

## ARTICLE III.

THE NEW TESTAMENT USE OF THE GREEK  
MYSTERIES.

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THIS article proposes an inquiry into the influence of the Greek Mysteries upon the language and imagery of the New Testament. The wide-spread influence of these observances on the life of the Greek and Roman world for centuries is well understood. In the Eleusinian Mysteries, the most celebrated and typical, the alternation and contrast of night and day, of wintry gloom and joyous spring, the cycle of seed-sowing and harvest, the whole series of phenomena of 'life and death, with more or less distinct reference to the suggested deeper questions of sin and purification, of the resurrection and of the future life, were set forth in striking dramatic form, engrossing the attention for days of great concourses of people, and given under the direct authority of the state. It was inevitable that the vivid impression should reproduce itself in some form of influence as pervasive as Greek civilization itself, extending to those documents of the New Testament connected with localities where the Mysteries had greatest prevalence.

There will be presented an account of the Mysteries sufficient to indicate their characteristic ideas and terminology; instances of the reproduction of these ideas and this terminology in the literature of the ancient world apart from the New Testament will be adduced; and the New Testament itself will then be examined for instances of the same influence upon its language and imagery.

## I. WHAT WERE THE MYSTERIES?

The Greek word *μυστήριον*, (usually found in the plural, τὰ *μυστήρια*, when referring to these rites,) is derived from the verb *μύω*, *to close*, implying either the closing of the eyes or of the lips. Either sense is appropriate enough to the idea of the Mysteries, the reference being in the one case to the closing of the eyes to external sights, i. e. the shutting out of objective impressions and the heightening of subjective influences, and in the other to the closing of the lips in the profound silence which characterized the relation of the initiates to the rite itself, and in the permanent secrecy ever after imposed upon them regarding that which they had seen and heard. A study of the original verb with its cognate forms in other languages (Sanskrit *mukas*, dumb; Latin *mutus*; English *mute*;) and of the prominence of the idea of silence in connection with the Mysteries, induces the belief that the prominent derivative idea is that of the closing of the lips, although it is not unlikely that both ideas appear, with even the additional idea of closing the ears from external sounds, as certain passages in Philo imply. The derived verb *μυέω* signifies, "I am initiated in the Mysteries;" and the initiated person is in general a *μύστης*. The secondary meaning of the word *μυστήριον*, viz. *any secret*, is the one which has given its force in large part to our English word "mystery;" and a still further departure from the original force of the word, as will hereafter be pointed out, is in the use of the word "mystery," especially in the sphere of religion, to denote *something inscrutable*.

1. *The sources of information.*—These are: allusions in classic literature; the results of exploration in the region of the original observances; and the writings of the early church Fathers, of Philo Judæus, and of the whole Neoplatonic school. The purposed reticence of the classic authors, a reticence characterizing also the inscriptions which have been discovered relating to the observances, has compelled

a dependence for our largest information upon the church Fathers, of whom Clement of Alexandria and Arnobius in particular have treated the subject quite fully, though polemically.

A sufficient summary idea of the results of investigation on the general subject of the Mysteries may be had from a comparison of their treatment in the encyclopædias and classical dictionaries (especially Ramsey's article on the "Mysteries" in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, and Preller on "Demeter," "Eleusis," and kindred subjects in Pauly's *Real-Encyclopædie*) and more recent books such as Dyer's "The Gods in Greece," and Hatch's Hibbert Lectures on "The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages on the Christian Church" (especially chap. x.), with such articles as that in the *Nineteenth Century* for 1878 (vol. iv.), on "Rules for Celebrating the Greek Mysteries, from Inscriptions," and three articles by Fr. Lenormant in the *Contemporary Review* for 1880 (vols. xxxvii., xxxviii.). Many other books and articles might be mentioned as of greater or less service, and the thesaurus of information from which all modern writers on the subject have derived aid is the Latin treatise of Lobeck called "Aglaophamus," although certain conclusions which seemed established at the time of his writing, early in the century, have since been modified by the discovery of inscriptions at Andania, Eleusis, and elsewhere. While the present writer's purpose has not called for work at first hand on the subject of the Mysteries themselves, he has verified results wherever possible, and has especially sought to form an independent judgment upon matters in dispute. In his study of the influence of the ideas and terminology of the Mysteries on the New Testament writings, his work has been almost wholly at first hand. It has, in the main, consisted of repeated examination of the New Testament, the Septuagint, the works of Philo Judæus, and those of the ante-Nicene Fathers; and a comparison of the

allusions to the Mysteries contained in these writings with each other, and with the original mystic observances themselves.

2. *History.*—The origin of the Mysteries is hidden in the earliest twilight of history. Other nations than Greece had their Mysteries as they had the underlying myths corresponding to those of Greece; but we are interested mainly in those of Greece and the Grecian colonies of Asia Minor, and of the Greek Mysteries our chief interest attaches to those of Eleusis, of which indeed we have the largest information, and which came early to embrace the distinctive features of the Dionysiac or Bacchic Mysteries as well as those of the primitive myth of Demeter and Persephone. The so-called Homeric Hymn to Demeter is the main source of information as to the early form of the Eleusinian myth and Mysteries. It dates back probably to the sixth century B. C., possibly to the seventh. It relates the story of the seizing by Aides (Pluto) of the maiden Persephone, or Kore, whom he carried for his bride to his home in the underworld; the search of her disconsolate mother Demeter, and the coming of the latter in the course of her wanderings to Eleusis, where she was hospitably received by the primitive inhabitants, and in return for their kindness gave them the Mysteries known thereafter, from the place, as Eleusinian.

