A KEY TO THE ENIGMAS OF THE WORLD

TERTIUM ORGANUM: *A Key to the Enigmas of the World. By P. D. Ouspensky. Translated from the Russian by Nicholas Bessaraboff and Claude Bragdon. Introduction by Claude Bragdon. 8vo. 344 pages. Manas Press. Rochester, New York.*

IN Russia, "if we are to believe its writers," people still engage in violent discussion of what is neither here nor there. Idealists, materialists, theosophists, and even Christians roar at one another and tyrannize when they have the chance. Over here where abstractions are left to badly paid professionals, where a university education in philosophy has no effect except to make a few boys skeptical about the trinity, vindications of abstract freedom seem superfluous. One has heard the ladies talking about faith on the porch. But the business man, but the scientist—beyond a prejudice in favour of church or against it—what does he care, what on earth or in heaven does he care?

The fact is we are definitely committed, and talking would appear ridiculous. The church has seen that it will not amount to anything without one billion, three hundred million dollars. There was a minister who disapproved of art because "nothing is worth while which is not self-supporting."

And just lately it has become popular among Americans to materialize the spirits. The post-bellum revival is made out of very solid stuff indeed.

Now, however, quite inapropos, comes another book out of Russia by a mathematican, the mathematical ideas of which are announced as being simple enough for the understanding of a person with a high school education *(touché!)*, Tertium Organum: A Key to the Enigmas of the World. This title might formerly have been rewarded by a ceremonial burning, and now seems to ask for a place in the fourpenny box beside magic pamphlets and dream books. But as dream books have recently endured an apotheosis, the reader will advance with caution.

"I have called this system of higher logic Tertium Organum because *for us* it is the *third organ* (instrument) of *thought*, after those of Aristotle and Bacon. The first was the Organon, the second, Novum Organum. But *the third* existed earlier than the first."

In other words the author does not claim to have invented here anything new; and since nearly every analogy and argument advanced has attached to it some other name, one assumes that the question of originality does not enter into his purpose. Whereas among scientists one cannot find the egg for the clucking.

The purpose is unimportant. What he has accomplished is an artistic synthesis of certain liberating implications of the new mathematics with the very old affirmations of the mystics, who did not need mathematical assistance, but whose remarks can be made more palatable to moderns with the reassurances of modern authority. You get a man somewhat bewildered by telling him that the scientist whom he respects so much is beginning to think that two and two make five, and then you land on him with the full weight of the impossible. The thing has been tried before, but never, I think, so quietly.

Ouspensky's thesis is that the best way to change the world is to change one's point of view, one's consciousness; and in elaborating it, he lets out the famous secret that there is nothing else besides consciousness, that all one has to do is to take possession of one's property.

Starting with Kant's doctrine that time and space are necessary conditions of sensuous receptivity, categories of the intellect, without which we cannot approach the external world at all, he sees the present impossibility of our knowing the thing-in-itself, not as an eternal limitation, but as a problem. If the outer world is eternally limited, one can start from the inside. As a matter of fact we know already that the same things look different to different people; and how much more so to different animals. Consciousness has changed, has developed, apparently, though perhaps not according to Darwin's theory. Its further development should be conscious, will, perhaps, have to be conscious.

"The snail moves upon a single line and except for that line is

not conscious of anything. All sensations entering from the outside, the snail senses upon the lines of its motion, and these come to it out of time—from the potential they become present. For the snail our entire universe exists in the future and in the past, that is, in time." [The snail in fact is a one-dimensional being, existing in two other dimensions of which it has no inkling.]

"The higher animals—the dog, the cat, and the horse—are two-dimensional beings. To them all space appears as a surface, as a *plane*. Everything out of this plane lives for them in time."

There is not room here for the arguments with which Ouspensky reinforces this assertion, although they occupy some of the most interesting pages of the book. People who think they know animals will doubtless be annoyed at such a bald statement; but one can only suggest that they read Chapter IX, which may give them at least a respect for Ouspensky as an observer who does not tell anecdotes.

The implication, however, is inescapable. Man, too, is occupying space of which he has no inkling—fourth dimensional space—the phenomena of which appear to him in time.

