinds of Cabala, and one of them is "the supreme part of Natural Magic".

¹ Pico, *Opera*, p. 105. ² *Ibid.*, loc. cit. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

The Cabala¹ as it developed in Spain in the Middle Ages had as its basis the doctrine of the ten Sephiroth and the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The doctrine of the Sephiroth is laid down in the Book of Creation, or *Sefer Yetzirah*, and it is constantly referred to throughout the *Zohar*, the mystical work written in Spain in the thirteenth century which embodies the traditions of Spanish Cabalism of that time. The Sephiroth are "the ten names most common to God and in their entirety they form his one great Name."² They are "the creative Names which God called into the world",³ and the created universe is the external development of these forces alive in God. This creative aspect of the Sephiroth involves them in a connection with cosmology, and there is a relationship between the Sephiroth and the ten spheres of the cosmos, composed of the spheres of the seven planets, the sphere of fixed stars, and the higher spheres beyond these. A striking feature of Cabalism is the importance assigned to angels or divine spirits as intermediaries throughout this system, arranged in hierarchies corresponding to the other hierarchies. There are also bad angels, or demons, whose hierarchies correspond to those of their good opposites. The theosophical system of the universe on which the infinite subtleties of Cabalist mysticism are based is connected with the Scriptures through elaborate mystical interpretations of the words and letters of the Hebrew text, particularly the book *Genesis* (on which large parts of the *Zohar* are a commentary).

The Hebrew alphabet, for the Cabalist, contains the Name or Names of God; it reflects the fundamental spiritual nature of the world and the creative language of God. Creation from the point of view of God is the expression of His hidden self that gives Itself a name, the holy Name of God,⁴ the perpetual act of creation. In contemplating the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and their configurations as constituents of God's name, the Cabalist is contemplating both God himself and his works through the Power of the Name.

The two branches of Spanish Cabalism are thus both based on the Name or Names; they are complementary to each other and

intermingled. One branch is called the Path of the Sephiroth¹; the other the Path of the Names.² An expert practitioner of the Path of the Names was the thirteenth-century Spanish Jew, Abraham Abulafia, who developed a most complex technique of meditation through a system for combining the Hebrew letters in endless varieties of permutations and combinations.

Though Cabala is primarily a mysticism, a way of trying to know God, there is also a magic which goes with it, which can be used mystically or subjectively on oneself, a kind of self-hypnosis, as an aid to contemplation, and G. Scholem thinks that this was how Abulafia used it.³ Or it can be developed into an operative magic,⁴ using the power of the Hebrew language, or the powers of the angels invoked by it, to perform magical works. (I am speaking, of course, from the point of view of a mystical believer in magic, like Pico della Mirandola.) The Cabalists evolved many angelic names unknown to the Scriptures (which mention only Gabriel, Raphael, and Michael) by adding to a root term describing the angel's specific function a suffix, such as "el" or "iah", representing the Name of God, and such angelic names invoked or inscribed on talismans had power. Abbreviations of Hebrew words, by the method of Notarikon, or transpositions or anagrams of words by the method of Temurah, were also potent. One of the most complicated of the methods used in practical Cabala, or Cabalist magic, was Gematria which was based on the numerical values assigned to each Hebrew letter involving a mathematics of extreme intricacy, and by which, when words were calculated into numbers and numbers into words the entire organisation of the world could be read off in terms of word-numbers, or the number of the heavenly hosts could be exactly calculated as amounting to 301,655,172. The word-number equation is, like all these methods, not necessarily magic and can be purely mystical; but it was an important feature of practical Cabala through its association with names of angels. There are, for example, seventy-two angels through whom the Sephiroth themselves can be approached, or invoked, by one who knows their names and numbers. Invocations must always be made in the Hebrew tongue, but there are also

¹ On the Cabala, see G. G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* Jerusalem, 1941.

² Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 210. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 212. ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 202 ff. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 122 ff. ³ *Ibid.*, pp. 141-2.

⁴ For a rudimentary account of "practical Cabala", or Cabalist magic, see K. Seligmann, *The History of Magic*, New York, 1948, pp. 346 ff.

silent invocations to be made merely by arranging or displaying Hebrew words, letters, signs or signacula.

Amongst the eager activities which Pico undertook for his total synthesis of all knowledge—made at the age of twenty-four—was the learning of Hebrew which he seems to have known quite well, or at least much better than any Gentile contemporary.¹ He had a number of learned Jewish friends, of some of whom we know the names—Elia del Medigo, for example, and Flavius Mithridates. These and others supplied him with the necessary books and manuscripts, and he had probably read the Hebrew Scriptures in their original language, together with many commentaries, including Cabalist commentaries and works. He seems to have had some knowledge of the *Zohar* and of the mystical commentary on the *Song of Solomon*. And G. Scholem has pointed out that he seems to refer to Abraham Abulafia's techniques of letter-combinations.² The pious and enthusiastic young man above all valued his Hebrew and Cabalist studies because he believed that they led him to a fuller understanding of Christianity, and certified the truth of the divinity of Christ and the doctrine of the Trinity. His seventy-two Cabalist *Conclusiones* are introduced as "confirming the Christian religion from the foundations of Hebrew wisdom".³ The sixth conclusion states that the three great Names of God in Cabalist secrets, within the quaternary Name (the Tetragrammaton), refer to the Three Persons of the Trinity.⁴ And the seventh conclusion affirms that "No Hebrew Cabalist can deny that the name of Iesu, if we interpret it according to Cabalistic principles

¹ For Pico and the Cabala the chief study was formerly J. L. Blau, *The Christian Interpretation of the Cabala in the Renaissance*, Columbia University Press, 1944. But see now the very important essay by G. Scholem, "Zur Geschichte der Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala", in *Essays presented to L. Baeck*, London, 1954; and F. Secret, "Pico della Mirandola e gli inizi della cabala cristiana", in *Convivium*, I, 1957. Of the many books on Pico, the one which concentrates most on Pico and the Cabala is E. Anagnine, *Giovanni Pico della Mirandola*, Bari, 1937.

² *Essays presented to L. Baeck*, p. 164, note.