Eleusis is a small city some fourteen miles northwest of Athens. Originally separate from Athens politically, it became subordinated to it at a date soon after that of the Homeric Hymn, and with its political affiliation Eleusis appears to have given its Eleusinian rites to the more famous city, incorporating into them soon thereafter something of the Bacchic elements already a part of the Athenian observances and retaining them ever afterward. The influence of Orphism in the fifth century B. C. introduced the more extravagant Bacchic features of their myth of Dionysus

Zagreus, the child-god, the mediator or "saviour," whose salvation, however, appears to have consisted mainly in sobering men who have been made drunken by his own orgies.<sup>1</sup> Fr. Lenormant points out the substantial unity of this myth throughout the East, attached in Phrygia to the name of Attis, in Syria to that of Adonis, and in Egypt to that of Osiris. To this Orphic influence is doubtless due the introduction of the obscene features of the Mysteries which so scandalized the church Fathers, and indeed called forth the denunciation of Plato himself. The Eleusinian Mysteries are considered to have remained substantially unchanged from about the fourth century B. C. until the downfall of the Roman Empire.

3. *The Observances.*—In general, it may be said that the Mysteries were a representation of the phenomena of nature, and an expression of certain human aspirations under the form of dramatized myths. The myth of Demeter-Kore was the double emblem of the transition from winter to spring, and from death to life. The myth of Dionysus (Bacchus), the wine-god, was a representation of the productive powers of nature, and an identification of frantic enthusiasm with religious fervor. The ecstasy cultivated in ages more refined by purely psychical means, was by the followers of Bacchus sought through sensual channels. Intoxication with wine was treated as a state of religious exaltation; and the god Dionysus (Bacchus) was worshipped also as the procreative divinity; the grossest emblem of the fact, the phallus, being publicly displayed in the celebration of his Mysteries. It is said that one of the forms of beatitude promised to the initiated after death was "eternal inebriation" (*μέθη αἰώνιος*). The Mysteries which at their highest became a veritable aid to the souls longing for a

<sup>1</sup> "Dionysus the saviour, who came to show men, tired and dazed by his orgies, how they might make themselves clear-eyed once more and have untroubled hearts as they betook themselves again to their wonted avocation." —Dyer's *The Gods in Greece*, p. 34.

personal experience of the divine nature, and an expression of faith in immortality, became at their lowest a glorification of drunkenness and lust. While the primitive myth of Demeter as it appears in the Homeric Hymn is free from indecencies, and while the Mysteries of Eleusis were doubtless the repository of the purest form of these rites to the end, yet even at Eleusis there seems to have been, at least during the whole later course of its history, a strange mingling of the innocent and the depraved, of lofty aspiration and shocking indecency.

(1) The Participants.—The chief officer of the Mysteries was the *hierophant*. There were associated with him the *dadouchos*, or torch-bearer; the *keryx*, or herald; and the *epibomios*, or chief of the priests who officiated at the sacrifices. There were female officers corresponding to these, and a large number of inferior officers. The *mystagogue* was an initiated person in charge of a group of candidates for initiation to whom he gave the necessary preliminary instructions in that which he had himself seen and heard. The candidate after the first stage of initiation, *myesis*, was called a *mystes*, and after the second stage, *epopteia*, was termed an *epoptes* or *ephoros*.

(2) The Programme.—The observance of the mystic ceremonies may be described by its principal stages or by the occurrences of its nine successive days. These stages were: (a) *Katharsis*, or purification; (b) *Systasis*, the preliminary rites and sacrifices; (c) *Myesis*, or *Teletē*,<sup>1</sup> the initiation proper; (d) *Epopteia*, or *Autopsia*, the final stage.

What were called the Lesser Mysteries were held at Agra, a suburb of Athens, in the month of Anthesterion or February, six months before the celebration of the Greater

<sup>1</sup> The term *τελετή* is used frequently to characterize the whole mystic rite. It signifies finishing or perfection. In one of the sculptured representations the Mysteries are personified by a female figure bearing the name TEAHTH.

Mysteries at Eleusis, in Boedromion (September). The latter marked the descent of Persephone to the underworld, the coming of winter, the planting of the seed; the former marked the re-appearance of the lost daughter of Demeter, the coming of spring, the appearance of the seed above the ground. Candidates for initiation into the Greater Mysteries at Eleusis must have passed through the initiation into the Lesser Mysteries at Agra at least six months before, and it is thought that a further period of a year was interposed between the taking of the degrees of *Myesis* and *Epopteia*.

The Greater Mysteries constituted a nine-days' festival corresponding to the fabled nine days of Demeter's wandering search for her daughter. It began on the 15th of Boedromion with the sending out of the *Spondophoroi* to proclaim the sacred truce which accompanied the celebration. The events of the nine days may be outlined as follows:—

First Day. Called *Agurmos*, "assembling," the people being called together on that day to hear the public proclamation regarding the celebration. The conditions of participation were announced by the *keryx*, or herald. Barbarians, homicides, and impious persons were warned to absent themselves, and the *mystai* were exhorted to have their hands and hearts pure. The obligation of absolute silence<sup>1</sup> during the mystic ceremonies, and of absolute secrecy concerning them thereafter among the uninitiated, was announced at this time, and repeatedly emphasized subsequently.

Second Day. Known by the cry *ἀλαδε μύσται*, "to the sea, O *mystai*." A day of purification.

Third day. A great public holiday characterized by the public sacrifices called *Soteria*.

Fourth Day. Marked by the offering called the *Hiereia*, or priestly sacrifices.

<sup>1</sup> Ramsey (Encyc. Brit.) quotes Philostr., Vit. Apoll. i. 15, 17, "*ὡς περ ἐν μυστηρίοις ἐσιώπων*," showing that the impressive *silence* of the mystic ceremonies was proverbial.

Fifth Day. Marked by the *Epidauria*, or sacrifices to Asklepios.

