Gurdjieff in the Light of Tradition (part 1)

by

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This fellow doth not cast out devils,but by Beelzebub.
St. Matthew XII. 26

Understood from all sides not only different deep-rooted minutiae of the common psyche of man, suspected by me and intriguing me all my life, but constated unexpectedly many such "delicacies", which, had they been known to Mr. Beelzebub, would, I dare say, grow the horns mentioned by me…even on his hooves.
Gurdjieff

If I had bared myself, I should inevitably have betrayed my tail which there on your planet I skillfully hid under the folds of my dress.
Beelzebub, Ch. XXXIV

WHY Gurdjieff? Because despite René Guénon's warning to "flee Gurdjieff like the plague," and although the man died a quarter of a century ago reportedly saying to his intimates, "*Vous voilà dans de beaux draps"* ("You're in a fine mess"), many people not infrequently endowed with real intellectual and spiritual potential continue to follow his groups in France, England, Sweden, Germany, Switzerland, the United States, Australia, the Argentine, and elsewhere, considering him as "precursor of the New Age."

Three errors almost invariably crop up when Gurdjieff's name is mentioned. First, that his work is acroamatic and cannot be properly evaluated except by those on the "inside": "His

science belongs to the knowledge of antiquity," writes Margaret Anderson, "and this knowledge is transmitted by word of mouth, never written about except in general terms." This is nonsense, and her nephew, Fritz Peters, rightly debunks what he calls the "almost beatific secrecy" of this unknowability cult. Revelation, the source of all basic religions, is by nature *revelatory,* while the last thing esoterism in its limitless universality can mean is the exclusivism of *clique;* schools of philosophy likewise exist for the *dissemination* of ideas, whatever their relative merits, and to claim that there is an indefinable something—both ancient and yet new—which only an "inner circle" of adepts can grasp is to subjectivize all possible approaches to understanding. Intelligence is by definition *intelligible,* and language—if words have sense—is the vehicle of communication. This observation is essential, since Gurdjieff/Ouspensky followers insist that the words can mean other than what they say, which if true would cast a grave responsibility on these authors for misleading countless readers. Tantra, Yoga, Hesychasm, Zen, Taoism, Vedanta, Platonism, Scholasticism, Hermeticism, the Kabbalah—let alone Freemasonry, occultism, secret societies, and pseudo-religions—ample documentation is there for all who care to find it; the only things "hidden" are the particular techniques and formulas a master may give a disciple (although these are generally known *grosso modo),* and the extent of a person's inner comprehension and realization (though here again "Ye shall know them by their fruits"). Naturally, if a thinker hoodwinks his thought in dark conundrums, riddles, mystification, and sundry obscure sophistries, then one is justified in brushing it off as just that. But when Peters goes on to say that "the emotional experience that most people had with Gurdjieff and his work is not something that can be explained in a logical, convincing manner," this is altogether different, for here we are in the domain of pure subjectivity, and there is no question but what the personage under study had an emanation that was powerfully contagious to the individuals in his *entourage.*

The second error is one of perspective, that it is impossible to pierce through the aura of mystery and arrive at an objective assessment of the man since there are preponderantly two mutually exclusive views of equal validity each to the persons concerned: some claim to see a saint in him while others find a devil. *Au choix!* Somewhat as though there could be two schools of thought on whether London is nearer to Paris or Tokyo. Spiritual sciences on their level obey laws no less rigorous than physical sciences, and the criteria are there for those qualified to judge. This in no way means overlooking what we shall see to be Gurdjieff's enigmatic and contradictory character.

The third fallacy hinges on the idea that since Gurdjieff claimed to be the recipient of teachings transmitted from antiquity, all depends on being able to determine whether or not the spiritual organization(s) involved and the line(s) of transmission are authentic, valid, and orthodox; whereas the whole crux of the matter is contingent on whether he was himself a legitimate representative and faithful purveyor of any truths to which he may have been exposed. Mahesh Yogi, for example, stems from a spiritual lineage tracing back to Sankarâchârya and is

none the more orthodox for that, having perverted the practices of his order while pretending to be the first to reveal the heart of the Vedanta. It goes without saying that anyone purporting to come from the fastnesses of Central Asia with a teaching for the West about the regeneration of mankind could simplify matters enormously by presenting clear and unequivocal credentials. Gurdjieff, however, has a reply to this: if things were to be made too accessible it would draw unwanted elements into his path and obstruct the initiatic ends of his mission—a strange condition on the part of a "scientific philosopher" (who practically considered himself an *avatar)* with a "manifesto" to humanity.

Documentation for this condensed study is drawn mainly from the following sources:

- *The Unknowable Gurdjieff.* By Margaret Anderson (Routledge and Kegan Paul).
- *Our Life with Mr. Gurdjieff.* By Thomas de Hartmann (Penguin Books).
- *Gurdjieff Remembered.* By Fritz Peters (Samuel Weiser).
- *In Search of the Miraculous.* By P. D. Ouspensky (Routledge and Kegan Paul).
- *Witness: The Story of a Search.* By John Godolphin Bennett (Coombe Springs Press).
- *Gurdjieff: Making a New World.* By J. G. Bennett (Turnstone Books).
- *Monsieur Gurdjieff.* By Louis Pauwels (Éditions du Seuil).
- *The Herald of Coming Good.* By G. Gurdjieff (Samuel Weiser).

It may be well to add that the seven works on Gurdjieff are far too unanimous in the portrait depicted to leave any doubt as to the intrinsic veracity and authenticity of the reporting; while the last book differs from the others only in that it reads like a caricature of this portrait.

Finally there is Gurdjieff's major opus: *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson: An Objectively Impartial Criticism of the Life of Man* (*All and Everything),* First Series (Routledge and Kegan Paul); and also the Second Series, *Meetings with Remarkable Men* (Routledge and Kegan Paul).[1]

The Background

Georgi Ivanovitch Gurdjieff was born according to his passport on the 28th of December, 1877 (although he claimed to be much older), at Alexandropol (formerly Gyumri and now

[1] The Third Series, *Life Is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*, still awaits publication.

Leninakan) in northwest Armenia, of a Greek family originally named Georgiades from a peculiar culture anciently established in Asia Minor. He says his aged father—for whom he had a remarkable veneration and whose maxims he enjoyed repeating, such as "If you wish to lose your faith, make friends with the priest" —was originally a wealthy cattle owner who lost his (and others) herds in a plague and had to turn to carpentry. This man was gifted as a local "bard" or *ashokh* (he apparently knew the Gilgamish epic) and *raconteur;* and certainly Gurdjieff inherited in no small degree the concomitant capacity for invention, which could explain in part, at least, his notoriety as a spinner of contradictory stories. On this point, moreover, his protagonists admit of no inconsistency, construing the trait as an allegorical lever for didactic purposes, while serving also as a consciously applied "shock" technique or "trial" to render the "physical, emotional, and mental" substance of his disciples more resilient and aware. The truth probably falls somewhere between, Gurdjieff exploiting an idiosyncrasy of character as a tool for "rectifying" the characters of others. Whatever the case, since the clues to his early training—apart from a few official documents and passports—lie solely in what he saw fit to divulge in his allegorical or what he calls "legominstic" manner, those determined to identify the sources of his message will have in large extent to decode the lineal tree(s) of his "investiture" by the fruits which were to drop in later years.

