PART ONE

Ancient Greek Mythology of the Constellations in the Northern Hemisphere

We shall now leave the following labors of Hercules and concentrate on the last two labors. As we have seen so far, these labors are connected with the constellations of the starry sky. We can detect the reflections of all twelve deeds in the stars. Yet, we should not imagine that they are found just by plain sailing through the Zodiac, as it were. It is a far more complicated matter, because the constellations outside the Zodiac are also concerned. It ought to be emphasized that the connection between the stars and the twelve labors of Hercules is not a kind of arbitrary allegory, nor is the Hercules myth a star myth without any background of real historical events. These events took place on Earth, though not in a literal, material sense. However, they coincided with cosmic happenings and configurations. Ancient peoples realized, as a matter of fact, that the great cosmos of the stars works also in the bodily nature and penetrates our doings on the Earth. Thus the human being was
perceived as a microcosm within the greater body of the macrocosm, and in the earthly existence of the human being was detected the reflection of cosmic events. Therefore, the twelve deeds of Hercules were perceived as an earthly reflection of great laws and of the divine order in the heavenly world. This was the viewpoint of eastern wisdom on its road toward the west. Thereby the human being became more and more the onlooker. This is the character of our times, inasmuch as the original wisdom has deteriorated.

The ancient western world, whose last representative is the ancient Celtic culture, went a different way. These peoples realized more clearly their oneness with the great universe. They did not separate from the cosmic world to the same extent as the ancient eastern peoples, when they experienced themselves as microcosm within the macrocosm. This oneness was expressed in many ways, and we still have glimpses of it, for instance, in the runes and spells of the ancient bards. The druid Amergin, who is connected with the mythological foundation of Ireland, and later the Welsh bard Taliesin, sing of their magical power over all nature, animate and inanimate. Both speak of being or having been all existing things in the universe, including the stars: “There is nothing in which I have not been.” Therefore, the mythology of Celtic background also has a deep inner connection with cosmic events, which is even more pronounced and impressive than that of Greek and eastern mythology. The western “cosmo-mythology” led in another way out of its innermost nature. For those peoples the cosmos descended to the Earth and was active within its being, and foremost within the human race. Therefore the fading cultures of the west left to our ages the heritage, even the task, to cope with the material world, to handle and to transform it. For the divine cosmic world had descended into the world of matter.

The eleventh labor of Hercules leads us to the very center of the summer sky, where we see the kneeling figure of Hercules himself. On ancient star maps we find him holding a club in one hand and in his other hand a branch of the Golden Tree of the Hesperides. Sometimes he is depicted grasping Cerberus, the famous Hound of the Underworld of Greek mythology, instead of the twig. Both pictures refer to the last two of the twelve labors of Hercules. Also the Dragon upon which he stands is connected with the eleventh deed.

In the course of the tenth labor, Hercules had to journey to the far west. There, on an island in the ocean, lived the giant Geryones, who united the upper parts of three human beings in one single body. The task was to destroy this monster and to bring home the huge herds of cattle that were in his possession. After the successful completion of this errand, Hercules was again sent out to the dim and mysterious west, or north of the world. This time he was commanded to fetch a branch of the tree on which grew the golden apples of the Hesperides. Nobody knew where that tree was standing. Hercules traveled through the whole world from east to west asking everywhere for information of the whereabouts of those golden apples. He encountered numberless adventures, and finally he was sent to Atlas, who lived in the far west and who carried the sky on his shoulders. The myth grows here to gigantic cosmic dimensions, and we are left in no doubt whatever about the great significance of this adventure. Atlas knew where the tree of the Hesperides stood, and he directed Hercules on his way. So he went and entered the beautiful garden of the Hesperides, who were, according to one version, the daughters of Atlas and Hesperis, the Evening Sky. There in the midst he saw the tree with the golden fruits. Gaia herself (Mother Earth) had planted it and had given it as a wedding present to Zeus and Hera. But the tree was guarded by a mighty dragon. A terrific fight ensued as soon as Hercules drew near. Finally Hercules killed the dragon. Now he could safely break off a branch of the sacred tree and return home.

This is one version of the story. Another runs as follows: Hercules came to Atlas and asked him for the way to the Garden of the Hesperides. He was then told that as a mortal being he could not enter that sacred realm. Atlas agreed to go if Hercules, in the meantime, would take the burden of the sky on his shoulders. This Hercules did and Atlas went on his errand. He overcame the dragon that guarded the sacred tree and safely brought back a branch with three of the golden apples. As he approached Hercules, it came into his mind that he had now carried the burden of the sky long enough. So, he told Hercules that he would himself carry the branch with the golden apples to Greece. However, the human hero was more clever than Atlas, the descendant of the ancient divine Cronides. He seemed to agree, but asked Atlas to take the sky just for a moment so that he could make himself a cushion. No sooner had the unsuspecting Atlas again taken the heavy burden on his shoulders than Hercules grasped the branch of the Hesperian tree and departed.