³ Pico, p. 107. There are two sets of Cabalist Conclusions: (1) a set of 48, said to be drawn straight from the Cabala (*ibid.*, pp. 80-3); (2) a set of 72, according to Pico's "own opinion" (*ibid.*, pp. 107-11). It is the latter set which I am using here.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

and methods, signifies God, the Son of God, and the wisdom of the Father through the divinity of the Third Person."¹

Pico, both in his Cabalistic conclusions and in his Apology, distinguishes between different kinds of Cabala. In the first conclusion he says:

Quicquid dicant cacteri Cabaliste, ego prima diuisione scientiam Cabalae in scientiam Sephirot & Semot, tanquam in practicam & speculatiuam distinguerem.²

In the next conclusion, he subdivides "speculative Cabala" into four divisions:

Quicquid dicant alii Cabalistsae, ego partem speculatiuam Cabalae quadruplicem diuiderem, correspondentes quadruplici partitioni philosophiae, quam ego solitus sum afferre. Prima est scientia quam ego uoco Alphabetariae reuolutionis, correspondentem parti philosophiae, quam ego philosophiam catholicam uoco. Secunda, tertia, et quarta pars est triplex Merchiana, correspondentes triplici philosophiae particularis, de diuinis, de mediis & sensibilibus naturis.³

The first of these parts of speculative Cabala, described as "Catholic" philosophy done with revolving alphabets, is thought by Scholem to refer to letter-combinatory techniques of Abraham Abulafia and his school, the Path of the Names. The second with its allusion to the three worlds—the supercelestial world of the Sephiroth and the angels, the celestial world of the stars, and the sensible or terrestrial world—would presumably correspond to the Path of the Sephiroth.

In the third of the Cabalist conclusions, Pico gives a definition of practical Cabala:

Scientia quae est pars practica Cabalae, practicat totam metaphysicam formalem & theologiam inferiorem.⁴

Fortunately, he explains himself a little more clearly about the different kinds of Cabala in his Apology. He now abandons the sub-divisions of the speculative Cabala, and makes only two classifications which he calls two sciences both of which are to be honoured with the name of Cabala. One is the *ars combinandi*,

¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8. Cf. Scholem, *essay cited*, loc. cit.

³ Pico, p. 108. ⁴ *Ibid.*, loc. cit.

which would correspond to the Catholic philosophy done with revolving alphabets mentioned in the conclusion on speculative Cabala. And he now says that this art is like "that which is called amongst us the *ars Raymundi*" (that is the Art of Ramon Lull) though its procedures are not quite the same. And the second of the two sciences to be honoured with the name of Cabala is concerned with the powers of those higher things which are above the moon, and it is "the supreme part of natural Magic". He then repeats the two definitions. "The first of these two sciences is the *ars combinandi* which I called in my Conclusions a revolving alphabet; the second is about one way of capturing the powers of superior things, another way of doing which is by natural magic." He adds that Cabala in its original meaning does perhaps not quite apply to both these sciences, but through "transumption" they may both be given the name.¹

So far as I am able to understand him, therefore, Pico divides Cabala into two main branches. One is the *ars combinandi* which is probably derived from the letter-combinatory mysticism of Abraham Abulafia and which Pico thinks is somewhat similar to the Art of Ramon Lull. This side of Pico's Cabalism I shall entirely exclude from all further discussion here, as it belongs into the history of the Art of Ramon Lull. Here we are solely concerned with Pico's second kind of Cabala, the kind which is a "way of capturing the powers of superior things another way of doing which is by natural magic", and which is "the supreme part of natural magic". Evidently this second kind is magic. It is related to natural magic, but higher. It must go high up beyond the

¹ The passage is as follows: "In uniuersali autem duas scientias, hoc etiam nomine honorificarunt, unam quae dicitur ars combinandi, & est modus quidam procedendi in scientiis, & est simile quid, sicut apud nostros dicitur ars Raymundi, licet forte diuerso modo procedant. Aliam quae est de uirtutibus rerum superiorum, quae sunt supra lunam, & est pars Magiae naturalis suprema. Utraque istarum apud Hebraeos etiam dicitur Cabala, . . . et de utraque istarum etiam aliquando fecimus mentionem in conclusionibus nostris: Illa enim ars combinandi, est quam ego in conclusionibus meis uoco, Alphebetariam reuolutionem. est ista quae de uirtutibus rerum superiorum, quae uno modo potest capi, ut pars Magiae naturalis, alio modo, ut res distincta ab ea: est illa de qua loquor in praesenti conclusione, dicens: Quod adiuuat nos in cognitione diuinitatis Christi ad modum iam declaratum, & licet istis duabus scientiis nomen Cabalae, ex primaria & propria impositione non conueniat, transumptiue tamen potui eis applicari." Pico, pp. 180-1 (*Apologia*).

stars, which is all that natural magic aims at, into the super-celestial spheres; or it must have a way of capturing the power of the stars which is stronger than that of natural magic, because it is as if were harnessed to higher forces.

That this kind of Cabala is magic is abundantly proved by Pico's further remarks on it in the *Apology*.¹ Just as there has been among us, says Pico, a bad form of Magia which is necromancy, and which is not the same thing as the natural magic which he advocates; so there has been among the Hebrews a bad form, a degradation of Cabala. There have been wicked Cabalist magicians, falsely claiming to derive their art from Moses, Solomon, Adam, or Enoch, who said that they knew the secret names of God, and by what powers to bind demons, and have said that it was by such means as this that Christ did his miracles. But of course it is not this wicked kind of false Cabalist magic which Pico is advocating as anyone can understand, for he has expressly pointed out in one of his conclusions that the miracles of Christ could not have been done by way of Cabala. (The seventh of the magical conclusions states that Christ's miracles were not done either by Magia or by Cabala.²)

These excuses and disclaimers indicate pretty clearly that the methods of good practical Cabalists would be similar to those of the bad ones but used in a good way. They too would use the secret Hebrew names of God and names of angels, invoking them in the powerful Hebrew language or by magic arrangements of the sacred Hebrew alphabet. Bad Cabalists would raise bad angels or demons in this way; good ones would raise good angels. This would be a magic which would go beyond, and be far superior to, natural magic, for it would tap the powers in the supercelestial world, beyond the stars.

Examination of some of Pico's *Conclusiones* will bear out that his Cabalist magic was almost certainly of this kind.

Two of the sets of *Conclusiones* are important for this enquiry, namely the *Conclusiones Magicae* and the *Conclusiones Cabalistae*. The magical conclusions are partly about natural magic and partly about Cabalist magic, and some of them are about both. I have already quoted some of the ones on natural magic, and I

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 181. ² *Ibid.*, p. 105.

shall now quote some of those on Cabalist magic and on both of the magics.

Quodcunque fiat opus mirabile, siue sit magicum, siue Cabalisticum, siue cuiuscunque alterius generis, principalissime referendum est in Deum. . . .¹

This, the sixth magical conclusion, is interesting for its definition of the object of magic as doing a "wonderful work", that is a magical operation. It also specifies that such works can be done by different kinds of magic, by *Magia* (natural magic) or by *Cabala*, or by other kinds; the last clause would allow for the inclusion of, for example, Orphic magic and Chaldean magic on both of which Pico has something to say in other conclusions. And it solemnly recommends the spirit of piety towards God in which all good magical operations must be undertaken.