This does not mean, however, that all must be left to conjecture: Gurdjieff was by his lights a logical—hence "practical"—man, and much too "real" a personality to countenance total duplicity. Already in his childhood he was fascinated by magical phenomena of diverse kinds, including religious miracles, and he realized forces were at play that could not be explained by the known laws of physics and biology. By the age of eleven, at which time he says he started drinking, having all his life an "irresistible urge to do things not as others do them," he was frequenting the Romanys and Yezidis; when finally we find him organizing his own "circle" in Tashkent around 1911, he had behind him a private training by the dean of the Kars Military Cathedral, for both priesthood and medicine, and some twenty years of prodigious peregrinations throughout Turkestan and the surrounding regions in pursuit of occult wisdom. Alone or with other "Seekers of the Truth" he had penetrated more particularly Afghanistan, Kafiristan, Chitral, Kashmir, Sinkiang, Siberia, and Tibet or lands adjacent. He was brought up as much on Turkish as Armenian, which gave him a lingua franca for many of the places visited. He had likewise combed through Turkey, gone to what he claims was an Essene Jewish monastery near Jerusalem where he would have learned ritual dances based on a cycle of seven, studied Hesychasm at Mount Athos, and explored archeological sites in Crete, Egypt, Abyssinia, and especially in the ruins of Babylon searching for traces of the "Sarmân Brotherhood"—"Assembly of the Enlightened"—or "Inner Circle of Humanity" said in an Armenian book *Merkhavat* to have been founded there some four thousand, four hundred years ago. The word Sarmân or Sarmoun appears in certain Pahlavi texts to designate the custodians of Zoroaster's teachings. He learned more about Zoroastrianism from his contacts with the Yezidis of Kurdistan

at Sheikh Adi and Mosul, who in addition would have divulged their traditions inherited from Mithraism and Manichaeism.

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Gurdjieff writes that he had "the possibility of gaining access to the so-called 'holy-of-holies' of nearly all hermetic organizations such as religious, philosophical, occult, political and mystic societies, congregations, parties, unions etc., which were inaccessible to the ordinary man, and of discussing and exchanging views with innumerable people who, in comparison with others, are real authorities." He even professes to have made the Pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina with Sart Dervishes, although nothing came of it, as orthodox Islam held little attraction for him. He believed, however, that northern Sufi orders could well be under the hidden direction of the Khwajagân —"Masters of Wisdom"—themselves in turn delegated by the Sarmân "Inner Circle," the "Assembly-of-All-the-Living-Saints-of-the-Earth." We know how people were haunted at that period with the idea of a spiritual World Centre concealed in the heart of Asia (Saint-Yves d'Alveydre with his "Argattha" and Madame Blavatsky with her "Shambala")[2] from which an "Elite" directs the destiny of humanity—somewhat in the way that people earlier were intrigued right into the Renaissance with the idea that the Terrestrial Paradise might possibly still exist in some unattainable region on earth. Anyhow, Bokhara and not Mecca was for him the secret centre of Islam, where the Naqshbandîya Sufis—supposedly infiltrated by the Khwajagân—were concentrated until the close of the nineteenth century; and it is from them that J. G. Bennett thinks Gurdjieff adopted many ideas and techniques. The programme for the "movements" demonstrations which his group was to give in Paris and New York meanwhile attributes the sources of the "dances" and "rituals" to monasteries in Sari in Tibet, Mazari Sherif in Afghanistan, Kizilgan in the Keriya Oasis in Chinese Turkestan, and Yangi Hissar in Kashgar. Gurdjieff also writes that he had access in Central Asia "into a monastery well known among the followers of the Mahometan religion" where he became "absolutely convinced that the answers for which I was looking… can only be found… in the sphere of man's subconscious mentation"; again, that he went "to a certain Dervish monastery, situated likewise in Central Asia," where he spent two years in the study of hypnotism and the mechanism of the functioning man's subconscious sphere." Bennett guesses that this must have been a *tekki* (community centre) of the Yesevi order, a fraternity founded by the shaman-raised Ahmed Yesevi (born about 1042)—

[2] Thanks to information supplied by a Hindu friend and scholar, we know that these two Sanskrit terms have a venerable origin, appearing in an ancient Tibetan text, *The Road to Shambala*. This latter word designates "Abode of Siva," while Agarttha means' "ungraspable"; and in the context Shambala represents a transcendent Centre, Agarttha being the same Centre hidden in the earth.

the first of the Turkish Khwajas and called by the Turks Bab-Arslan, or Lion Father—at Yesi which was to become Tashkent. Because of their affiliations with shamanism the present-day Yesevis are said to be unfavorably regarded by other Sufi orders, but this affinity is just what would argue favorably with Gurdjieff, given their stress on cosmology, and the use of music, rhythm, magic, shock techniques, and perhaps also the "stop exercise"[3] which was later to feature in his method. Another clue dropped by Gurdjieff refers to the religious exercises of the Matchna monks in the eastern Gobi desert who had connections both with the Yesevis and with Tibetan tantric Buddhism. All this is very complicated; but then, Gurdjieff was not a simple man.

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A word must be inserted here on the subject of shamanism. In his chapter "Shamanism and Sorcery" in *The Reign of Quantity,* Guénon explains that the religion practiced by various Mongol peoples is essentially *primordial*[4] in origin with rites comparable to those of the Vedic tradition; in certain sectors, however, there has been an over-development of the cosmological sciences, leading to a pre-occupation with the animic domain and the manipulation of powers belonging to the inferior psychic realm with the attendant accumulation of magical forces which can present a real—if local—danger to the shaman himself, but which is nothing compared to the generalized danger that accrues when these potent magical residues are captured by people with quite other ends in view than the shaman himself—a mere instrument for condensing these forces—could ever dream of. Whether or not in writing these passages Guénon had someone like Gurdjieff in sight, it is certain that Gurdjieff for all the doors he may or may not have been able to open did not leave these monasteries with his bags empty. He even told Bennett in later times about acquiring powers: "If you wish to acquire something of your own, you must learn to steal."

How, meanwhile, did he maintain himself throughout those years? By trading in antiques and carpets and corsets, for one thing, and manufacturing bric-a-brac, repairing broken machinery, and organizing various rural enterprises "of a rather questionable character";[5] for

[3] Discussed in the next section.

[4] It is noteworthy that followers of Gurdjieff take pride in belonging to a "primordial current" that "transcends" the different religions.

[5] This "cunning old blade"—as Gurdjieff described himself at that period—tells how he was resting in the shade of trees in New Samarkand devising schemes to finance his travels, when he observed a number of sparrows in the branches above. Knowing the fondness of the Sarts in this region for songbirds, he forthwith searched out the nearest cabstand, where the drivers were dozing in the afternoon heat, and surreptitiously plucked from the horses' tails the hairs needed to make snares for the sparrows.

another, by serving very probably as an agent for the Russian government. He says he was "almost mortally… wounded three times in quite different circumstances" through being "punctured" by "a stray bullet." The first time was in Crete in 1896 just before the outbreak of the Graeco-Turkish War, where he may have arrived as a member of the Ethniki Etaireia, a subversive society supported by the Russian government to foment trouble in Macedonia. The second time was in Tibet in 1902 on the eve of the "Anglo-Tibetan War." Gurdjieff talked of his "Tibetan marriage" and how his eldest son had been appointed the abbot of an important lamasery. He could well have been in Tibet as a Russian political agent, where his name would have been pronounced Dorjieff since according to himself there is no "g" in Tibetan, but Bennett says the inference that he might have been the famous Lama Dorjieff who was a tutor of the Dalai Lama and later his emissary to Tsar Nicholas II crumbles before the photographic evidence.*

The third "stray bullet" was plunked into him in 1904 in the Trans-Caucasian region near Chiatur, "by some 'milashka' from among those two groups of people… the so-called Russian Army, chiefly Cossacks, and the so-called Gourians." These remarks heighten the hypothesis that he was both" running with the hare and hunting with the hounds," being caught up in the revolutionary movement, possibly in the same group with the Georgian Djugashivili, later to be known to the world as Joseph Stalin. It has recently been conjectured that Stalin at that time was playing the double role of Tsarist agent in the secret police (Okhrana) and revolutionary. Gurdjieff, of course, claims to have known Stalin and to have studied with him in the seminary at Alexandropol. He grants his "propensity during this period for… trying to place myself wherever… there proceeded sharp energetic events, such as civil wars, revolution, etc.," always in view of gaining more information about man's hidden motivations, and to "discover, at all

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With the first bird netted he repaired to his lodgings and clipped its feathers to the semblance of a canary, which he then colored fantastically with aniline dyes he had on hand for painting artificial paper flowers. This *rara avis* was peddled off in the markets of Old Samarkand for two roubles as a special "American canary," the proceeds paying for several cheap painted cages, soon to lodge more luckless "canaries." By the end of a fortnight our habile huckster had made a small fortune with the sale of some eighty caged, clipped, and painted sparrows, whereupon he took the next train out of town before a sudden rain or an inadvertent bath in their drinking troughs should expose the birds'—and his—true colors.