Sixth Day. Marked by the Bacchic procession from Athens to Eleusis. The statue of Iakchos (Bacchus) was carried in procession, "a handsome child crowned with myrtle and holding a torch in his hand." The chorus of *mystai* in Aristophanes call him *φωσφόρος ἀστήρ*, the significance of which will be referred to in connection with a New Testament passage.

Seventh Day. Sacrifices occupied the day, but the principal features of this and of the succeeding days were the night-time ceremonies, those of the last two nights in particular being known as *pannuchides*, i. e. all-night festivals. On this seventh night occurred the wandering of the procession of the *mystai* with torches about the region surrounding Eleusis, in imitation of the wandering search of Demeter for her daughter. The mournful night was ended, like the fabled journey of the goddess, by drinking the *kykeon*, a drink "made of flour diluted with water perfumed with pounded mint." This, together with the touching, tasting, and handling of certain articles contained in the sacred chest, constituted a sacrament to which much importance was attached, and which seems to have formed a preliminary to the admission of the candidate to the full initiation on the succeeding nights. These mystic articles are described by Clement of Alexandria<sup>1</sup> in words which are variously interpreted, but which certainly include a description of various cakes, seeds, leaves, and the like. This sacramental act has a resemblance to the form which the eucharist came to have as elaborated by the church in the post-apostolic times, and it is highly significant that the term "mystery" came to be applied to the sacraments in the course of time, and that the word *μυστήριον* came to be used as an equivalent to the Latin *sacramentum*.

<sup>1</sup> Protrept., chap. ii. Cf. Arnobius, Adv. Gent. v. 26.

The mystic formula or symbol used by the *mystai* as they approached their full initiation was, according to Clement and Arnobius, as follows: "*I have fasted; I have drunk the cup; I have received from the box; having done, I put it into the basket, and out of the basket into the chest.*"<sup>1</sup>

Eighth Day. The ceremonies which took place on the eighth night were those termed *Myesis*, the initiation into the lower degree of the Mysteries. On this night, as indeed on the succeeding night it is likely, the *mystai* waited with extinguished torches outside the great *telesterion* in darkness and silence. When suddenly the doors were flung open and they were admitted to the brilliantly illuminated temple, the contrast was startling and impressive, as it was intended to be. Dion Chrysostomos speaks of the rapidity of the change from darkness to light;<sup>2</sup> and, in general, this illumination and the impressive silence of the Mysteries were proverbial in Greek literature, as they became characteristic elements in the impression produced. A sacred drama, in all probability representing the myth of Demeter, as already outlined, was presented on this night, with certain impressive utterances from the *hierophant* breaking the mystic silence at intervals. The revealing of the sacred things, including doubtless the previous sacramental exhibition to the candidates of the mystic tokens contained in the sacred basket (*kalathos*) and chest (*kiste*) as already described, constituted what was known as the *paradosis tôn hierôn*.

Ninth Day. This was characterized by the final ceremonies admitting the *mystes* to the highest stage of initiation, called *epopteia*, or *epopsia*, or *autopsia*. In addition to a repetition of the waiting outside of the temple in darkness it is probable that an additional *paradosis* of sacred articles took place, described by a formula similar to, but not identical

<sup>1</sup> Ἐνήστευσα· ἔπιον τὸν κύπελλον· ἔλαβον ἐκ κίστης· ἐργασάμενος (leg. ἐγγεσάμενος) ἀπεθέμην εἰς κάλαθον, καὶ ἐκ καλάθου εἰς κίστην.

<sup>2</sup> Orat. xii. (p. 387, ed. Reiske).

with that of the preceding night. This, at any rate, is one interpretation placed upon the second formula given by Clement and others as follows: "*I have eaten out of the drum, I have drunk out of the cymbal, I have carried the kernos, I have insinuated myself under the pastos [or I have entered the bridal chamber].*"<sup>1</sup>

Some authorities indeed refer this formula to the Phrygian Mysteries; but it seems likely that it is to be referred to the second night of the great mystic ceremonies at Eleusis, which, moreover, is supposed to have witnessed the Bacchic additions to the original myth, and to have involved the grosser symbolism, against which the Fathers vented their just indignation. It is probable that among the Dionysiac features of this night's exhibition there was included the ascent of Persephone from the underworld, holding the child-god (Dionysus, Bacchus) in her arms. This ceremony probably took place precisely as the cock-crowing announced the dawn. The previous reference to the child-god bearing his torch, as *φωσφόρος ἀστήρ*, "the morning star," should be borne in mind in connection with this fact. The spectacle of an ear of corn appearing in the midst of a profound silence, a supposed symbol of the resurrection, is also referred to this final night as one of its crowning features.

The result of the whole mystic ceremony, in its highest purpose, was expressed by the term *εφορτεία*, or the still more significant one, *αὐτοψία*, characterizing the final initiation. It was asserted to accomplish for the *mystes* a direct, personal vision and experience of God, to establish a communion with him, a participation of the divine nature.

We may now briefly sum up the characteristic features of the mystic rites and nomenclature, for the sake of a recognition of allusion to them wherever it shall appear. From

<sup>1</sup> Protrept., chap. ii. Ἐκ τυμπάνου ἔφαγον· ἐκ κυμβάλου ἔπιον· ἐκεροφόρησα· ὑπὸ τῶν παστῶν ἠπέδυνον.

what has been already described, the following terms, with their cognate ideas, will be recognized as characteristic of the Mysteries; the word *μυστήριον*, *mystery*, and other derivatives of the verb *μύω*; the word *τελετή* or the allied adjective form *τέλειος*, with the idea of maturity or perfection; the word *ἐποπτεία* and its derivatives, with the associated idea of a personal experience of the divine fellowship; certain specific allusions to the contrast of light and darkness with the derived ideas of *enlightenment*, *illumination*, and the like; the term *silence*; the ideas of reservation and revelation of religious truth; ideas associated with the offices of hierophant, keryx, mystagogue, and the like; and certain formal uses of the expressions *touch*, *taste*, *handle*, *behold*,—associated with the mystic *paradosis*.