I have already quoted earlier the fifteenth magical conclusion which states that no magical operation is effective unless *Cabala* is added to it, and the twenty-second with its affirmation that no names are powerful for a magical work unless they are in Hebrew, or closely derived from Hebrew. I therefore go on to the twenty-fifth conclusion, which is as follows:

Sicut characteres sunt proprii operi Magico, ita numeri sunt proprii operi Cabalae, medio existente inter utrosque & appropriati per declinationem ad extrema usu literarum.²

Natural magic uses characters, Cabalist magic uses numbers through its use of letters. This is a clear reference to the numerical values of Hebrew letters which are to be taken into account in doing Cabalist magic. There is also a very obscure reference to a connection between the characters of magic and the letter-numbers of *Cabala*.

Sicut per primi agentis influxum si sit specialis & immediatus, fit aliquid quod non attingitur per mediationem causarum, ita per opus Cabale si sit pura Cabala & immediata fit aliquid, ad quod nulla Magia attingit.³

This, which is the twenty-sixth and last magical conclusion, is very important for the relation of *Magia* to *Cabala*. Natural magic

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 105-6. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

uses only intermediary causes, the stars. Pure *Cabala* goes immediately to the first cause, to God Himself. It can thus do works to which no natural magic can attain.

Of the Cabalistic conclusions, I have already quoted the first three which define the different kinds of *Cabala*, and I now select for quotation some of the others. In thinking about the Cabalist conclusions one cannot be quite sure that they are magical in purpose (as the magical conclusions certainly are) or whether some, perhaps most, of them are not purely mystical. Is Pico talking about a mystical ascent of the soul through the spheres to the Sephiroth and the mystical Nothing beyond them? Or does he envisage using magical means for this ascent or at gaining magical powers for operations from it? In a personality such as his, the fine line dividing mysticism from magic is difficult and perhaps impossible to trace.

Modus quo rationales animae per archangelum Deo sacrificantur, qui a Cabalisticis non exprimitur, non est nisi per separationem animae a corpore, non corporis ab anima nisi per accidens, ut contigit in morte osculi, de quo scribitur praeciosa in conspectu domini mors sanctorum eius.¹

This, the eleventh conclusion, is certainly profoundly mystical. In a supreme trance, in which the soul is separated from the body, the Cabalist can communicate with God through the archangels, in an ecstasy so intense that it sometimes results, accidentally, in the death of the body, a way of dying called the Death of the Kiss. Pico was greatly preoccupied with this experience and mentions the *mors osculi* in his commentary on Benivieni's poem.²

Non potest operari per puram Cabalam, qui non est rationaliter intellectualis.³

The operations of pure *Cabala* are done in the intellectual part of the soul. This immediately marks them off from the operations of natural magic, which are done only with the natural *spiritus*.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 108-9.

² Commentary on Benivieni's *Canzona de Amore*, Lib. III, cap. 8. (Pico, p. 753; *De hominis dignitate, etc.*, ed. Garin, p. 558.)

³ Pico, p. 109.

Qui operatur in Cabala . . . si errabit in opere aut non purificatus accesserit, deorabitur ab Azazale. . . .¹

It is possible that this could refer only to mystical operations, attempts to reach the archangels which go wrong and encounter a bad angel instead. Or it could be one of the usual warnings to magicians of the preparations and purifications necessary before attempting to operate, and of the awful dangers which await a magician who makes a mistake in his magic or attempts to operate when not properly prepared.

The natural magic, which carefully avoided trying to reach star demons had taken precautions against such risks as these. For some of the star demons were good but others bad, hence it was better not to attempt to do anything more than *spiritus* magic. Although Pico's higher magic is angelic and divine, he is not altogether safe, for there are bad angels as well as good angels. Unpleasant though it might be to encounter face to face the tall dark man with red eyes, the Egyptian decan demon for the first face of Aries, it might be even worse to be devoured by this terrible Jewish bad angel, Azazael!

In the forty-eighth Cabalist conclusion, Pico shows that he fully understands that there is a relationship between the ten spheres of the cosmos—the seven spheres of the planets, the eighth sphere or the firmament of fixed stars, the empyrean, and the primum mobile—and the ten Sephiroth or Numerations of Cabala.

Quicquid dicant caeteri Cabalisticæ, ego decem sphaeras, sic decem numerationibus correspondere dico, ut ab edificio incipiendo, Jupiter sit quartæ, Mars quintæ, Sol sextæ, Saturnus septimæ, Venus octavæ, Mercurius nonæ, Luna decimæ, tum supra aedificium firmamentum tertie, primum mobilæ secundæ, coelum empyreum primæ.²

Though the way in which he is counting here is confusing,¹ Pico is thinking of correspondencies between the ten spheres and the ten Sephiroth such as are sometimes set out as follows:

<i>Sephiroth</i>	<i>Spheres</i>
(1) Kether	Primum mobile
(2) Hokhmah	Eighth sphere
(3) Binah	Saturn

¹ *Ibid.*, loc. cit. ² *Ibid.*, p. 111.

³ By starting with the empyrean, instead of the primum mobile, and by displacing Saturn, Pico seems to confuse the normal order.

(4) Hesod	Jupiter
(5) Gevurah	Mars
(6) Rahimin	Sol
(7) Netsch	Venus
(8) Hod	Mercury
(9) Yesod	Luna
(10) Malkuth	Elements

It is this relationship of the Sephiroth with the spheres of the cosmos which makes of Cabala a theosophy related to the universe. And it is this relationship which makes it possible to speak of Cabalist magic as the completion of natural magic, or a higher form of natural magic, reaching higher spiritual forces which are yet organically related to the stars.

In the sixty-sixth Cabalist conclusion, Pico describes how he "adapts our soul" to the ten Sephiroth, describing them by their meanings, as follows:

Ego animam nostram sic decem Sephirot adapto, ut per unitatem suam fit cum prima, per intellectum cum secunda, per rationem cum tertia, per superiorem concupiscibilem cum quarta, per superiorem irascibilem cum quinta, per liberum arbitrium cum sexta, & per hoc totum ut ad superiora se conuertitur cum septima, ut ad inferiora cum octava, & mixtum ex utroque potius per indifferentiam uel alternariam adhaesionem quam simultaneam continentiam cum noua, & per potentiam qua inhabitat primum habitaculum cum decima.¹

This compares with the meanings of the Sephiroth as given by Scholem² as follows:

	<i>Pico</i>
<i>Kether</i> : the Supreme	Unity
<i>Hokhmah</i> : Wisdom	Intellect
<i>Binah</i> : Intelligence	Reason
<i>Hesod</i> : Love or Mercy	Superior concupiscence
<i>Gevurah</i> : Power and Wrath	Superior irascibility
<i>Rahimin</i> : Compassion	Free-will
<i>Netsch</i> : Eternity	That through which all converts to superiors
<i>Hod</i> : Majesty	That through which all converts to inferiors
<i>Yesod</i> : Basis	Mixtures, etc.
<i>Malkuth</i> : Kingdom or Glory	The power of the first

¹ Pico, p. 113.

² Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 209.

Pico's meanings are, as can be seen, mostly the same, and he shows understanding of the circular arrangement, or movement, of the Sephiroth through which the last connects with the first.

It is no accident that there are seventy-two of Pico's Cabalist conclusions, for the fifty-sixth conclusion shows that he knew something of the mystery of the Name of God with seventy-two letters:

Qui sciuerit explicare quaternarium in denarium, habebit modum si sit peritus Cabalae deducendi ex nomine ineffabili nomen 72 litterarum.¹

All that we need to retain of the mysteries of the Cabalist conclusions is that Pico knew in some form the outline of the Path of the Sephiroth and its connections with the cosmos, and that this was why Cabala connected with natural magic as its higher form. From the magical conclusions, we know that he did envisage doing practical Cabala, or Cabalist magic, though the details of the way in which he did this only the initiated can explain. More could doubtless be learned from Reuchlin's *De arte cabalistica* (1517)² in which several of Pico's Cabalist conclusions³ are quoted and commented upon and in which the practitioner of Cabala could learn much that was not explained by Pico, for instance that angels, who are voiceless, are better communicated with by *signacula memorativa* (Hebraic mnemonic signs) than by speaking their names.⁴ Reuchlin treats at length of the letter-number calculations, gives many names of angels, including those of the seventy-two who form the Name of God (Vehuiah, Ieliel, Sitaël, Elemiah, and so on)⁵ and instructions how to summon the more familiar Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael.⁶ Through Reuchlin, Pico's Cabalist magic leads straight on to the angel magic of Trithemius or of Cornelius Agrippa, though these magicians were to work it in a more crudely operative spirit than the pious and contemplative Pico.

Pico's oration on the Dignity of Man echoes throughout with the words *Magia* and *Cabala*; these are the basic themes of his

¹ Pico, p. 112.

² Johannes Reuchlin, *De arte cabalistica*, Hagenau, 1517.

³ For example, the 19th magical conclusion is quoted (*ed. cit.*, p. 58 *recto*) and the first Cabalist conclusion (p. 64 *recto*).

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 56 *verso*. ⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58 *verso*. ⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 57 *recto*.

whole song. After the opening quotation from Trismegistus on man, the great miracle, comes the main eulogy of natural magic,¹ after which the speaker passes on to the mysteries of the Hebrews and the secret tradition stemming from Moses.² The oration is full of secrets not fully revealed. The Egyptians sculptured a sphinx on their temples to show that the mysteries of their religion must be guarded under a veil of silence.³ The Cabala of the Hebrews contains mysteries handed on under a seal of silence.⁴

Sometimes he comes near to revealing a secret:

And if it is permissible, under the veil of enigma, to mention in public something of the most secret mysteries . . . we invoke Raphael, the celestial doctor that he may liberate us with ethics and dialectics, like a salutary physician. In us, now restored to good health, will dwell Gabriel, the force of the Lord, who *leading us through the miracles of nature and showing us where dwell the virtue and power of God*, will present us to Michael, the high priest, who, after our service to philosophy, will crown us, as with a crown of precious stones, with the priesthood of theology.⁵

How do we invoke Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael, so that they dwell in us with all their powers and knowledge? Do we perhaps know their secret names and numbers? Is there a secret of practical Cabala at the core of this lofty mystical aspiration?

The praise of magic and of man as Magus in the oration is couched in general rhetorical terms, and only hints at the secrets of magical procedures. But it is certainly in praise of both *Magia* and *Cabala*, and it would therefore seem that the complete Renaissance Magus, as he burst upon the world for the first time in Pico's oration in his full power and Dignity, was a practitioner of both natural magic and also of its "supreme form", practical Cabala.

In his study of Ficino's magic, D. P. Walker has suggested that it was probably mainly subjective, that is to say he used it chiefly on himself.⁶ It worked through the imagination, by conditioning the imagination through various ways of life and rituals towards receiving inwardly the divine forms of the natural gods. It was

¹ Pico, *De hominis dignitate etc.*, ed. Garin, pp. 102 ff., 152 ff., etc.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 155 ff., etc. ³ *Ibid.*, p. 157. ⁴ *Ibid.*, *loc. cit.*

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 129, 131. ⁶ Walker, pp. 82-3.

the magic of a highly artistic nature, heightening the artistic perceptions with magical procedures. The same is probably true of Pico's use of practical Cabala, that it was mainly a subjective use of Cabalist magic by a deeply religious and artistic nature. In what forms—perhaps more sublimely beautiful in his imagination than even the angelic forms painted by a Botticelli or a Raphael—did Raphael, Gabriel, and Michael come to dwell with Pico della Mirandola?

And perhaps it is also chiefly in this imaginative and artistic sense that we should understand the influence of the Renaissance magic of the type inaugurated by Ficino and Pico. The operative Magi of the Renaissance were the artists, and it was a Donatello or a Michelangelo who knew how to infuse the divine life into statues through their art.

The double magic of Pico brought magic quite inevitably within the sphere of religion. If even Ficino's mild cult of the natural gods as a kind of medical therapy involved him in difficulties with theologians, Pico's difficulties from the same quarter were bound to be much graver and deeper, for, by harnessing natural magic to Cabala, he took magic right up into the supercelestial world of divine and angelic powers. The cult which went with the religious magic, as compared with, for example, the solar rites of natural magic, was the religious cult itself. In the *Heptaplus* it is said that, in order to unite ourselves with the higher natures, we must follow the cult of religion with hymns, prayers, and supplications¹; and in the Orphic conclusions, the "hymns of David", that is the Psalms, are spoken of as incantations as powerful for the work of Cabala, as the hymns of Orpheus are of value for natural magic.

Sicut hymni David operi Cabalae mirabiliter deseruiunt, ita hymni Orphei operi ueri licitae, & naturalis Magiae.²

Thus a practical Cabalist singing a psalm is performing a rite similar to the natural magician intoning an Orphic hymn—similar, but more powerful, because we are told in another Orphic conclusion, which I quoted above, that the Orphic hymns have no power unless "the work of Cabala" is added to them. It is difficult to understand how Cabala could be done at the same time as Orphic singing. Possibly Pico simply means that Psalm singing

¹ Pico, *De hominis dignitate, etc.*, ed. Garin, pp. 319, 321.

² Pico, *Opera*, p. 106.

should alternate with Orphic singing. Or perhaps it is done with an *intentio animae* towards the true God above nature whilst singing the hymns to the natural gods. Or could it be through influence of religious chanting on the hymns to the natural gods, which would also work the other way, as a memory of the hymns to the natural gods within the religious hymns to the God of David sung in church? The problem is perhaps insoluble, but in thinking of it we are in the presence of a problem which was to agitate later controversies about religion in relation to magic, namely, should a religious reform involve putting more magic into religion, or taking the magic out of it? If one puts the problem, not only in these terms, but in terms of magical and wonder-working images in Christian churches the possible relevance of this tremendous Renaissance emphasis on religious magic to the Reformation and its iconoclasm is a question which begins to raise its head.