Having come so far from the abysmal snail it would be a pity to stop, it would be worse than a pity. Analogies, however, are not going to help us farther. Why not say approximately what we mean?

Very obligingly Ouspensky makes the attempt, beginning again at the beginning. The axioms of Aristotle's Organon were these:

A is A.
A is not Not-A.
Everything is either A or Not-A.

Expressed by Bacon in Time:
That which was A will be A.
That which was Not-A will not be A.
Everything was and will be either A or Not-A.

After this pattern the superlogical axioms might be:
A is both A and Not-A.
Everything is both A and Not-A.
Everything is All.

"But these axioms are in effect absolutely impossible. . . . In reality the ideas of higher logic are inexpressible in concepts. . . . Let us therefore reconcile ourselves to the fact that it is *impossible* to express superlogical relations in our language as it is at present constituted."

There remains the method of art, which never used logic as more than a scaffolding for hints. Ouspensky, in the latter half of his book, "talks round" the subject, gives the negative side, and quotes the mystics. These are the pages in which he lands on his readers, in which, to use the more elegant phrase of the translator, he "rubs their noses" in mysticism.

Although women may feel more at home in this atmosphere, many persons will probably look back with regret at the analogies, and others will like neither analogies nor questions. But Ouspensky has got over discouragement at lack of understanding. "We" are very stupid, "we" are very lacking in boldness and a sense of responsibility, as a race. But perhaps there are in reality two races.

"The correctness of the very expression 'we' is subject to grave doubts. . . . Imagine a menagerie full of monkeys. In this menagerie a *man* is working. The monkeys observe his movements and try to imitate him but they can imitate only his visible movements; the meaning and aim of these movements are closed to them; therefore their actions will have quite another result. And should the monkeys escape from their cages and get hold of the man's tools, then perhaps they will destroy all his works and inflict great damage on themselves as well. But they will never be able to create anything. Therefore a *man* would make a great mistake if he referred to their 'work,' and spoke of them as 'we.' "

To Ouspensky as to other reformers (Jesus included) there are people with the same vision as himself and there are imbeciles. The imbeciles are not going to be punished; they are not wrong, they are quite all right, indeed. It is perfectly possible to describe *their* attributes in human language. Take their morals for example:

"Division into good and evil. Dualistic morals. Attempts to replace the inner law by the outer one. . . . Consciousness of

responsibility for immediate results of action only and in one relation only. The imposition of responsibility upon others, or upon institutions. 'I am fulfilling my *duty* or the *law*, and I am not guilty.' "

This is bull-moose psychology and would explain several billions of wars.

But if the two races are so cleanly divided, whom is Ouspensky talking to, whom is he persuading? There must be a lot of people on the edge, uncomfortable in either camp, perhaps some prominent ones among them. Ouspensky takes many quotations from The Varities of Religious Experience; but he also quotes, rather maliciously and without comment, a passage from A Pluralistic Universe which suggsets that William James never got beyond a reading acquaintance with the absolute: "First, you and I," wrote James, "just as we are in this room, and the moment we get below the surface, the unutterable itself! Doesn't this show a singularly indigent imagination? Isn't this brave universe made on a higher pattern with room in it for a long hierarchy of beings?" Alas, where is Memorial Hall, where is the Arboretum?

Ouspensky hints that if he wanted to he could tell of other methods of getting revelation besides the anaesthetic one. He recommends another book of his, The Wisdom of the Gods, to people who desire a truly ineffable experience of the absolute.

Tertium Organum, however, closes not with an exhortation to a more virtuous life, but with a rather strong statement in favour of freedom. Positivism, says Ouspensky (and by positivism he means materialism that goes to church and materialism that does not), was once a force of liberation, breaking apart the old dualistic tyranny. But now, the very people who formerly fought it are its most vigorous supporters. The method is no good any more, and at some future time it will be defined as a system "by which it was possible not to think of real things and to limit oneself to the region of the unreal and illusory." The idea of evolution is dead, and reincarnation along with it. The very popularity of the idea of progress compromises progress seriously. It was to be expected. Dead people cannot keep even true ideas alive. But to the living "all that arrests the motion of thought—is false."

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