## II. ALLUSIONS TO THE MYSTERIES OUTSIDE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS.

Ancient classical literature furnishes frequent allusions to the Mysteries, these being mainly direct though guarded references to the rites. The public ceremonies are freely alluded to, but greater reserve is shown concerning the ceremonies within the sacred *telesterion*. Aristophanes dared to make certain parts of the mystic celebration the subject of parody in one of his comedies.<sup>1</sup> That which is most pertinent to this discussion, however, is the figurative use of the terminology of the Mysteries, since it is almost wholly a metaphorical use of this terminology which occurs in the New Testament. Lobeck and others have pointed out numbers of such allusions in the classic writers. E. g., Plato compares the contemplation of the "ideas" to the Mysteries. Chrysippus calls the discussion of the nature of the gods *τελετή*, i. e. *initiation*. Euripides calls sleep "*the lesser mysteries of death*." Marcus Aurelius Antoninus

<sup>1</sup> The Frogs.

declares: "Death is such a thing as generation is, a *mystery* of nature."

But we come upon much closer evidence of this metaphoric use of the language of the Mysteries in the later religious writings under Platonic influence, such as those of Philo Judæus and the ante-Nicene Fathers. Even Josephus has a trace of this influence, and it is seen in the terminology of the Septuagint<sup>1</sup> to some extent.

The writings of the church Fathers are filled with allusions, direct and indirect, to the Mysteries. The play upon words early characterizing the use of the terminology of the Mysteries became elaborate in the later centuries of the existence of these rites, both in the writings of the pagan Platonists, who found means, through their allegorizing method, of deriving any desired teaching from the mystic symbolism and dramatic action, and in those of the Christian Platonists, who found its terminology equally serviceable, and who used it partly from the habit of their training, many of them having doubtless been initiated in the Mysteries previously to their conversion, and partly with a desire to conciliate their pagan readers. Yet at times they gave most explicit denunciation of the Mysteries themselves.<sup>2</sup>

In the writings of Philo the terminology of the Mysteries is largely adapted to the purposes of his allegorical exposition of the Hebrew Scriptures and of all philosophy. According to this free use of the mystic terminology, Moses himself was "initiated," was indeed a "*hierophant*," as was the prophet Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup> The warning of the sacred *keryx* to all unworthy ones to absent themselves before the performance of the Mysteries began, was thus imitated: "Let the superstitious stop their ears or else let them depart, for we

<sup>1</sup> See Hatch, *Essays in Biblical Greek*; Cremer, *Biblico-Theol. Lexicon*, *sub voce μωσθηριον*.

<sup>2</sup> See Bigg, *The Christian Platonists of Alexandria*, p. 91.

<sup>3</sup> De Cherub. 14; De Gigant. 12.

are about to teach those *initiated persons* who are worthy of the knowledge of the most sacred *mysteries* the whole nature of such divine and *secret ordinances*." <sup>1</sup> Philo makes figurative allusion to the Greater and Lesser Mysteries, thus characterizing truths of greater and less moment, <sup>2</sup> as does Euripides in the allusion quoted above. He refers explicitly to the Dionysiac or Bacchic elements in the Mysteries. <sup>3</sup> He speaks of the marriage relation as one of the Mysteries. <sup>4</sup> Moses is called the "*steward and guardian of the sacred mysteries of the living God*." <sup>5</sup> The sudden shining out of light upon the *mystai* after the period of waiting in profound darkness, whence the figure of enlightenment is derived, is referred to. <sup>6</sup>

Again, the figure of *tasting* divine experiences, derived from the sacramental act of tasting certain of the contents of the sacred *kiste* in the Mysteries, occurs together with an exhortation strikingly similar in other respects also to that of Hebrews vi. 1-6. <sup>7</sup> The all-night revels (*αἱ παννυχίδαι*) of the Bacchic orgies are explicitly mentioned, and applied by simile in a spiritual sense to the feasts of the Therapeutæ, in the passage previously referred to. <sup>8</sup> The imagery of intoxication as a religious enthusiasm is also used in the same chapter, and transferred in a spiritual sense from the Bacchic orgies: "As in the Bacchanalian revels, drinking the pure wine of the love of God." A glorification of drunkenness in a wholly literal sense, and quite in harmony with the Dionysiac doctrine and the eternal inebriation (*μέθη αἰώνιος*) which formed an element in the Greek idea of the state of the blessed after death, is found in his treatise "De Plantatione Noe," 41, 42: "Therefore the virtuous man *will become intoxicated* without losing any of his virtue thereby;" "We

<sup>1</sup> De Cherub. 12. <sup>2</sup> Legis Allegor. iii. 33, and elsewhere. <sup>3</sup> De Cont. Vit. 11.

<sup>4</sup> De Cherub. 13. <sup>5</sup> De Plantatione Noe, 6. <sup>6</sup> De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini, 22. <sup>7</sup> De Somn. 26. <sup>8</sup> De Cont. Vit. 11.

shall not be wrong if we say that a wise man *will become intoxicated* [μεθυσθήσεται]."

But, like the church Fathers after him, Philo, while freely adopting the imagery of the Mysteries whenever it suits his purpose, at other times strongly condemns the Mysteries themselves. E. g., in the treatise "De Sacrificantibus" (p. 12): "In addition to this, the lawgiver also entirely removes out of his sacred code all ordinances respecting initiations [τελετάς] and mysteries [μυστήρια], and all such trickery and buffoonery."