The connection between magic and Christianity in Pico's formulations is made even closer and more formidable by his extraordinary claim that Magia and Cabala help to prove the divinity of Christ. The seventh of the magical conclusions is as follows:

Nulla est scientia, que nos magis certificet de diuinitate Christi, quam Magia & Cabala.¹

What exactly he meant by this amazing statement is nowhere fully explained, but this was the conclusion to which most exception was taken, which raised a storm of protest, and which he concentrated on apologising for and defending in his *Apology*.² Some of the Cabalist conclusions refer to the power of Cabala for confirming the divinity of Christ.

7 Nullus Hebraeus Cabalista potest negare, quod nomen Iesu, si eum secundum modum & principia Cabalae interpretemur, hoc totum praecise & nihil aliud significat, id est Deum Dei filium patrisque sapientiam per tertiam diuinitatis personam, quae est ardentissimus amoris ignis, naturae humanae in unitate suppositi unitum.

15 Per nomen Iod, he uau, he, quod est nomen ineffabile, quod dicunt Cabalistae futurum esse nomen Messiae, euidenter cognoscitur futurum eum Deum Dei filium per spiritum sanctum hominem factum, & post eum ad perfectionem humani generis super homines paraclatum descensurum.³

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 105. ² *Ibid.*, pp. 166 ff.

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 108, 109. Cf. also Cabalist conclusions, 14, 16 (*ibid.*, p. 109).

It was thus, through Cabalistic letter-manipulations that the ecstatic young man perceived with rapture that IESU is indeed the name of the Messiah, the Son of God.

But how did Magia also prove the divinity of Christ? I have no explanation of this to offer, unless it is to be supposed that Pico thought of the Eucharist as a kind of Magia. Readers interested in this problem may be referred to Pico's treatise on the Eucharist,¹ in which I have not been able to find any definite use of the word Magia.

So, with the utmost confidence and boldness, the most devout Christian mystic, Pico della Mirandola, advanced to his defence Magia and Cabala. Far from being magics in which a Christian must not dabble, they are, on the contrary, magics which confirm the truth of his religion and lead him into a greater spiritual awareness of its mysteries. And yet, this was a double-edged tool which Pico was using in defence of his religion, and he was aware of its other dangerous cutting edge, which he guarded against in the seventh magical conclusion, repeated with great emphasis in his Apology:

Non potuerant opera Christi, uel per uiam Magiae, uel per uiam Cabalae fieri.²

If Magia and Cabala have such power, was it by these means that Christ did his wonderful works? No, says Pico with the utmost emphasis. But later magicians were to take up this dangerous thought.

There is yet another aspect of Pico's crucially important position in the history of our subject. The Magia of the oration is ultimately derivable from the magic of the *Asclepius*, a derivation which Pico boldly emphasises when he begins the speech with Hermes Trismegistus on the great miracle of man. Thus, in yoking together Magia and Cabala, Pico was really marrying Hermetism to Cabalism, a union—which, as emphasised earlier in this chapter, Pico was the first to bring about—from which was to spring a progeny of Hermetic-Cabalists, composers of works of vast complexity and infinite obscurity as numerous as they are baffling.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 181 ff.

² *Ibid.*, p. 105; in *Apologia*, *ibid.*, pp. 166 ff., 181, etc.

In the last chapter, it was suggested that the mediaeval magic was reformed and superseded in the Renaissance by the new style philosophic magic. There was also a type of mediaeval magic which used names of angels, names of God in Hebrew, invocations in bastard Hebrew and curious magical arrangements of letters and diagrams. Magicians ascribed such magics as these to Moses, and more particularly to Solomon, and one of the most characteristic text-books of this type of magic was the work known as the *Clavis Salomonis*¹ which was widely circulated surreptitiously in variant forms. It is probably of this type of work that Pico is thinking when he says that his practical Cabala has nothing to do with wicked magics going under the name of Solomon, Moses, Enoch, or Adam, by which demons were conjured by bad magicians.² When seen in the context of the lofty philosophical mysticism of Cabala and from the stand-point of some real knowledge of Hebrew and the mystique of the Hebrew alphabet, those old magics were seen to be not only wicked, but also ignorant and barbarous. They are replaced by practical Cabala, the learned Hebrew magic which takes its place beside the learned Neoplatonic magic as one of the two disciplines which together make up the equipment of the Renaissance Magus.

We begin to perceive here an extraordinary change in the status of the magician. The necromancer, concocting his filthy mixtures, the conjuror, making his frightening invocations, were both outcasts from society, regarded as dangers to religion, and forced into plying their trades in secrecy. These old-fashioned characters are hardly recognisable in the philosophical and pious Magi of the Renaissance. There is a change in status almost comparable to the change in status of the artist from the mere mechanic of the Middle Ages to the learned and refined companion of princes of the Renaissance. And the magics themselves are changed almost out of recognition. Who could recognise the necromancer studying his *Ficatrix* in secret in the elegant Ficino with his infinitely refined use of sympathies, his classical incantations, his elaborately Neoplatonised talismans? Who could recognise the conjuror, using the barbarous techniques of some *Clavis Salomonis*, in the mystical Pico, lost in the religious ecstasies of Cabala, drawing archangels to his side? And yet there is a kind of continuity because the

¹ Thorndike, II, pp. 280-1.

² Pico, p. 181 (*Apologia*).

techniques are at bottom based on the same principles. Ficino's magic is an infinitely refined and reformed version of pneumatic necromancy. Pico's practical Cabala is an intensely religious and mystical version of conjuring.

Just as the old necromancy was ultimately derivable from late antique types of magic which flourished in the context of the Hermetism, or pagan gnosticism of the early centuries A.D., so did the old conjuring go back to the same period and the same type of sources. Names of angels, names of God in Hebrew, Hebrew letters and signs, are a feature of gnostic magic in which pagan and Jewish sources are inextricably mingled. This mingling continues in the later tradition. There are, for example, names of Jewish angels in *Picatrix*, and the authorship of some "Keys of Solomon" is ascribed to "Picatrix".¹ Thus both the Renaissance Magic and its Cabala could be regarded as reformed revivals of magics ultimately derivable from pagan and Jewish gnosticism.