* Editorial Note. An expert on Tibet states that in Tibetan "G" is a particularly common letter. Witness such words as *gon-pa*—monastery, *gang*—who? which?, *ge-long—bhikku*—fully ordained monk, *gur-nza*—hymn same initial syllable as *Gur*djieff!); how could a person who had studied in Tibet be ignorant of such a fact? On the other hand, "F" is absent from the Tibetan alphabet; the final letter of Gurdjieff could not be reproduced exactly. (It is possible that if he said he had visited Tibet, he meant Ladak, sometimes known as "Little Tibet," which, forming part of the state of Kashmir at that time, would have been relatively accessible; but even so, this does not explain his alleged statement that "G" is wanting in the language).

costs, some manner or means for destroying in people the predilection for suggestibility which causes them to fall easily under the influence of 'mass-hypnosis'."

The solution he sought flashed upon him during a transformation of character that he would have undergone during convalescence in an eastern retreat from one of his bullet wounds, a transition leading to what Bennett calls "liberation from the 'pairs of opposites'" that Gurdjieff supposedly achieved in his thirty-second year. His autobiographical account of this insight is given in the *Third Series* of his writings—not yet published—entitled *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*.[6]

He had developed by this time highly concentrated psychic and hypnotic powers, and was frankly becoming something of a menace: people called him "the Tiger of Turkestan." For all his mental prowess, he was "haunted by the terror of 'inner emptiness,'" and felt it urgent to attain a permanent awareness that would free him from the tyranny and conditioning of automatic hereditary factors,—"to have outside myself, so to say, 'A never-sleeping-factor, a reminding-factor.' Namely, a factor which would remind me always, in my every common state, to 'remember myself.' But what is this!!! Can it be really so??!! A new thought!!! Why could not I, in this instance also, look to a 'universal analogy'? And here also is God!!!…

"God represents absolute goodness; He is all-loving and all-forgiving. He is the Just Pacifier of all that exists. At the same time, why should He, being as He is, send away from Himself one of his nearest, by Him animated, Beloved Sons, only for the 'way of pride' proper to any young and still incompletely formed individual, and bestow upon Him a force equal but opposite to His own?… I refer to the 'Devil.' This idea illuminated the condition of my inner world like the sun, and rendered it obvious that in the great world for the possibility of harmonious construction there was inevitably required some kind of continuous perpetuation of the reminding factor. For this reason our Maker Himself, in the name of all that He had created, was compelled to place one of His Beloved Sons in such an, in the objective sense, invidious situation. Therefore I also have now for my small inner world to create out of myself, from some factor beloved by me an alike unending source…

"I came to the conclusion, that if I should intentionally stop utilizing the exceptional power in my possession which had been developed by me consciously in my common life with people, then there must be forced out of me such a reminding source. Namely, the power based upon strength in the field of *Hanbledzoin* or as it would be called by others, power of telepathy and hypnotism…. And so, if consciously I would deprive myself of this grace of my inherence, then

[6] The extracts which follow are given in Bennett's *New World*.

undoubtedly always and in everything its absence would be felt. Never as long as I live shall I forget what state of mind resulted then."

Translated, this means that Gurdjieff resolved to forego the role of thaumaturge for his own aggrandizement and glory, and to transmit instead to those whom he considered qualified, his high-energy *hanbledzoin* as a "reminding-factor" for the good of mankind, in view of ultimately awakening humanity from its "mass-hypnosis"; and to judge from the state of things, it appears that a good deal of this force remains in circulation twenty-five years after his death. Bennett writes that "Gurdjieff was, more than anything else, a Sufi… The true way transmits a spiritual power, *baraka* or *hanbledzoin,* which enables the seeker to do what is quite beyond his unaided strength… This transmission of a higher energy that can be assimilated to the energy of the pupil is a vital part of the whole process, and in this sense it certainly can be said that Gurdjieff, at all times, was a teacher. Everyone who met him reported the sense of mastery, of a power which acted upon them… Sometimes, when the people could not perform the difficult tasks which he set them, he would tell them to 'draw on my *Hanbledzoin* and you will be able to do this work.'… He also, though not so specifically, referred to himself as being in contact with a higher source, and said that by drawing upon this higher source, the work for which he was responsible would be able to spread and gain strength in the world.… I think he wished to convey to us that we should, after his death,… become a means for the transmission of this higher energy."

The reader will not fail to notice in the long citation from Gurdjieff above, his divergence with Christian theology as to the identity of the Beloved Son sent into the world to redeem mankind; for him, in fact, the "Logos" without the participation of a "Neutralizing third force" (*fagologiria*) is purely "sterile."

Gurdjieff, incidentally, called psychoanalysis "nonsense," but there is notwithstanding an inescapable similarity in the remedial techniques developed by him and Sigmund Freud: both men made the "contribution" of turning magic into a therapeutic device; what Freud calls "the inhibitions of instinct" that have to be eradicated corresponds with what Gurdjieff calls "the influence of 'mass-hypnosis'"; the transference operated by the psychoanalyst through "playing the Devil" or acting as a "counterwill" (the "suspended superego") to his patient's will in order to cure the "neurosis"[7] corresponds with Gurdjieff's transmission of *hanbledzoin* as a "reminding-factor" or "counterhypnosis" in order to cure man of the "psychosis" of his propensity to suggestibility, namely, the automatic manifestations of his nature—the "Devil"[8]

[7] An intensive study on Freudianism, its background and ramifications, is given in *The Revolt Against Moses: A New Look at Psychoanalysis*, by Whitall N. Perry, published in the Spring 1966 number of *Tomorrow*.

[8] Peters writes that Gurdjieff "called himself a 'devil.'" Freud likewise said: "Do you not know that I am the Devil? All my life I have had to play the Devil, in order that others would be able to build the most

(reminding source) being "forced out" to exorcize the "demon" (hereditary factors)—"mercilessly, without any compromise whatsoever, to extirpate from the mentation and feeling of man the previous, century-rooted views and beliefs about everything existing in the world."[9]

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Back to Tashkent: it is in this Uzbekian oasis of Eastern and Western cultures, where shamanism, Buddhism, and Islam were practiced alongside Nestorian and Russian Orthodox Christianity—with a sprinkling of occult and theosophical societies on the fringe—that Gurdjieff first set himself up around 1910 as a mage, professional hypnotist, healer, and wonder-worker. He frequented the divers occultist organizations, which served for him as ready-to-hand "workshops-for-the-perfection-of-psychopathism" where he could "observe and study various manifestations in the waking state of the psyche of these trained and freely moving 'Guinea-Pigs,' allotted to me by Destiny for my experiments." Results were rapid, and within six months he was becoming well known as an "expert" and "a great '*maestro.*'" But his "workshops" proved too narrow in scope, affording him no more than three or four human types out of the needed "28 'categories-of-types' existing on Earth, as they were established in ancient times." He thus founded his "own 'circle' on quite new principles, with a staff of people chosen specially by me," and from which was later to emerge the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man. His efforts to introduce the hidden teachings of the "Masters of Wisdom" to mankind at large were claimed to have been sanctioned through "a certain definite agreement" that he secured from a "brotherhood" or "kind of monastery existing in the very heart of Asia" for "their future co-operation"; by different clues that were dropped, Bennett takes this to be a Sarmân sanctuary in the Keriya Oasis (Sinkiang) that presumably proffered guidance for the remainder of Gurdjieff's career.

Apart from the money he "sheared from disciples", Gurdjieff tells how he kept himself in funds at this time, by arranging contracts for road and railway construction; buying and selling stores, restaurants, and cinemas; driving cattle; participating in oil wells and fisheries; and dealing in rugs, Chinese porcelain, and cloisonné. Then in emergencies he could always fall back

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beautiful cathedral with the materials that I produced" (R. Laforgue, "Persönliche Erinnerungen an Freud", *Lindauer Psychotherapiewoche*, 1954, p. 49).