Again, in the treatise "De Specialibus Legibus," iii. 7, Philo speaks of the infamous class of "men-women" (ἀνδρόγυνοι), the victims of nameless vice, as being given special honor in many nations. He says: "At all events one may see men-women strutting through the market-place at mid-day, and leading the processions in festivals, and, impious men as they are, having received by lot the charge of the temple, and beginning the sacred initiatory rites [καὶ μυστηρίων καὶ τελετῶν], and even concerned in the Mysteries of Demeter [καὶ Δήμητρος ὀργιάζοντας]."

There is very clear evidence, moreover, in Josephus<sup>1</sup> that the idea of the Mysteries had rooted itself in Palestinian soil. His description of the Essenes is very similar to Philo's of the Therapeutae, and has similar though less explicit allusion to their rites of initiation, to degrees of initiation, to secrecy concerning their esoteric doctrines, to their rites of purification before initiation, and to the silence which they observe in their meeting together, which silence, he says, seems to foreigners "like some fearful mystery [ὡς μυστήριόν τι φρικτόν]." He assigns to them also the Platonic view of the imprisonment or burial of the soul in the body, a view associated with the Mysteries.<sup>2</sup>

Of the extensive use of the terminology of the Myster-

<sup>1</sup> Bell. Jud. ii. 8.

<sup>2</sup> See Thomas Taylor's *Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*.

ies by the Fathers, even while combating their observance, the following passage from Clement of Alexandria may serve as an illustration. It occurs at the close of his "Exhortation to the Heathen" to abandon their profane Mysteries and to accept the higher mysteries of the religion of Christ. He exclaims: "Then shalt thou *see my God*, and be *initiated* into the sacred *mysteries*, and come to the fruition of those things which are laid up in heaven reserved for me, which 'ear hath not heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of any.' . . . O truly sacred *mysteries*! My way is *lighted with torches*, and I *behold* the heavens and God; I become holy whilst I am *initiated*. The Lord is the *hierophant*, and *seals* while *illuminating* him who is *initiated*, and presents to the Father him who is *initiated* to be kept forever. Such are the reveries of my *mysteries*."<sup>1</sup>

It should be possible from the survey which has been made of the subject thus far to discern whatever characteristic use of the language and imagery of the Mysteries may exist in the New Testament writings. In some instances, perhaps, the psychological unity of the race might explain the apparent similarity in terminology, while in certain instances there may be blended allusion to the Mysteries and to some passage of the Old Testament Scriptures. It is not true that the Greek Mysteries had in the New Testament period affected the doctrines and usages of the Christian church as was undoubtedly the case later in its history;<sup>2</sup> but, on the contrary, there appears in the numerous explicit or implicit allusions of the New Testament to these rites, a triumphant comparison of the weak, abortive, and impure pagan attempts to attain "salvation," "perfection," and "direct vision of God" through the revelation of certain trivial secrets, and the exhibition of certain trivial tokens,

<sup>1</sup> Prot rept., chap. xii.

<sup>2</sup> See Hatch's Hibbert Lectures on "The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages on the Christian Church," chap. x.

with the sublime "mystery of God" hidden "from times eternal," but manifested at the coming of Christ to all who would receive him, and culminating in the divine drama of Calvary and the resurrection, wherein a light and immortality, a salvation and divine fellowship, were secured, immeasurably outshining the splendor of the heathen conception.

### III. THE MYSTERIES IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The influence of the Mysteries upon the New Testament language and imagery can be fully traced only by observing that here, as in the preceding examples of that influence, the relation is at times a verbal one, involving the use of the word-forms characteristic of the Mysteries, even where the meaning has become somewhat remote from its original one; and at other times the relation is traceable only in the thought, a variety of allied verbal forms being used, in accordance with a tendency of later Greek writers. For example, the idea of the perfective character of the rites of initiation, *τελεταί*, will be associated with the use of the similar terms *τέλειος*, *τελειότης*, signifying maturity, full-growth, or perfection.

It may be said that, in general, the term "mystery" or "mysteries" is used in the New Testament to signify *something concealed*. But it may be quite as broadly affirmed that the customary modern meaning assigned to it of *something inscrutable, something in its nature beyond human comprehension*, is not at all justified by the New Testament. On the contrary, its classical and its New Testament use alike imply in it a suggestion of a revelation of the concealed truth at the proper time and to the proper persons. There has been a distinct loss to our proper understanding of Scripture, not to mention a dangerous tendency to the preclusion of a proper liberty of speculation, from the failure to recognize this fact. A recognition of the relation of the term "mystery" in the New Testament to the Greek rites

of the same name should aid in removing this confusion of thought.

While the general signification of *something concealed* may be asserted to belong to the word "mystery" and its cognate terms in the New Testament, there are other shades of meaning associated therewith and directly traceable to some part of its connection with the Greek Mysteries as herein described. These uses are in the nature of implications of the term, and sometimes singly, sometimes in combination, are involved in the more general meaning. They may be formulated as follows: 1. An experience attained by a process of initiation: 2. A truth or an experience or a principle reserved to certain persons or until a certain time; 3. A truth expressed in symbol or formula; 4. The esoteric truth hidden in a parable; 5. Truth unrevealed.

The general and the secondary significations of the word "mystery" have been more or less completely recognized by Cremer,<sup>1</sup> Hatch,<sup>2</sup> Thayer,<sup>3</sup> Edwards,<sup>4</sup> and others; but no unifying element in these uses is recognized by them. It is believed that a study of the word *μυστήριον* in connection with the full range of the terminology of the Mysteries, and especially in connection with the use of this terminology in other literature of the same general period, as has been attempted in this article, clearly indicates that this unifying element in the New Testament use of the word is to be found in its reference near or remote to the celebrated Greek rites, the Mysteries.

For the completion of the argument there should now be necessary only the presentation of the principal Scripture passages concerned, with brief notes *passim*.

