

SOME NOTES ON RITUAL

By Millen Cooke

A mantra is a form—usually made up of sounds or words—which, when properly employed with right knowledge and intention, becomes a vehicle for one or more of the powers of Divine Life.

A ritual is a mantra in motion. Within the major pattern, minor patterns may come into being, evolve, and blend themselves with the great whole, as subordinate themes contribute to the majesty of a symphony. Objects, words, music, and movement all contribute peculiar qualities, after the manner of different instruments in an orchestra. As each instrument has its definite and individual score, each of the factors employed in a ritual has its precise and irreplaceable part to play.

In general, there are two attitudes toward the use of ritual. The first is the easy, negative attitude of admiration and sensation. One can use the objects, say the words, sing the music, go through the motions, and be happily conscious of their beauty and enjoy one's own reactions to the forces released.

The second attitude is positive, and therefore harder to maintain, but it is the only one that is productive of any considerable result. It is an uphill challenge to the will of the participant to create, not *within* the form of the ritual but *through* it and *beyond* it, using the ritual as he would use a building tool. Not for one second may he allow himself to be bound by the form through which he moves. That form, beautiful as it may be, exists only to conduct the power by which all things are made, as the bodies of man exist only to conduct, to convey, the Life that inhabits them.

But just as the bodies of a man must be perfected and brought under his conscious control before they can function with complete efficiency, a ritual must be made perfect, and the subtle forms it builds must be brought within the scope of the will of their creator. Then, and only then, can a rite—however perfect its form and fruitful as it may be intrinsically as a channel—only then can it achieve its full intended creative possibilities.

On the lower planes of our system, a form is required in order to produce a form. The subjective does not become the objective without a "mediator," and all three terms are relative. We cannot make something out of nothing. We have needs if we would create. We must have raw materials. We need workmen. Workmen must have tools. We need the operation of building, itself. Finally, all these are subservient to the plan of the Architect.

In the wise use of ritual, a human being who maintains the positive attitude identifies himself with and assimilates each of these requirements in turn. Each requirement, or stage, typifies a great step in the evolution of a man and of the race. It is only as the ritualist learns to work *through* all five of the "steps without being caught up and confined in them, and discovers his unity with the true Life of the Architect, that he learns (and at the same time teaches) the great lesson of ritual. For ritual, like Alchemy, teaches the truth of a great Mystical Work through an exactly parallel and practical operation upon a lower plane of consciousness.