[9] From the preamble to *All and Everything*, as given in *The Herald of Coming Good*, p. 47.

on his healing powers: "There was not a single book on neuropathology and psychology in the library of Kars Military Hospital that I had not read and read very attentively." Bennett saw him "cure drug addicts and drunkards" in Turkey in 1921, and says that he repeated this later in Paris to help finance construction on the Prieuré at Avon near Fontainebleau, the final home of the Institute. And Peters tells how he witnessed the same thing in New York around 1935, when Gurdjieff was without other resources: "I became acquainted with a stream of 'patients'—at least they were not the usual 'followers'—who came to him regularly for 'treatments' of various kinds. Most of them were afflicted with something: they were alcoholics, dope-addicts, just plain neurotics, homosexuals, and what could be called 'adult delinquents' of one kind or another. I gathered that they paid him well to 'cure' them of whatever disease or manifestation happened to be afflicting them. I do not know in what the cures consisted,[10] except that all of them required long and frequent visits with him at all hours of the day or night.… The effect on the individuals was the usual one: they worshipped him, at least temporarily.…

This period of having to earn money did not last very long, and it was a relief to me when it was over… [and] he emerged from this rather woebegone characterization of a kind of quack-doctor living in shoddy circumstances.… The derelicts also vanished from the scene."

In 1911 Gurdjieff took a "special oath" binding himself in conscience to lead for the next twenty-one years "in some ways an artificial… and, for me, absolutely unnatural life." This may have helped in the accumulation of *hanbledzoin;* it certainly helped give a rationale to his eccentric and somewhat licentious behavior which was to confuse his disciples when he came to Moscow and St. Petersburg in 1912 in search of a wider range of personality-types for his expanding "workshop." Thus, when Gurdjieff's illustrious disciple, Peter Demianovitch Ouspensky, first met his master in Moscow in 1915, he was discomfitted by "the strange, unexpected, and almost alarming impression of a man poorly disguised, the sight of whom embarrasses you because you see he is not what he pretends to be and yet you have to speak and behave as though you did not see it… Many people got the impression that he was a gourmand, a man fond of good living in general, and it seemed to us that he often *wanted* to create this impression, although all of us already saw that this was 'acting'… In any other man so much 'acting' would have produced an impression of falsity. In him 'acting' produced an impression of strength, although… not always; sometimes there was too much of it." And Thomas de Hartmann, who at that time was a reserve Guards officer, writes: "I must say that my first reaction was anything but one of rapture or veneration." He was constrained to meet Gurdjieff in a café of such character that "if anyone were to find out that I had been there, I would have had to leave my regiment.… At one point, Mr. Gurdjieff said, 'There are usually more whores here.'

[10] In Meetings with Remarkable Men, Gurdjieff says it was through hypnotism: "After bringing a man into a certain state, [I] could influence him by suggestion to forget any undesirable habit."

Everything, including this coarse observation, was supposed not to attract but rather to repel a newcomer. Or if not to repel him, at least to make him hurdle the difficulties, holding fast to his aim in spite of everything." It is not at all uncommon, as is well known, for spiritual masters to test the mettle of potential disciples through rude ordeals of one kind or another, but there are limits and degrees and modalities—even so.

Gurdjieff, inevitably, found his way into the ill-starred court of Nicholas (whose person he respected, if not his polity) and Alexandra —from whose entourage he took to wife a lady-in-waiting, the Polish-born Countess Ostrowska. He was not the first wonder-worker to arrive, having been preceded by such "luminaries"—given entrance through the spiritualist "*salon noir*" of the Countess Ignatiev—as Maître Philippe, the former butchers boy from Lyon become hypnotist and healer, and named through the Tsarinas insistence "Russian military doctor" (not recognized by France) with the rank of army general and membership in the Council of State presided over by the Tsar, and who before he was expulsed foretold the immanent coming to the Romanoffs of a "messenger of God"; Papus (Dr. Gérard Encausse), the celebrated magnetizer, occultist, Martinist-Freemason, and disciple of Philippe, who— the same as Rasputin—correctly predicted that his own death would coincide with the outbreak of the Revolution; Mitia Kobita, the one-armed hunchback and "fool in Jesus Christ," a stutterer only able to pronounce "Papa" and "Mama" and yet considered an "oracle," who in one or another fashion served as a secret counsellor to the Tsar; the sorceress Dania Ossipova who counseled Nicholas II on the war with Japan; the magician and illuminé Antoni, who was likewise a political counsellor; and then again, the skilled thaumaturge Dr. Yamsarane Badmaïev (called "the owl" and "the bug") who was initiated in his native Mongolia to Tibetan medicine and magic, and was later to attend the University at St. Petersburg for a polishing in politics and diplomacy—Tsar Alexander III consented to be the godfather of this personage who, while directing a laboratory and clinic for healing neurotics with "Tibetan elixirs," was destined to become the most powerful of all secret counselors to Nicholas II: no high post was filled by the Tsar except upon his recommendation. The stage was thus thoroughly set for the grand entrance of Rasputin, who would soon far eclipse all these minor precursors,—excepting, of course, Gurdjieff, said to be canvassed by the moderates in the court as a foil to the dreaded machinations of the mesmeric monk. Too late, however; the die was cast.

* * *

Rasputin's assassination and the death of Papus both happened in 1916, and as predicted, all hell broke loose. It broke loose in the soul of poor de Hartmann also, who gives a graphic and excruciating account of the trials endured by Gurdjieff and his loyal band of followers to

maintain the “Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man” amidst the crossfire of the Cossacks and the Bolsheviks. Nor was “Mr. Gurdjieff”—as de Hartmann always refers to him—ever one to pass up an occasion for “entangling” (his expression) things even further. Thus one evening in Essentuki in the Caucasus where they took refuge in 1917, at a time when the rouble was disastrously devalued, Gurdjieff maneuvered the impoverished de Hartmann—cut off from his monthly funds—into hosting a banquet at a restaurant, where five-hundred roubles were needed to cover a meal that formerly cost two or three, and the bill came to about one thousand; a waiter had to be tipped to rouse a frightened Mme. de Hartmann from bed, who surrendered what amounted to half a month’s living expenses. Gurdjieff reimbursed his victim the next morning, while simply saying, “What happened was done for your sake.” On another occasion, the hapless composer was first obliged to sacrifice precious music paper reserved for the orchestration of a ballet, by stripping it into reels for winding skeins of silk, and then was ignominiously sent to sell the silk to his former acquaintances from St. Petersburg now living in Kislovodsk. He naturally enough avoided his friends, slipping at dusk into a large shop owned by his landlord,—where he found Gurdjieff awaiting hint. The silk was disposed of, and they returned home. De Hartmann saw this as a “wonderful lesson” in surmounting the “sense of class pride.” His wife was also given a lesson in “selflessness” when forced to hand over all her family jewels to Gurdjieff—who then replied, “Now take them back.” Inspired by this magnanimity, another lady offered up her valuables. That was the last she saw of them. “Everything that could repel, even frighten,” in de Hartmann’s words, was integral to his master’s methods.

Civil war soon rendered life in Essentuki intolerable, and Gurdjieff devised a scheme for escaping into the Caucasus mountains by proposing to organize an archaeological expedition in search of dolmens while at the same time planting a rumor that he knew of vast deposits of gold and platinum in the same region that could bring enormous wealth to the Provincial Government: people, as he wished to demonstrate to his pupils, will “believe any old tale.” The Essentuki Soviet forwarded the request to the higher Soviet in Piatigorsk, who offered unlimited faculties, including two railway wagons to take the party to Maikop in 1918 when rail travel was almost exclusively reserved for troop movements. Ouspensky, who did not accompany the expedition, said that a large amount of alcohol would be needed for “washing the gold.” Gurdjieff got the message, and the government came through with gallons of pure spirits—otherwise unobtainable—which was divided among the party in bottles labeled “Medicine for the treatment of cholera,” while another portion that was denatured was rendered potable by filtering through hot bread and baked onions and then put into bottles marked “Medicine for the treatment of malaria.”