Moreover, the two theoretical contexts in which the two kinds of magic revive in the Renaissance—namely the *Hermetica* and Cabala—are both gnostic in origin. The *Hermetica* are collections of documents of pagan gnosticism of the early centuries A.D. in some of which (particularly the account of creation in *Pimander*) there is Jewish influence. And, as the researches of G. Scholem have recently emphasised, there is a strong gnostic influence in early Jewish Cabala,² and underlying the Neoplatonism with which it was mingled in the Spanish Cabalism of the Middle Ages. He has drawn attention, in particular, to one most interesting example of this. In the pagan gnostic theory of the ascent of the soul through the spheres, in which it casts off the influences of matter, its final regeneration takes place in the eighth sphere where the Powers and Virtues of God enter into it. I resumed an example of this doctrine in the second chapter, in the outline of "Egyptian Regeneration" from *Corpus Hermeticum XIII* with its description of the entry of the Powers into the regenerated soul in the eighth, or "ogdoadic" sphere, after which the Powers sing in the soul the "ogdoadic hymn" of regeneration.³ Scholem has shown that in the

¹ Thorndike, II, p. 281, note 1.

² G. Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and the Talmudic Tradition*, New York, 1960; see also Scholem's *Major Trends on gnostic influence on the Cabala*.

³ See above, pp. 28-30.

Hekhaloth literature (one of the predecessors of Cabala) there is exactly the same conception, the divine Glory and Power being thought of as in the eighth sphere, and even the word "ogdoas" is translated into Hebrew.¹

Now, curiously enough, Pico della Mirandola saw a connection between Hermetism and Cabala, and what he saw is perhaps almost the same as what Scholem has arrived at by his scholarly methods. Pico draws ten *Conclusiones* from Hermes Trismegistus, which come just before the Cabalist conclusions. The ninth of these Hermetic conclusions is as follows:

- 9 Decem intra unumquemque sunt ultores, ignorantia, tristitia, inconstantia, cupiditas, iniustitia, luxuries, invidia, fraus, ira, malitia.²

Pico is quoting from *Corpus Hermeticum XIII* as translated by Ficino where the twelve "punishments" of matter are translated as "ultores" and their names are translated³ exactly as Pico gives them here, except that he has left out two of them, making only ten "punishments" or evil material forces, instead of twelve. It will be remembered that in *Corpus Hermeticum XIII*, the twelve "punishments", deriving from the zodiac and representing man under the power of the stars, are driven out by ten good forces or Powers and Virtues of God, and when the decade has driven out the dodecade, the soul is redeemed and sings the "ogdoadic" song. Pico had a reason for reducing the "ultores" to ten, for he wanted to make a comparison with Cabala in his following, and tenth, Hermetic conclusion.

- 10 Decem ultores, de quibus dixit secundum Mercurium praecedens conclusio, uidebit profundus contemplator correspondere malae coordinationi denariae in Cabala, & praefectis illius, de quibus ego in Cabalisticis conclusionibus nihil posui, quia est secretum.⁴

I believe that this means that Pico thinks that the Hermetic "punishments" correspond to ten evil things⁵ in Cabala which are driven out by their good opposites—that is by the ten Sephiroth—in an experience of which he did not speak in the Cabalist con-

¹ Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 65 ff.

² Pico, p. 80. ³ See above, pp. 30-1. ⁴ Pico, *loc. cit.*

⁵ According to S. L. MacGregor Matthews, *The Kabbalah Unveiled*, London, 1951, the evil opposites of the Sephiroth would be the ten arch-devils, Satan, Beelzebub, and so on.

clusions, because it was too secret and holy to divulge. That is to say (or so I interpret it), Pico believes that the fundamental experience of the Cabalist, when the ten Sephiroth or Powers and Names of God, take up their abode in his soul, having driven out all evil forces, is the same as the experience of the Hermetist when the Powers, having driven out the Punishments, come to dwell in him and sing within him the "ogdoadic" hymn of regeneration.

If my interpretation of these Hermetic conclusions is correct, then it was not only on the level of their magics that Pico married together Hermetism and Cabalism, but on the very deep level of the actual structure of their religious experience, having perceived a basic similarity between the Hermetic system of the Powers and their opposites in a cosmic framework, and the Cabalist system of the Sephiroth and their opposites, also in a cosmic framework.

For Pico this remarkable essay in comparative religion would not take the critical form of a recognition of gnostic elements in Cabala comparable with Hermetic gnosticism. For him the comparison would be a rapturous realisation that what the Egyptian Moses, Trismegistus, teaches about the Powers and the Punishments is the same as what Moses, as reported by the Cabalists, teaches about the Sephiroth and their opposites.

The deepest root of the Renaissance revaluation of magic as a spiritual force allied to religion lies in the Renaissance interest in gnosticism and the *Hermetica*, to which, as we have just seen, Pico was able to relate his interest in Cabala. Much new work has been done in recent years on Hermetism in the Renaissance and it may eventually become apparent that both Ficino's Neoplatonism and Pico's attempted synthesis of all philosophies on a mystical basis are really, at bottom, an aspiration after a new gnosis rather than a new philosophy. At any rate, it was their immersion in the atmosphere of gnosis through their veneration for Hermes Trismegistus which led Ficino and Pico to their religious approach to magic and to their placing of the Magus on a lofty pinnacle of insight, a position very different from that held by the vulgar necromancers and conjurers in former less enlightened times.

Finally, it may be pointed out that the Dignity of Man the Magus in Pico's famous oration rests on a gnostic text, not on a patristic text. Pico does not quote the whole of the passage in the *Asclepius* on man the great miracle with which his oration opens,

and which, in its context, claims that miraculous man is, in his origin, divine:

And so, O Asclepius, man is a *magnum miraculum*, a being worthy of reverence and honour. For he goes into the nature of a god as though he were himself a god; he has familiarity with the race of demons, knowing that he is of the same origin; he despises that part of his nature which is only human for he has put his hope in the divinity of the other part.¹

The Fathers of the Church had placed man in a dignified position, as the highest of terrestrial beings, as spectator of the universe, as the microcosm containing within himself the reflection of the macrocosm. All these orthodox notions are in the oration on the Dignity of Man,² but the Dignity of Man as Magus, as operator, having within him the divine creative power, and the magical power of marrying earth to heaven rests on the gnostic heresy that man was once, and can become again through his intellect, the reflection of the divine *mens*, a divine being. The final revaluation of the magician in the Renaissance is that he becomes a divine man. Once again one is reminded of a parallel with the creative artists for this was the epithet which their contemporaries awarded to the great, of whom they often speak as the divine Raphael, or the divine Leonardo, or the divine Michelangelo.

Ficino, as we saw from his Apology, encountered difficulties from theologians because of his magic. Since Pico had been much bolder than Ficino, his difficulties were much more serious, and the Pico case became a theological *cause célèbre* which was long remembered. The main facts of the story can be very briefly resumed as follows.³ Owing to serious murmurs among Roman theologians about the heretical character of some of Pico's theses, Pope Innocent VIII was obliged to appoint a commission to go into the matter. Pico appeared several times before this commission to answer for his views. Eventually, several of the theses were

¹ C.H., II, pp. 301-2 (*Asclepius*); see above, p. 35.