<sup>1</sup> Biblico-Theological Lexicon of the New Testament, *sub voce*.

<sup>2</sup> Essays in Biblical Greek. Contains an extended critical study of the word *μυστήριον*.

<sup>3</sup> Lexicon of the New Testament, *sub voce*.

<sup>4</sup> Commentary on Corinthians. Notes on 1 Cor. ii. 7. (London: Hodder & Stoughton.)

## EXAMINATION OF NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGES.

Matt. xiii. 11 (Mark iv. 11; Luke viii. 10): "Unto you it is given to know *the mysteries* [τὰ μυστήρια] of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given." (Spoken of the teaching in parables.)

This passage presents the precise plural form used of the Greek Eleusinia; and has the familiar signification of *esoteric religious truth revealed only to the initiated and in symbolic form.*

Rom. xi. 25: "For I would not, brethren, have you ignorant concerning this *mystery* [μυστήριον] lest ye be wise in your own conceits, that a hardening hath befallen Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in."

Rom. xvi. 25: "Now to him that is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of *the mystery which hath been kept in silence*<sup>1</sup> from times eternal, but now is manifested," etc.

Such a combination of the characteristic ideas of the Mysteries cannot be fortuitous. The "Eternal Silence" of the Valentinians and other Gnostics, a term applied to one manifestation of the Deity; is doubtless derived from the common source, the Mysteries.

I Cor. ii. 1-9: "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or wisdom, proclaiming to you the *mystery of God* [τὸ μυστήριον τοῦ θεοῦ]. For I determined not to know anything among you, save Jesus Christ. . . . And my speech and my preaching were not in persuasive words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. But we speak wisdom among the perfect [τελειοὺς]; yet a wisdom not of this world, nor of the rulers of this world, which are coming to nought; but we speak God's wisdom in a *mystery* [ἐν μυστηρίῳ], even the wisdom which hath been *hidden*, which God foreordained before the worlds unto our glory: which *none of the princes of this world knoweth*: for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory; but as it is written, Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not, and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God hath prepared for them that love him."

This passage presents a striking combination of the

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the note on the proverbial *silence* of the mysteries; above, and Philo, De Sacrificiis Abelis et Caini, 15: "Becoming initiated into the perfect mysteries, may not be too ready to divulge the divine secrets to any one, but . . . may conceal them in silence." (Ἐν ἀπορήτῳ φυλάττη, lit. "guard them among the unutterable things.")

characteristic ideas of the Mysteries, containing the word *μυστήριον* twice, the terms *perfect* and *hidden*, used of the candidates and the message respectively in the Greek Mysteries, the idea of "things unutterable," the *ἀπόρρητα* of the Mysteries (cf. the *ἄρρητα ῥήματα* of 2 Cor. xii. 4); and the idea of the restriction of the truth to certain favored ones corresponding to the initiated of the Mysteries.

1 Cor. iv. 1, 5: "Let a man so account of us, as of ministers of Christ, and *stewards of the mysteries of God*.<sup>1</sup> . . . Wherefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will both *bring to light the hidden things of darkness* and make manifest the counsels of the hearts; and then shall each man have his praise before God."

1 Cor. xiii. 2: "And if I have the gift of prophecy, and understand *all mysteries* and all knowledge."

1 Cor. xiv. 2: "For he that speaketh in a tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God; for no man understandeth; but in the spirit he speaketh *mysteries*."

1 Cor. xv. 51: "Behold, I tell you a *mystery*. We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed," etc.

The whole fifteenth chapter is rich with suggestions of the symbolism of the Mysteries, both Greek and Egyptian. It would be quite in keeping with Paul's method to use the familiar imagery of the death and after-life of the seed in expounding to the Greeks the doctrine of the resurrection.<sup>2</sup>

Eph. i. 9: "The *mystery* of his will."

Eph. iii. 3 ff: "By revelation was made known unto me the *mystery*, as I wrote afore in few words, whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the *mystery* of Christ; which in other generations was not made known to the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit; to-wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel, whereof I was made a minister, according to

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Philo, De Plantatione Noe, 6: "Moses . . . the *steward* and guardian of the sacred *mysteries* of the living God;" and similar passages which use the figure of one guarding the mystic secrets as a steward or other officer guards the treasure of a house.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Virgil's description of the fiery potency inherent in the seeds of immortality.

"*Ignæus est ollis vigor et coelestis origo  
Seminibus.*"

—Æneid vi. 730, 731.

the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, was this grace given, to preach unto the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ; and to make [all men] to see [*φωτῖσαι*, literally "to enlighten"] what is the dispensation of the mystery [*ἡ οὐκ ονομα* (literally "the stewardship" as in 1 Cor. iv: 1) τοῦ μυστηρίου] which hath been hid in God who created all things."

Eph. v. 32: "This *mystery* is great; but I speak in respect of Christ and the church. Nevertheless do ye also severally love each one his own wife even as himself."

The mystery referred to is the marriage relation,<sup>1</sup> which Paul places upon the loftiest plane of honor and obligation. But the entire chapter of which this explicit allusion to the Mysteries forms the closing utterance is rendered luminous with meaning, if it be read with the Mysteries in view. The idea of procreation and certain objectionable features introduced into the Eleusinian Mysteries with the Dionysiac elements, were dignified by the name "sacred marriage" (*ἱερὸς γάμος*), and associated with much of impurity. The chapter, read in the light of the Bacchic features of the Eleusinia, and the still more infamous Sabazian orgies, appears to contain significant allusion<sup>2</sup> to the sacrifices of the Mysteries (ver. 2); to their unchaste features for which religious sanction was claimed (ver. 2); to the characteristic rude sport and ribald jesting of the Bacchic procession, the "Gephyrisms" (ver. 4); to the glorification of drunkenness

<sup>1</sup> The allusion recalls Philo's representation of the marriage relation under the form of a Mystery, in De Cherub. 13, and possibly involves also a reference to the distinction between the Lesser and Greater Mysteries which came to be so common a figure of allusion to truths of greater and less importance.