Gurdjieff was able to get the necessary papers and new Soviet passports for the group of some thirty persons; he trained the men and women to carry seventy and fifty-pound packs respectively by practicing with stone-weighted rucksacks; he taught them navigation by the stars and how to walk in mountains at night. “The rules were Draconian,” writes de Hartmann: “we

were no longer to be husbands or wives, or brothers, or sisters, to one another: we had to accept for the duration of the expedition unquestioning obedience to the leader, Mr. Gurdjieff. As the expedition would involve us in deadly perils, we had to fulfill every order exactly; disobedience would be punishable even by death, and saying this Mr. Gurdjieff put a large revolver on the table."

From Maikop they journeyed southeastward with pack animals over the mountains, crisscrossing the Bolshevik and White Army lines at least five times, and having little but faith in their leader's experienced resourcefulness to hold them together through every conceivable difficulty—including a foray with highwaymen—until finally they reached the Black Sea town of Sochi. The day before, in the hills above, they had triumphantly discovered a dolmen—though no gold—with the help of some hunters who were dumb-founded when Gurdjieff took measurements and revealed still two more that were completely unknown to these men of the region.

Then in January, 1919, they continued to Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, where the old regime yet existed. The Municipal Council lent a hand in getting the Institute re-established, and it was here in this community still flourishing with cultural life that the painter Alexander de Salzmann and his wife Jeanne, who was then teaching the Dalcroze system of dancing, joined the group, where their expertise was exploited for the choreography.

We next find the group—now reshuffled—in Turkey on their way to Europe, in June 1920,—a country easier of entry than exit for Gurdjieff, since the authorities had received a dispatch from New Delhi warning that he was a "very dangerous Russian agent," with the result that he was considered suspect and thus unable to obtain permission to leave the land. Not one to sit on his hands, Gurdjieff responded by opening a branch of the Institute in Constantinople, where he went hard to work on his master ballet, "The Struggle of the Magicians," and had his troupe stage among other things supernatural phenomena such as hypnotism, action at a distance, and thought transference.

In 1921 Gurdjieff was able to move on to Germany, where he thought of taking over the idled Dalcroze Institute of Eurythmic Dance at Hellerau near Dresden; but an invitation from Lady Rothermere and other rich friends of Ouspensky who was now in London tempted him to come to England, and there might he have stayed had not the Home Office refused him and his group visas extending beyond one month.

* * *

The following phase of this indefatigable career opens at Avon near Fontainebleau, forty miles from Paris, in the summer of 1922, where Mme. de Hartmann in the role of secretary to Gurdjieff came upon an abandoned mansion with weed-infested park, that had been remodeled from a seventeenth century monastery for Priors and now called the Château du Prieuré, said to have once been the residence of Madame de Maintenon. It was presently the property of the widow of Maître Labori, the famous lawyer who defended Dreyfus and who received as recompense from the Dreyfus family this estate. The asking price was a million francs, and although Gurdjieff had exhausted his funds in getting his pupils moved from Germany to France, he gave out the order from Paris to have the place purchased, sight unseen. Olga de Hartmann practiced on the widow the persuasion techniques learned from her Master and was able to secure some sort of lease with the option to buy. A call for help was then launched to the wealthy, while Gurdjieff with his usual acumen opened a clinic in Paris for drunkards and dope addicts, ventured in Azerbaijan oil, and aided Russian émigrés in starting restaurants in Montmartre which later paid off handsome dividends. All this, moreover, with the initial need for interpreters, thus rendering more difficult of achievement that instant psychic grip which he counted on establishing with clients.

By November the Prieuré was aswarm with disciples and visitors of many nationalities and callings, both rich and poor, artists, writers, doctors, professors, and musicians, from bejeweled American widows to ragged poets, all of whom except the transients and decrepit were put to Herculean tasks from dawn to sundown, building, felling trees, sawing timber, caring for a multitude of domestic animals, toiling in the kitchen, house, and laundry, tending the flower and vegetable gardens, and then at days end, changing for dinner, followed by an evening of "Sacred Gymnastics," or perhaps a lecture by Gurdjieff, or some old tunes on his little accordion-piano. Around midnight he would disdainfully call out: "*Kto hochet spat, mojet itti spat,*" or "Who want sleep go sleep"; but few would leave, knowing that the *real* teachings were reserved only for those who persevered to the breaking-point of endurance.

The grounds featured a "Study House" constructed from a surplus Zeppelin hangar obtained from the French Air Force for the cost of removal; it was before long converted into a kind of pseudo-Oriental pavilion replete with priceless Asian rugs, hangings, cushions, goatskins, raised divans, visitors benches, a stage with the Enneagram[11] figured above and a special box or "Kosshah" for Mr. Gurdjieff, fountains with fish (or on exceptional occasion champagne), colored lights, and of course—a grand piano. All pupils had to remove their shoes before entering, and the men were grouped separately from the women. For de Hartmann it created2010063 the impression of a mosque," although in place of Qurânic inscriptions, the cloth ceiling featured aphorisms by Gurdjieff painted and embroidered in a special script of his

[11] Explained in the next section.

invention which read vertically and suggested a jumble of Oriental alphabets disincarnate as a dream. The disciples were required to learn this lettering and ponder such arcane platitudes as: *I love him who loves work; The best means of obtaining felicity in this life is the ability to consider externally always, internally never (sic); Take the understanding of the East and the knowledge of the West, and then seek; The highest achievement of man is to be able TO DO*; and so forth.

Gurdjieff—or "G." as his intimates referred to him—christened his quarters on the second floor of the Prieuré The Ritz, where he set up in the manner of a pasha. Photographs taken at this period portray a stocky Levantine character with dome-like shaven head, huge baleful eyes, and a fierce moustache tucked between cheeks that hide a sarcastic glimmer of the mischievous and comic.

He drove his charges like a Turk to wake them out of their inherited stain of "complacency," sauntering through the grounds tarboosh aslant and puffing at long black cigarettes (although smoking was discountenanced for the others less advanced in their Harmonious Development), cajoling, praising, and cursing by turns. His rages, however simulated, were terrible to behold, for "his entire body would shake, his face grow purple and a stream of vituperation would pour out," to cite Bennett. But he was also capable of dispensing sweets—both literally and figuratively; and yet if a disciple mastered a chore or betrayed pleasure in his task, he risked being promptly reassigned to something disagreeable. No one dared complain; even the flies infesting the kitchen were tolerated as a "test." Without Gurdjieff's organizational skill and mastery of every art and craft from musical composition and Eastern cooking, to animal husbandry, masonry, stonecraft, agronomy, tailoring, carpentry, and the repair of electrical equipment, the place would have come apart at the seams; and yet precisely because of his Asiatic miscomprehension of Europeans' capacity for effort, there were those who cracked physically, emotionally, and psychically, with more than one death and suicide. Peters absolves him of responsibility for Katherine Mansfield's death, however, arguing justifiably that she was already wasted with tuberculosis when she arrived at Fontainebleau, and that it was her affair if she chose to shorten her days there rather than prolonging them in a sanatorium. Still, it seems rather excessive having this frail creature quartered in the stable over the cows in the damp cold of winter, purportedly to benefit from the bovine exhalations—physical and "spiritual."

Life at the Prieuré was not entirely Spartan; there were diversions, such as the motorcade-picnics, a joy to all but those who had to be in his huge open landau when Gurdjieff instead of the Russian chauffeur took the wheel. Provided plans did not change at the last moment, and provided the car could make the steep uphill run leading into the forests of Fontainebleau, and provided one of the frequent mechanical failures did not materialize, the cortege of his "calves" cruised into the country, hampers charged like cornucopias with caviar and melons, and awash with champagne, armagnac, and vodka. Then a halt might be called in some tumble-down village, the party trooping into a café, where Gurdjieff flourishing a wallet stuffed with thousand-

franc notes would order drinks for all present, and maybe treat the local citizenry with an air on the single-handed accordion, or, on later excursions, write a few snatches of *Beelzebub* at a sidewalk table.