² See E. Garin's study, "La 'Dignitas hominis' e la letteratura patristica", in *La Rinascita* (Florence, 1938), IV, pp. 102-46.

³ See L. Dorez and L. Thuasne, *Pic de la Mirandole en France*, Paris, 1897. Particularly valuable for the bearing of Pico's case on the problem of magic is the discussion by Thorndike (VI, pp. 484-511) which I have largely followed.

categorically condemned, amongst them the magical conclusion in which Pico states: *Nulla est scientia que nos magis certificet de divinitate Christi quam magia et cabala*. Despite his condemnation, Pico published his Apology, together with part of the oration on the Dignity of Man. The edition is dated May, 1487, but this date has been questioned. In the Apology, he defended his condemned propositions. This publication naturally involved him in fresh difficulties, and bishops with inquisitorial powers were appointed to deal with his case. In July, 1487, Pico made a formal submission and retraction to the commission, and in August the Pope issued a bull condemning all the theses and forbidding their publication, but exculpating Pico because of his submission. Nevertheless, when Pico fled to France, papal nuncios were sent after him to obtain his arrest, and he was for a time imprisoned at Vincennes, though his case was viewed with a good deal of sympathy in France, both in court and in university circles amongst whom his use of the teachings of the Parisian schoolmen in many of the theses was appreciated. He was allowed to return to Italy bearing French royal letters in his favour, and he was constantly supported by Lorenzo de' Medici who interceded for him with the Pope. He was therefore allowed to live in Florence, though under rather a cloud, and his way of life was one of extreme piety and asceticism, under the influence of Savonarola. He died in 1494, on the day that the French king's armies entered Florence.

In 1489, a long reply to Pico's Apology was published by Pedro Garcia, a Spanish bishop who had been one of the commission which examined Pico. Garcia's work has been analysed by Thorndike,¹ who has pointed out its great importance for the history of the attitude to magic. A large part of the work is concerned with refuting Pico's thesis that "there is no science which gives us more assurance of Christ's divinity than magic and the Cabala." Garcia is opposed to magic of any kind, all of which is evil and diabolical and contrary to the Catholic faith. He does not deny astrological theory and the consequent existence of occult sympathies, but states that these cannot be known or used by man except by diabolical assistance. He strongly condemns the use of astrological images, that is talismans, and refutes a Spanish theologian who has been trying to insinuate that Thomas Aquinas allowed their

¹ Thorndike, IV, pp. 497-507.

use. All this argument might, no doubt, be instructively compared with Ficino's tortuous attempts to draw in Thomas Aquinas in his defence of his talismans. The *De vita coelitus comparanda* was published in the same year as Garcia's book.

In connection with his condemnation of astrological images, Garcia has also to deal with those who have been saying that astrological magic can be as free from demonic influences as "ecclesiastical magic", such as the use of wax lambs blessed by the pope, or the blessing of bells. Garcia denies this, strongly affirming that Christian observances are not efficacious by virtue of the stars, but solely through the omnipotent power of the creator. Finally, Garcia denies the antiquity of Cabala.

Garcia's work is thus not only a condemnation of magic in itself but a refutation of the suggestion that "ecclesiastical magic" could have any connection with it.

In the next century, Archangelo de Burgo Nuovo wrote a defence of Pico against Garcia (printed at Venice in 1569),¹ and these two works—Garcia's and Archangelo's—may be said to epitomise the arguments for and against the connection of magic with religious practices which raged in the sixteenth century and to which D. P. Walker has drawn attention in his book.² The basic case for this controversy is the Pico case, and the arguments used by Pico's attackers and defenders.

In the last years of his life, Pico's situation was greatly eased by the advent to office in 1492 of a new pope. In that year, Innocent VIII was succeeded as the spiritual head of Christendom by Alexander VI, the Borgia pope, one of the most publicised and colourful characters of the Renaissance. Unlike his predecessor, the Borgia pope was not at all averse to astrology and magic, but, on the contrary, was deeply interested in those subjects, and he came most impressively to the rescue of Pico's orthodoxy. The bulls for Pico's absolution which Lorenzo de Medici had failed to obtain from Innocent VIII, in spite of repeated appeals, were promulgated by Alexander VI on June 18th, 1493, less than a year

¹ *Ibid.*, p. 507. Archangelo also wrote an exposition of Pico's Cabalistic Conclusions (*Cabalistarum delectiora . . . dogmata, a Ioanne Pico excerpta*, Venice, 1569).

² Walker, pp. 151, 153 ff., 178-85, etc.

after his elevation to the Holy See.¹ Not only that, the Pope wrote a personal letter to Pico himself, beginning "Dilecte fili Salute & apostolicam benedictionem." In this letter, Alexander rehearses the whole history of Pico's case, mentioning the nine hundred theses, the *Apologia*, the commission which had accused Pico of heresy, his flight to France, and ends by completely absolving both him and his works from all taint from heresy. Pico is described as illuminated by a "divina largitas" and as a faithful son of the Church. This letter was printed in all the editions of Pico's works,² thus encouraging readers to accept, on the highest authority, the writer's views as of unimpeachable orthodoxy. And this would include the view which was the chief cause of the outcry against Pico, and of the commission which Alexander quashed, that *Magia* and *Cabala* are valuable aids to Christianity.

It was in this changed atmosphere that Pico wrote, about 1493-4, his *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*. This work against astrology used to be taken as proof that Pico was free from astrological superstition. But its title alone shows that the kind of astrology which Pico is against is divinatory astrology, the normal astrology based on belief in the determination of man's fate by the stars and using calculations based on horoscopes to foretell the predestined future. And it has recently been pointed out³ that Pico repeats in this book what is practically Ficino's theory of astral influences borne on a "celestial spirit". Further, Pico actually cites "our Marsilius" as one of those who have written against astrologers "following in the traces of Plotinus, in the interpretation and exposition of whom he has much aided Platonic studies, amplifying and enlarging them."⁴ This could be an allusion to that commentary on Plotinus, the *De vita coelitus comparanda* and its *Magia naturalis* (including Plotinised talismans) as a work indirectly defended through being drawn in amongst those against

¹ Thorndike, IV, pp. 493, 560; Dorez and Thuasne, *Pic de la Mirandole en France*, p. 103; P. de Roo, *Material for a History of Pope Alexander VI*, Bruges, 1924, III, pp. 26-7. The letter which Pico wrote to Alexander in 1492 asking him to consider his case is printed in L. Dorez, "Lettres inédites de Jean Pic de la Mirandole", *Giornale storico della letteratura italiana*, XXV (1895), pp. 360-1.

² In the edition of Bâle, 1572, it is on the back of the title-page.