<sup>2</sup> The reference to the Bacchic orgies seems unmistakable when compared with Philo, De Contempt. Vit. 11, wherein the drunkenness, the mingling of the sexes, the all-night revels, and the Bacchanalian songs are spiritualized, their imagery being applied to the Therapeutae. The grossness of the Phallic worship connected with the Mysteries may indeed have been, at its best, "hallowed and ennobled by the spirit of the celebrants, whose reverence blinded their eyes while lifting up their hearts" (Mahaffy, Rambles in Greece, p. 155), but the pictured representations of this worship discovered at Pompeii and other sure indications prove that it tended constantly to degenerate into the sensual excesses so strongly suggested by it.

as an act of religious enthusiasm (ver. 18); to the Bacchalian songs (ver. 19); with the characteristic symbolism of light and darkness (ver. 8-14); the whole culminating in the contrast of the Christian idea of the marriage relation with that of the pagan Mysteries.

The richness of the Epistle to the Ephesians in allusions to the Mysteries is explained by the fact that the Ionians brought with them in their early migration to Asia Minor the rites of Demeter-Eleusinia, certain families maintaining throughout succeeding centuries the official functions as at Eleusis and Athens,<sup>1</sup> and the allusions of this chapter to the impure rites of the Mysteries wholly consist with the familiar fact of the predominant Diana-worship at Ephesus, when it is remembered that the "Diana of the Ephesians" was not the chaste goddess Artemis of the Greeks (although the latter applied that name to the divinity whom they found worshipped at Ephesus), but corresponded in character to the Eastern Astarte, whose counterpart is the voluptuous Venus. This cultus readily assimilated the sensual orgies of the Bacchic Mysteries, whether found alone or associated with the Eleusinia.

Phil. iii. 10-15: "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death; if by any means I may attain to the resurrection from the dead. Not that I have already obtained, or *am already made perfect* [τετελειωμαι]: but I press on, if so be that I may apprehend that for which I was apprehended by Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as be *perfect* [τελειαι], be thus minded."

The ideas of the resurrection, of fellowship with the divine nature, and of perfection or complete attainment, are those of the Mysteries raised to a higher power and applied to the Christian life.

Phil. iv. 12: "In everything and in all things *have I learned the secret* [μεμύημαι] both to be filled and to be hungry."

We have here, as nowhere else in the New Testament, the precise verb-form signifying "I have been initiated in the

<sup>1</sup> Asserted by Strabo, Geography, xiv. 1.

Mysteries." Its occurrence here would of itself be a decisive instance of Paul's allusion to the rites of the Greek Mysteries, and strongly re-enforces the general argument. As in the case of the Epistle to the Ephesians, the presence of allusions to these rites has its local basis in the fact of the prominence of the city itself in relation to their observance. Philippi was the Macedonian city built upon the Thracian frontier, in the pathway of the original course of the Mysteries of Dionysus, and probably also of those of Demeter, as they spread throughout Greece; and near this city in the Mountains of Hæmus was located a shrine of Dionysus, while a hill still closer to the city is understood to have been called "The Hill of Dionysus." It has been suggested that the girl possessed of a spirit of divination [Gr. having a spirit, a *python*] healed by Paul, was a *hierodule*, or priestess, of the shrine of Dionysus.<sup>1</sup>

Col. i. 24-29: "Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and fill up on my part that which is lacking of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church; whereof I was made a minister, according to the *dispensation* of God which was given me to you ward, to fulfil the word of God, even *the mystery* which hath been *hid from all ages and generations*, but *now hath it been manifested* to his saints, to whom God was pleased to make known what is the riches of the glory of this *mystery* among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory: whom we proclaim, admonishing every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man *perfect* in Christ." (Cf. ii. 2; iv. 3.)

The language of the Mysteries is sufficiently evident in the foregoing passage. Lightfoot in his Commentary on this Epistle, in a discussion of the "Colossian Heresy," (which he identifies with a Gnostic Essenism) has the following appropriate statement, applicable moreover to the whole field of this discussion (pp. 98, 99): "St. Paul takes up the language of his opponents and translates it into a higher sphere. The false teachers set forth a philosophy, but it was only an empty deceit, only a plausible display of false reasoning. They pretended 'wisdom,' but it was

<sup>1</sup> See Smith's Dict. Bib. "Philippi."

only a profession, not a reality. Against their pretensions the apostle sets the true wisdom of the gospel. On its wealth, its fulness, its perfection, he is never tired of dwelling. . . . Again, they had their rites of initiation. St. Paul contrasts them with the one universal, comprehensive mystery [i. 26, 27; ii. 2; iv. 3], the knowledge of God in Christ. This mystery is complete in itself: it contains all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden in it. Moreover it is offered to all without distinction: though once hidden, its revelation is unrestricted, except by the waywardness and disobedience of men. The esoteric spirit of Gnosticism finds no countenance in the apostle's teaching."

2 Thess. ii. 6-8: "And now ye know what restraineth, to the end that he may be revealed in his own season. For *the mystery of lawlessness* doth already work; only there is one that restraineth now, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of his mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of his coming."

The personification of the Mysteries as a secret force of evil, here and in Rev. xvii. 5, is even more natural than their adaptation to Christian ideas, when the iniquitous character of much that was included under the observance of the Mysteries is considered.

1 Tim. iii. 9: "Deacons . . . holding *the mystery of the faith* in a pure conscience."

1 Tim. iii. 16: "And without controversy great is *the mystery of godliness*; he who was manifested in the flesh, justified in the spirit, seen of the angels, preached among the nations, believed on in the world, received up in glory."