And Peters remembers his joy as a child at Fontainebleau the day Gurdjieff on a whim bought two hundred bicycles and ordered everyone out riding them. But the biggest occasions were the Saturday feast days, when "the Forest Philosophers"—as the devotees were called—gave public evening demonstrations of their dances and staged pseudo-magical phenomena. These evenings also featured a special banquet dedicated to the "Science of Idiotism," said to be derived from an ancient Central Asian institution called the *Chamodar,* or Master of the Feast. Gurdjieff had learned from a "Sufi community" that there are twenty-one gradations of reason or idiotism in man's evolution from his natural reasonless state to the highest state of "Our Endlessness," or "God." As the last three states are reserved for God and his sons, that left open within the generic category of "All Hopeless Idiots" eighteen specific grades to choose from, each person being free to decide what type of idiotism best accorded with his nature,—the compassionate idiot, the squirming idiot, the zigzag, doubting, swaggering, or enlightened idiot, as the case might be. The "ancient sages" taught that alcohol was used to actualize one's degree of idiotism. Dr. Christopher Evans has amusingly if not very flatteringly described this event in his *Cults of Unreason: "*At these sessions Gurdjieff, who was a great tippler, would call a long series of toasts to various kinds of 'idiot,' in which all, whether teetotallers or not, were obliged to participate. It was a great evening for those who liked alcohol, and a nightmare for those who didnt. The Russians many biographers, great and small, have made numerous attempts at explaining the significance of the 'idiot's toast,' and most have come to the conclusion that the not particularly ambiguous word had some symbolic significance. No one, it seems, has ever seriously contemplated the possibility that the idiots in question were those seated at the table, though one suspects that Gurdjieff, with fez awry and flushed, beaming face, had a pretty good idea of whom he was thinking as he raised his glass on high."

* * *

By December, 1923, the dances and music were perfected to the point that a performance was able to be given at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées. This in turn led to an invitation for the Master impresario and his troupe to demonstrate their theatrics in America. Here again Gurdjieff showed his organizational skill, arranging for complete outfits of clothing, and getting passports validated for the Russians, Lithuanians, Armenians, and Poles in the group. Early in 1924 they sailed to New York on the "Paris," "Mr. Gurdjieff" occupying a first-class cabin, the others berthed in second; the company was allowed the use of the first-class lounges, however, in

exchange for a performance of the "Movements" on behalf of the crew. The crossing was particularly rough, and de Hartmann recalls the night of the spectacle with Gurdjieff in the front row suddenly shouting, "Stop!" and the dancers in frozen contortions slithering to starboard, then to port, while "the piano slowly, but steadily, slid from one side of the stage to the other, myself following it on my chair."

With the help of rich admirers, concert halls were hired in New York, where Walter Damrosch himself attended a performance, in Philadelphia and Boston, where they played to Harvard University professors and students, then Chicago, with finally a gala demonstration given at Carnegie Hall in April before the company returned to France to prepare a second American tour for the following autumn.

These plans were shattered by an automobile accident in July that almost cost Gurdjieff his life, and brought the Institute to a jarring halt. In his words: "As a final chord, this battered physical body of mine crashed with an automobile going at a speed of ninety kilometers an hour into a very thick tree… alongside the road in Fontainebleau forest… one week [it was actually several] after my return to Europe from America. From such a 'promenade,' it was discovered that I was not destroyed and several months later, to my misfortune, into my totally mutilated body there returned in full force, with all its former attributes, my consciousness." He must have had a premonition of this accident, for it was imputed to a faulty steering wheel on his Citroen, which he had just had checked at a garage before taking the calamitous drive. He anyhow saw the mishap as "the manifestation of a power hostile to his aim, a power with which he could not contend"—in Bennett's words.

Gurdjieff was transported almost immediately from the hospital at Avon to the Prieuré, where he regained consciousness after five days, but recovery came very slowly. De Hartmann writes that as soon as he "was able to get up and stroll about with the help of his wife or one of us, he began to ask to have tall trees cut down to make big bonfires in the park almost every day.… Fire evidently pleased Mr. Gurdjieff; we thought that he drew a kind of force from it, and we tried to provide him with as many as possible. But the felling of the trees was a difficult matter." Did it not occur to de Hartmann that there might also have been an element of vengeance here against a "very thick tree"?

This was a bad time for the founder of the now paralyzed Institute. His mother was dying, his wife was dying, the Russians—helpless refugees in a land where few knew the language and their one idol lay stricken—sat huddled, crushed, in the corridors of the château; virtually all of the English departed, "with their tails between their legs"—in Gurdjieff's idiom, and about the only financial support remaining for the heavily indebted Institute was from the journalist and critic, Alfred Richard Orage, then setting up groups in New York, Chicago, and Boston. Gurdjieff was outraged at being abandoned by Ouspensky and his English group, although he in part at least had himself to thank, already having badly wounded this aristocratic mathematician-

thinker back in Essentuki in 1918 by the incomprehensible "artistry" with which he managed to alienate the most loyal disciples: Ouspensky logically began reasoning that there might be more than one way and one man for putting the priceless teachings of the Masters of Wisdom into practice.

Indeed Ouspensky, a dry, precise, and somewhat humorless intellectual whose one fatal limitation was the inability to see beyond the psychic domain, was except for this limitation the very antithesis of his Rabelaisian guru, who modeled himself after the fabulous Mullâ Nasr ad-Din. He nevertheless visited Fontainebleau from time to time in an effort to maintain harmony between the two groups; and it was only when Gurdjieff sailed for America that the rupture—possibly provoked by money matters—became established. Just before this, Winifred Alice Beaumont (soon to marry Bennett) had interrogated Ouspensky: "I want you to tell me the truth about Gurdjieff. I know he is not an ordinary man, but I cannot tell if he is very good or very bad" and the immediate reply was: "I can assure you that Gurdjieff is a good man." Yet by the time of the auto crash, Ouspensky was warning that Gurdjieff had two "I"s, "one very good and one very bad. I believe that in the end the good 'I' will conquer. But meanwhile it is very dangerous to be near him.… He could go mad. Or else he could attract to himself some disaster in which all those round him would be involved." This hardly tallies with Bennett's assertion that Gurdjieff achieved "liberation from the 'pairs of opposites'" in his thirty-second year, but it certainly tallies with the account given by Peters, who says "he frequently warned that his work could only become more difficult as one learned more; in other words, as one grew one did not achieve any greater peace or any visible, or tangible reward—one did not become obviously 'good'—but the struggle between any individual's capacity for 'good' or 'evil' for himself became that much more intensified. Mr. Gurdjieff himself was an interesting example of this particular theory and I often thought that his personal power was such that he could very easily do as much harm as he could do good."

Fritz Peters's word particularly merits attention, because he not only reports with artless candor and shattering honesty, but in addition he is about as impartial and "neutral" a witness as might be found among the biographers who knew Gurdjieff personally, being neither strictly a disciple and therefore a proponent "committed" to the message, nor someone disaffected by the movement and out to blacken its leader. He was practically speaking a child of circumstance, raised like an orphan at the Prieuré, with no special regard for the teachings, and simply the attachment or "very great, genuine affection" for Gurdjieff that a child feels towards a parent. But he is the first to admit that his involuntary involvement precludes total objectivity, especially as Gurdjieff claimed to have put something into him as a boy that went considerably deeper than what a mere pupil might acquire: "You learn in skin, and you cannot escape.… I already in your blood—make your life miserable for ever—but such misery can be good thing for your soul, so even when miserable you must thank your God for suffering I give you." Apparently Gurdjieff became sufficiently convinced that Peters was "poisoned for life" to qualify for successor, since

he was publicly thus designated, in 1945. This must not be taken too seriously, as Bennett was likewise a recipient of the same honor during a private talk with Gurdjieff at his café on the Avenue des Ternes ("Only you can repay for all my labors"); and goodness knows on to how many other shoulders the mantle passed, although Bennett was doubtless the last to receive it, as Gurdjieff died a week later. Peters assessed the imponderables of his "election" very astutely: 1. "It was actually true" (although "I did not honestly know in what his 'work' consisted"); 2. "It was intended to 'expose' my ego to myself"; 3. "It was intended to produce various reactions in the other persons present"; 4. "It was a huge joke on the devout followers." While the reader is not told his definitive conclusion if there was one, Peters does indirectly drop a clue in his dual evaluation of Gurdjieff as being "some sort of self-created, inevitable Messiah," and "in a very literal, paradoxical sense, the embodiment of that excellent phrase: 'a real, genuine phony'"—two ideas which are less totally contradictory than might at first appear.