³ Walker, pp. 54-5.

⁴ Pico della Mirandola, *Disputationes adversus astrologiam divinatricem*, ed. E. Garin, Florence, 1946, p. 60.



3. Pinturicchio, Hermes Trismegistus with the Zodiac, Room of the Sibyls, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican (p. 115).



4. Pinturicchio, Mercury killing Argus, Room of the Saints, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican (p. 116).



5. Pinturicchio, Isis with Hermes Trismegistus and Moses, Room of the Saints, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican (p. 116).

astrology.¹ In short, Pico is really defending the Ficinian "astral magic" (he does not use this expression) which, as emphasised in the last chapter, is quite a different thing from astrology proper being a way of escape from astrological determinism by teaching how to control and use the stellar influences. Written about 1493-4, that is at about the time that the Pope had exonerated Pico from all blame, the book against astrology is really a vindication of *Magia naturalis*.

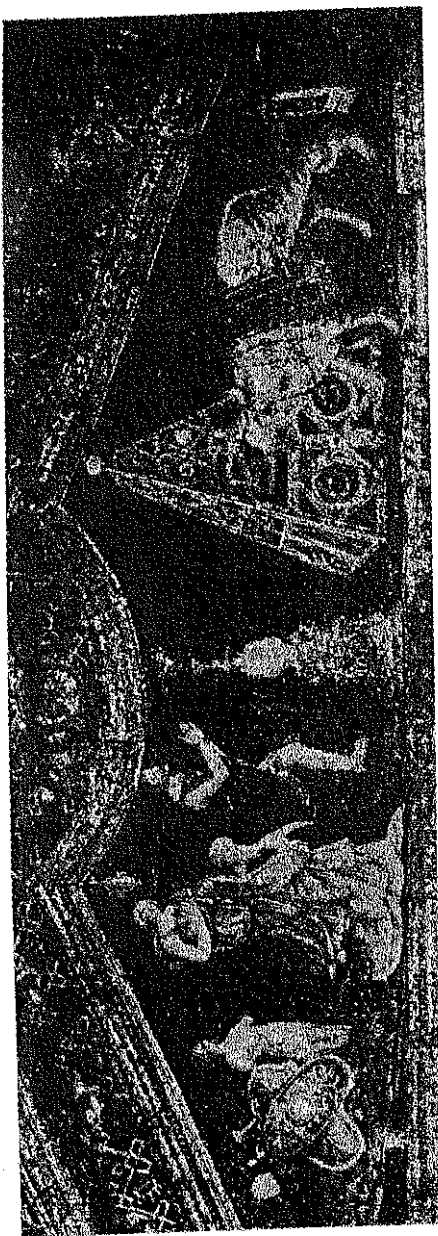
It is into the context of the controversy about Pico, in which Alexander VI came out so strongly on the side of the Magus, that one should put the extraordinary "Egyptianism" in the frescoes painted by Pinturicchio for Alexander in the Appartamento Borgia in the Vatican. These frescoes were studied by F. Saxl,² who pointed out that within an orthodox programme there are strange allusions. In the first room are twelve Sibyls, uttering their prophecies of the coming of Christ, and twelve Hebrew prophets. I would suggest that Lactantius and the Siena pavement teach us to look for the greatest Gentile prophet, Hermes Trismegistus, as likely to be present in the Room of the Sibyls, and I think he is there, as the prophetic figure with the zodiac (Pl. 3) who ends the series of the planets, above the Sibyls. In the next room are twelve prophets with the twelve apostles; the Christianity foretold by Hebrew and Gentile prophets has arrived, represented by the apostles. In the following rooms come the seven liberal arts, with Astrology the most prominent, seven saints, and seven scenes from the life of the Virgin. It is, so far, a perfectly orthodox programme.

But very strange are the Egyptian scenes in the Room of the Saints. The emblem of the Borgia family was the bull, and the Borgia bull becomes identified in this series with Apis, the bull worshipped by the Egyptians as the image of Osiris, the sun god. It is by a series of allusive shifts in meaning as the frescoes tell their story that the Egyptian Apis bull, or the sun, becomes identified with the Borgia bull, or the Pope as the sun. The Egyptian series begins with the story of Io, turned into a cow by

¹ But it could also refer to Ficino's criticisms of "bad" astrology in his commentaries on Plotinus; cf. Walker, p. 54. In any case, the point is that if Pico regards Ficino as a writer against astrology, then the kind of astrology which Pico is against cannot be the Ficinian type of Neoplatonised astral magic.

² F. Saxl, "The Appartamento Borgia", in *Lectures*, Warburg Institute, University of London, I, pp. 174-88; II, Pls. 115-24.

6 (a) Pinturicchio, Egyptian worship of Apis, Room of the Saints, Appartamento Borgia, Vatican (p. 116).



Juno, who set Argus to watch her. Argus was killed by Mercury, a scene shown in one of the paintings where Mercury, with drawn sword, is despatching Argus (Pl. 4). Having been rescued by Mercury from Argus, Io escaped into Egypt where she became the goddess Isis. After the scene with Mercury and Argus, there follows in the frescoes, a scene where Io-Isis is seated on a throne (Pl. 5), with a figure on her left identified by Saxl as Moses. The figure on her right is obviously the same person as the one shown with the zodiac in the Room of the Sibyls (Pl. 3). He is, I suggest, again Hermes Trismegistus, now shown with Moses.

The Mercury who killed Argus was, according to Cicero, Hermes Trismegistus who afterwards went into Egypt and gave the Egyptians their laws and letters. This is mentioned by Ficino in the *argumentum* before his *Pimander*:

Hunc (i.e. Trismegistus) asserunt occidisse Argum, Aegyptiis prae-fuisse, eisque leges, ac litteras tradidisse.¹

Hence, the Mercury in the fresco who kills Argus would be Hermes Trismegistus, and the next scene would show him in Egypt, as the lawgiver of the Egyptians, with, beside him, the law-giver of the Hebrews, Moses. This would be the usual Hermes-Moses comparison with which we have become so familiar in our study of Magia and Cabala.

Why did the Pope have such a programme painted early in his reign, a programme which glorifies the Egyptian religion (Pl. 6a), shows the Egyptian Apis bulls worshipping the Cross (Pl. 6b), associates Hermes Trismegistus with Moses? The answer to this question is, I believe, that the Pope wished to proclaim his reversal of the policy of his predecessor by adopting Pico della Mirandola's programme of using Magia and Cabala as aids to religion.

The profound significance of Pico della Mirandola in the history of humanity can hardly be overestimated. He it was who first boldly formulated a new position for European man, man as Magus using both Magia and Cabala to act upon the world, to control his destiny by science. And in Pico, the organic link with religion of the emergence of the Magus can be studied at its source.

¹ See above, pp. 2, 14.