It cannot be wholly fanciful to see in this earliest creed statement or symbol of the Christian church, with its explicit allusion to the *Mysteries*, an implicit reference to the *paradosis tôn hierôn* of the mystic ceremony, and to the formal profession or symbol uttered by the *mystai*, as given by Clement of Alexandria and others. Cf. also the language of 1 Tim. vi. 14-16, and 2 Tim. i. 9-11.

Heb. ii. 9, 10: "That he should *taste* [γεύσῃται] death for every man . . . to make the author of their salvation *perfect* through suffering."

The metaphoric term *tasting*, connected with the *paradosis tōn hierōn* and the mystic formula referred to above, and the idea of the perfective character of the Mysteries are alluded to here.

Heb. vi. 1-5: "Let us *press on unto perfection*. For as touching those who were once *enlightened* and *tasted* of the heavenly gift, and were *made partakers of the Holy Ghost* and *tasted* the good word of God, and the powers of the age to come, and then fell away," etc.<sup>1</sup>

The allusions to the perfective aim of the rites, the characteristic idea of enlightenment, the symbolic tasting, and the participation in the divine nature, are remarkably clear instances of the adaptation of the terminology of the Mysteries.

The perfective idea and some form of the word τέλειος or its derivatives appear also in this Epistle at v. 9; vii. 19, 28; x. 1, 14; xi. 40; xii. 21.

1 Pet. ii. 12: "That they may by your good works, which they behold [ἐποπτεύοντες], glorify God in the day of visitation." (Cf. iii. 2, 3.)

This is the first use of a word involving an allusion to the highest initiatory rite of the Eleusinian Mysteries, ἐποπτεία. The idea suggested by the latter passage is that of the similar moral effect induced by that direct vision of the Deity asserted for the mystic rites, and by the sight of holy Christian living.

2 Pet. i. 16: "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eye-witnesses [ἐπόρται, literally "eye-witnesses by initiation"] of his majesty."

This is an evident allusion to the myths which formed

<sup>1</sup> The remarkable similarity of the language here and that in the passage of Philo, De Somniis, i. 26, which explicitly refers to the Mysteries, to a pressing on to a full experience, to a tasting of the divine love ("but as for you, O souls, who have once tasted of divine love") indicate that the writer of the Hebrews had not merely the Mysteries themselves but this passage of Philo in mind, the latter fact being indicated also by a multitude of other resemblances between the books.

the basis of the Greek Mysteries; and this passage presents the single New Testament instance of the precise term applied to the initiates of the highest degree at Eleusis, *επορταί*.

2 Pet. i. 19: "And we have the word of prophecy made more sure; whereunto ye do well to take heed, as unto a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star [*φωσφόρος*] arise in your hearts."

This passage strongly suggests the culminating moment in the mystic ceremony, when as the crowing of the cock announced the day, Persephone ascended from "the underworld" bearing in her arms the child-god, called *φωσφόρος ἄστὴρ*.

1 John i. 1-7: "That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life (and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us), that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us; yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ: and these things we write, that our joy may be fulfilled. And this is the message which we have from him, and announce to you that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. If we say we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanseth us from all sin."

There seems here a clear allusion to the mystic *paradosis*, wherein the sacred tokens were touched, tasted (or kissed), and handled,<sup>1</sup> and the *epopteia*, or *autopsia*, wherein the initiate was assumed to attain a direct vision of deity, a personal participation of the divine nature, with a purifying result. Compare the unconscious coincidence of the language in this passage and in the description of the Mysteries in the Encyclopædia Britannica: "Those who believed in the Mysteries kept in their heart as a saving and sacred possession the knowledge of what they had seen and heard

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the "Touch not, taste not, handle not" (*Μὴ ἅψη μὴδὲ γεύσῃ μὴδὲ θίγῃς*) of Col. ii. 21. Lightfoot decides that it is not a Mosaic restriction thus referred to. There may be an indirect allusion to the mystic formula here.

and kissed and handled." The ideas of *light* and *perfection*, so characteristic of the Mysteries, also appear in this Epistle at ii. 5, 8; and iv. 15.

Rev. i. 20: "The *mystery* of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the churches, and the seven candlesticks are the seven churches."

The word "mystery," as here used, signifies *the inner meaning of a symbol* and is closely akin to the idea of the Mysteries of Greece.

Rev. x. 7: "Then is finished *the mystery of God*."

Rev. xvii. 5: "Upon her forehead a name written, *Mystery*, Babylon the Great, the Mother of Harlots and of the Abominations of the Earth. . . . I will tell thee *the mystery of the woman* and of the beast which carried her." (Cf. on 2 Thess. ii. 6, 7.)

The foregoing are the principal passages which appear to the writer of this to contain clear allusions to the Mysteries. Yet it is impossible to communicate in an article of this kind the full force of the constantly deepening impression produced by prolonged study of the subject that such allusions color a large portion of those writings of the New Testament which had Gentile environment. It diminishes in no degree the originality of the New Testament teachings to concede this; while it adds a depth and richness to the coloring, lends a background and detail to the imagery, and renders luminous certain parts of Scripture previously obscure. It is simply the extension of the constant method of Paul, as indeed of Paul's Master, of using the language of the life about him. Paul uses the terminology of the Mysteries as he does that of the Greek games or of the Roman military camp, but often with the added and ethical motive of placing in implied contrast the pagan and the Christian conceptions.

This article has rigidly respected the limitations of its title, resisting the temptation to discuss the relation of the Mysteries to Greek philosophy, to Mysticism, to the mediæval mystery-plays, or to the Illuminati and modern secret

societies, although these present an alluring field for research. It will have quite sufficed if it seem to have demonstrated somewhat fully the importance of the Mysteries among the providential influences affecting the terminology of the scriptures of the New Testament.