* * *

Profiting from the insomnia suffered during his convalescence, Gurdjieff who slept little anyhow began devising a scheme whereby to disseminate his ideas throughout the world in writing. And thus, over a midnight coffee with Olga de Hartmann taking the dictation, began *All and Everything: Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson: "*It was in the year 223 after the creation of the World," came the words in Russian. "…Through the Universe flew the ship Karnak of the 'trans-space' communication.…" Never one to conceive anything on a scale less than Gargantuan, he planned this work exceeding well a thousand pages to be but the first series of a trilogy, whose second part would be the quasi-or-pseudo-autobiographical *Meetings with Remarkable Men,* and the third, *Life is Real Only Then, When "I Am,"* where his most intimate speculations would be unveiled. When he was later able to write himself, he put down his thoughts in Armenian, which was then translated back by the Armenians into poor Russian and revised by Mme. de Hartmann before being translated into dictionary English by her husband and then polished by Orage (who helped set the final idiom) and the English-speaking students. For "Headquarters" the author chose the Café de la Paix in Paris, although he also wrote in restaurants, "dance-halls," and other what he calls "kindred 'temples' of contemporary morality." Then came the shock in 1927: after monitoring frequent public readings of *Beelzebub,* Gurdjieff was forced to register the fact that his listeners could scarce understand a word. Whether the book was too esoteric, or whether his thoughts became hopelessly garbled from the multiple translations, he saw that it would all have to be re-done. (Some readers may find the final version equally incoherent, but this is beside the point.)

A decision had to be made. By his calculations the whole work of revision and publication would take some seven years to complete. Yet neither he as experienced diagnostician nor the doctors foresaw the possibility of his being able to outlive even half that span of time. He determined therefore to "mobilize all capacities", and if no solution were forthcoming by the following New Year (Gurdjieff considered his birthday to be the 1st of January old style), "then on the evening of the last day of the Old Year to begin to destroy all my writings, calculating the time so that at midnight with the last page to destroy myself also."

He now began to notice that his literary output or "laborability" was in direct proportion to the amount of suffering he had to endure, lately intensified by the deaths, first of his mother and then his wife; thus circumstantially the answer to his problem dawned on him at Christmas, that a principle could be established—and eventually applied to others—concerning the relationship between intentional suffering (for which he coined the word *partkdolgduty,* from an amalgam of Armerian, Russian, and English) and creative work—a formula to be immortalized on his mother's tombstone:

Ici repose
La mère de celui
Qui se vit par
Cette mort forcé
D'écrire ce livre
Intitulé
Les Opiumistes[12]

It only needed now putting theory into practice, and on the 6th of May 1928 Gurdjieff made an irrevocable oath before his own essence, under the pretext of different worthy reasons, to remove from my eyesight all those who by this or that make my life too comfortable. Since having his friends around was not all that comfortable, for he writes that during his Great Illness they came-sucked-me-out-like-vampires-and-went-away, one has to suppose that not having them around would prove still more uncomfortable. We have already seen how he got rid of Ouspensky. Among his closest and oldest associates next shown the door were Dr. Stjernwal, Gurdjieff's right-hand man ever since the founding of the Institute in Russia, with his wife and children; the young Russians Ivanoff and Ferapontoff, respectively leader of the movement's

[12] "Here lies / The mother of he / Who finds himself by / This death compelled / To write this book / Entitled / The Opiumists." One can wonder that the normal culmination of an aged lady's life could so traumatize her son; the book moreover is not known. Gurdjieff, however, was extremely sentimental about family ties—epitaph to the contrary. If this commemoration proves anything, it is that its author *lived* the contradiction that most biographers feel was opportunistically "posed."

demonstrations and personal secretary and translator of the lectures into English—both men wandered off bedazed to Australia; Dr. Maurice Nicoll, a leading exponent of Jungian psychology; Orage, who left to become editor of the *New English Weekly*; Alexander de Salzmann, who went to Switzerland where he soon died; Thomas de Hartmann, because conditions were made so unbearable that he was forced out on the verge of a nervous breakdown; and then his wife, because she could not acquiesce to Gurdjieff's demand that her husband now be forced back. Bennett just before this period had found himself maneuvered into a position where there was no alternative but to leave the Prieuré; he managed, however, to rejoin the thaumaturge twenty-five years later. As for Peters, he was told at the time of his investiture never to return; he tried, nevertheless, only to have Gurdjieff close the door in his face with the words: "Cannot say goodbye again—this already done." Orage back in the early thirties, having found separation intolerable, made the decision to terminate his activities and return to France; that night he died of heart failure—which hit Gurdjieff with something of a shock. Even Ouspensky around the time of his final illness in 1947 was crying in his cups: "Doesn't he understand how much I love him? Why does he not let me go back to him? He knows that I need him and I know that he needs me."

The prognosis established by Gurdjieff and his physicians proved to be way off target, for he was to live well over seven times the number of years allotted. While writing at this period, he also composed more than a hundred musical scores as emotive accompaniment to the readings from chapters of *Beelzebub,* which book he managed to rewrite completely within eighteen months. Life at the Prieuré meantime slowly regained its former momentum: for all the people gone, there were always enough new "calves" around to keep the Institute developing, harmoniously or otherwise. And then there were more trips to America, in 1929, 1930, and right on until the War, mostly spent with his groups in Chicago and particularly New York, where he held office at Childs Restaurant on Fifth Avenue and 56th Street, or one of its branches. Bennett says there are reasons to believe that Gurdjieff also made one or more brief trips to Asia during these years; at least the postmarks on letters received show that he was continuously in touch with Turkestan. And when he spoke of "writing letters of enquiry to…friends whom he respected," it was obviously not his pupils that he had in mind.[13]

[13] For the sake of the record, one of the "Seekers of Truth" with Gurdjieff during his early travels in Asia has been identified according to Louis Pauwels on the testimony of the French scientist Jacques Bergier as being Karl Haushofer, a German army officer and geographer of notorious fame, who was not only political adviser to Hitler but also founder of the secret society, Order of Thule, to which Hitler and other top Nazi officials belonged. The philosophical tenets of this order were drawn from the Tibetan grimoire *Dzyan*. It is claimed that Gurdjieff was in continuous contact with Haushofer, to whom moreover he proposed the emblem of the inverted swastika.

* * *

All the tensions and "*remue-ménage*" in the years following the automobile accident, compounded by financial difficulties, finally forced the closing and selling of the Prieuré in 1933; and Gurdjieff eventually moved into the Paris apartment of his deceased brother Dimitri, a rather dank and dingy flat at 6 rue des Colonels Renard near the Etoile, which was to remain his residence to the end. Peters observed in 1945 that "except for the fact that there were no grounds and gardens in which Mr. Gurdjieff's students could labor, the teaching of his method did not seem to me to have changed very much. There were still readings, lectures, dance groups, and interviews with particular students. The only thing missing in the general ambience was 'The Prieuré' itself."

He was perpetually busy trying to get his trilogy polished and published, for although written exclusively for the "Inner Circle," it was clearly too momentous a work to be forever withheld from humanity. His life style during those years was to buy food at the market, which he would then prepare, cook, and serve—his tasseled magenta fez replacing the chef's hat—to maybe forty or more people in a dining room made to hold six, which inevitably left the majority of guests standing wedged in halls and doorways while dishes were relayed from the kitchen at the password: "Chain!" Some commentators have thought to discern an analogy between these banquets and the Lord's Supper—a proof if nothing else of Gurdjieff's dictum about the ease with which people by the power of suggestion can be made to "believe any old tale."

During the war he managed besides his rug trade to harvest proceeds from a company he owned which fabricated false eyelashes; moreover he apparently maintained himself rather handsomely amidst scarcity, for in his words: "I make deal with Germans, with policemen, with all kinds idealistic people who make 'black market.' Result: I eat well and continue have tobacco, liquor, and what is necessary for me and for many others. While I do this—very difficult thing for most people—I also can help many people." Peters noticed, in fact, that his mentor seemed to support with unwonted deference quite a "retinue" of old and destitute persons who visited his apartment each day. When not there, he could almost always be found at the Café de la Paix, holding forth like a boulevardier Pythagoras or latter-day Falstaff.

* * *

Bennett renewed the contact in the summer of 1948. Just at this time Gurdjieff set off in a borrowed car on one of his motor jaunts, heading for Cannes, when in passing through a small village his car was rammed by a delivery wagon with a drunken driver, who with his passenger was instantly killed; Gurdjieff's three passengers escaped serious injury, but he himself was pinned in the buckled car between the wheel and the seat, from which it took an hour to extricate him. He was perfectly conscious the whole time and directed each movement to prevent fatal loss of blood.

Bennett reached the rue des Colonels Renard the following evening just as two cars drove slowly up. From one of them Gurdjieff painfully emerged, spattered with blood and black with bruises. Bennett realized that he "was looking at a dying man. Even this is not enough to express it. It was a dead man, a corpse, that came out of the car; and yet it walked. I was shivering like someone who sees a ghost."

With iron-like tenacity Gurdjieff managed to gain his room, where he sat down and said: "Now all organs are destroyed. Must make new." Then he turned to Bennett, smiling: "Tonight you come dinner. I must make body work." As he spoke a great spasm of pain shook his body and blood gushed from an ear. Bennett thought: "He has a cerebral haemorrhage. He will kill himself if he continues to force his body to move." But then he reflected: "He has to do all this. If he allows his body to stop moving, he will die. He has power over his body."

Although the doctor once there ordered Gurdjieff immediately to bed on risk of dying of pneumonia if nothing else, his patient disobeyed and came to dinner as usual—fractured skull, smashed ribs, blood-filled lungs, and all—to the indescribable agony of those present. When he did finally go to bed he declined the morphia that had been sent for, saying he had found how to live with pain. He also refused penicillin ("It is poison for the psyche of man") and X-rays, and yet through some incredible deployment of inner energy he knitted together so well again that by two weeks he was back to his habitual routines.

But Gurdjieff must have seen that the moment had come to play his trump card, for he now began gathering in pupils new and old from all over the world. He already told Bennett just three or four days after the accident to bring across his group from England: "Let all come… Necessary not to lose time." Thus this notable English scientist, linguist, mathematician, traveler, and seeker urged his followers to place themselves directly under Gurdjieff's guidance: "I now have… what I would call *Objective Hope* that I can achieve the transformation of Being that has been my aim for nearly thirty years. I believe that the same objective hope exists for all of you. I must warn you that Gurdjieff is far more of an enigma than you can imagine. I am certain that he is deeply good, and that he is working for the good of mankind. But his methods are often incomprehensible. For example, he uses disgusting language, especially to ladies who are likely to be squeamish about such things. He has the reputation of behaving shamelessly over money matters, and with women also. At his table, we have to drink spirits, often to the point of

drunkenness. People have said that he is a magician, and that he uses his powers for his own ends.… What I do know is that he can show us the way to work effectively so as to get results… by the very simple means of invoking the powers latent in our own bodies.

"From my point of view, whatever may be the risk and however great may be the payment, the game is worth the candle."

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Every morning, afternoon, evening, and night: rhythmic exercises, readings, private consultations, and Pantagruelian feasts without interruption, plus droves of people all the time arriving; the tension was accumulating until becoming intolerable. What with the battering of egos and general pandemonium, hard-headed business magnates were reduced to weeping, and some men and women after a single weekend with Gurdjieff had to leave for the nearest mental hospital. No matter what went "wrong," it was always "right," since all served to further the work.

But Gurdjieff could be extraordinarily courteous when he wished, as Denis Saurat already had the occasion to observe in an interview with him years earlier. Or tender, as, when playing some melancholy Eastern air on his little hand organ at two in the morning until all eyes were moist, he would suddenly stop, intuiting his listener's thoughts, and after a pause say quietly, "It is a prayer." Or disarming, as a timid lady disciple might discover upon ringing his doorbell when he himself answered and she found herself transfixed speechless before a face whose masks for once were gone and which now appeared to radiate nothing but charity for the world; he would calm her with the simple explanation, "God helps me."

That autumn the maestro left once more for America, to see his groups and arrange for the publishing of *Beelzebub.* The pattern was always the same: gatherings in Childs restaurant, feasts in his hotel-apartment with music pumped out of the unfailing accordion until about two in the morning, when Gurdjieff would catch some three hours sleep before a dawn visit to the markets to buy provisions for feeding up to eighty pupils.

Upon Gurdjieff's return to France the following spring at the age of seventy-two his health began deteriorating rapidly; and although he passed the summer in his usual manner, devising all sorts of projects and planning another trip to America, he was mainly preoccupied with how his work would be carried on in the future. "The next five years will decide," he said. "It is the beginning of a new world. I must make the old world 'Tchik' [i.e., squash it like a louse], or else it will make me 'Tchik.' From now on, I need soldiers who will fight for me for the new world."

On the 21st of October he saw the proofs of the American edition of *Beelzebub,* and apparently took this as a sign that his work was done, for the next day he went to his café for the last time. Gurdjieff's legs were so swollen with dropsy that when he tried to leave, Bennett had to hoist him into the car, which he nevertheless insisted on driving. For Bennett it was a terrifying experience, as Gurdjieff had no strength to apply the brake. After a near collision with a truck the car crazily coasted to a stop at his flat.

Four days later Gurdjieff was carried out on a stretcher and moved to the American Hospital, where he cracked jokes over a cigarette while the doctor tapped his dropsy. "Bravo America," he said, and slumped into a coma. At eleven a.m. on the 29th of October, 1949, he was dead.

Or was he? One of his disciples, Solita Solano, wrote: "Four hours after his death his forehead and neck were still very warm; the doctor said he couldn't understand it." And Bennett, who arrived on the first plane from England, said after the embalming: "I was convinced that he was breathing. When I shut my eyes and held my breath I could distinctly hear a regular breathing—although no one else was in the chapel."

The doctors were even more mystified after the autopsy showed to what a state of deterioration most of Gurdjieff's organs were in, that he had been able to live for so long.

The body lay for four days in the mortuary chapel of the hospital, where the disciples kept a permanent day-night vigil amidst a profusion of flowers and throngs of constantly passing visitors. Then the bier was transported to the Russian Cathedral in the rue Daru, where the priest offered a short prayer service. Mme. de Hartmann writes: "When the priest finished the ceremony and entered the altar, he closed the curtains. At this moment the electric lights went out…for some inexplicable reason [according to the priest]…. The church was plunged into darkness, illuminated only by little candles burning before images."

It was Thomas de Hartmann who wrote the eulogy for the burial service, composing it so "that the last words pronounced by the priest in front of Mr. Gurdjieff's coffin in the Russian church were words from 'The Struggle of the Magicians.'" Solita Solano reported: "The priest at the Russian church stated that there has never been such a funeral before, except Chaliapin's; that he has never seen such mass grief, or such a concentration of attitude on the part of the mourners. Even the undertaker, who had never seen Gurdjieff before he saw him dead, broke down at the grave and wept. Just from the vibrations, I daresay."

Gurdjieff was buried at Avon, which has since become a Mecca of sorts, as Bennett on his Coombe Springs estate near Kingston, Surrey, erected in 1957 a curious nine-sided building designed to concentrate spiritual vibrations, called the Djamichunatra—from a place described in

Chapter 46 of *All and Everything* where the soul receives "second being-food"—and laid out so that the central axis pointed to Fontainebleau.[14]

(*To be continued*)

[14] This temple of vibrations was inaugurated upon the arrival of the Indonesian thaumaturge, Pak Subuh, at Coombe Springs, who seemed to be the key to Gurdjieff's enigmatic premonition in May, 1949: "I need Dutch group, for contact with Dutch India." Subuh's visit is a story in itself, already much publicized following the sensational cure of the actress Eva Bartok. In one month at Bennett's estate over four hundred people were "opened" by the mage's *latihan*; and one man in his zeal for progress let his *latihan* get so out of control that he ended up dying on the carpet. It was too much even for Subuh, who exclaimed: "Bapak has never seen anything like this in twenty-five years."