We find all the figures of this story in the summer sky. There stands Hercules in the center, holding the branch with the golden apples in his hand. Beneath his feet is the Dragon, the guardian of the Hesperian tree, whom Hercules slew. To the west of Hercules appears the constellation of Bootes, the Bear Driver, as he is sometimes called. The main star of that constellation is Arcturus which, according to very ancient traditions, was also called Atlas. This is not strange because Arcturus/Atlas is near the Pole Star and seems to support the
sky. In ancient times, about 5000 BC, the Pole of the celestial dome was near the tail of the Dragon. At present it is in the tail end of the Lesser Bear, where it has moved since then, following the law of the precessional movement of the axis of the Earth. Bootes/Arcturus, or Atlas, must have appeared then as if supporting the Celestial Pole with one outstretched arm.

What was the inner meaning of the eleventh labor of Hercules? What are the golden Hesperian apples? The second version of the story gives us an interesting clue. Hercules is not able to enter the realm of the Hesperides himself. Atlas, the supporter of the sky, has to do it for him; so that sacred garden must have been an extremely lofty region. The fact that the great Atlas is called upon to perform the task may lead us to the conclusion that it was the region of the sky, the cosmos itself, where the tree was standing. Also the owners of the garden, the Hesperides, suggest that it was considered to be a realm in which one can only enter by mighty efforts of cosmic contemplation and meditation; for the Hesperides are the daughters of Atlas, i.e., those forces which can carry the heavens, and of Hesperis, the mysterious and all-knowing night. Thus it may not seem too absurd to say that the sacred garden is the cosmos itself, in the middle of which stands the Tree of Life of eastern tradition, the unceasing source of life in the great cosmos. Bootes/Atlas stands as a guardian to the west of Hercules. Therefore, Hercules must “become Atlas” or, in other words, he must carry his burden for a while. But can we then also find the garden of the Hesperides in the sky? We can detect it as the constellation of Virgin in the west, beyond Bootes/Atlas. An abundance of myths is connected with Virgin, and it is quite evident that it was considered to be a very ancient constellation. The ancient Egyptians saw in it, Isis, the divine sister of Osiris. In Mesopotamia it seems to have been associated with Ishtar, the Queen of Heaven, who is the same divinity as Isis. In ancient temples of Egypt she was heard saying of herself, “I am the Universe that was, that is, and that will be. No mortal being has ever lifted my veil.” In Greece this constellation was experienced as Ceres, the mighty goddess of never-ceasing life and fertility in the universe. She was seen holding in her left hand a sheaf of corn, the brilliant fixed-star Spica. Thus we can say that the eleventh labor of Hercules was really the search for the eternal sources of existence and life in the cosmos. His penetration to the region of the Hesperides, the attainment of a branch of the tree of the golden apples, was the earthly equivalent of a spiritual conquest of the constellation of Virgin. Again, the mythology of this whole complex is, as in the preceding descriptions, a vivid interpretation of the spiritual properties of Virgin. All ancient star wisdom described it as the womb of all cosmic and earthly existence.

We have come to the constellation of Virgin by trying to find the inner meaning of the eleventh labor of Hercules. The first three labors we found reflected in Lion and in the neighboring Hydra and Greater Bear. This progress from Lion to Virgin may seem to have been very slow; yet we need to take into account that Hercules had to go through an intense process of inner development and catharsis before he was able to proceed on his journey to that exalted spiritual region of cosmic existence, of which the constellation of Virgin is the external reflection. We can find the fourth labor to the tenth labor chiefly reflected in the constellations of the winter sky, about which we have spoken earlier. In those intervening seven deeds, Hercules encountered to the fullest extent the spiritual heritage of forces that are represented by the constellations starting with Cetus, Eridanus, and so forth—in other words, the starry imaginations below the Zodiac. We shall see later on that he was not really able to fully overcome the impact of that region in which dwelled beings of a high divine descent, but who had fallen into the whirlpool of down-dragging Earth forces. His partial failure ultimately became the reason for his downfall. With the eleventh labor, Hercules was finally able to approach, through the Gate of Lion, that world which is represented by the constellations of the summer sky. Whereas before this he had struggled for cognition and domination of the cosmic heritage that was embedded in his own physical organization, he now advanced to those regions where he hoped to find answers to the great questions of existence: of becoming and dying. Searching for the golden apples of the Hesperides, he finally penetrated into that region where the divine foundation of all creation and birth can be found. This realm is represented in the sky by Virgin. Having found the cosmic wells of life, or at least having come near them, there remained for Hercules the last and greatest riddle: the secret of death itself. This last or twelfth labor is reflected in the constellation of Scorpion, the descent into Hades, the “realm of the shades”, the place of the ultimate fate of all existing creatures.

The Gate of Hades was guarded by Cerberus, the three-headed hound of Hell. The last task of Hercules was now to bring this monster to the upper world. He descended into this realm and forced Charon, the sinister ferryman, to take him across the river Styx, which separated the world of the living from that of the dead. Beyond the river he found the heroes Theseus and Pirithous chained to a rock. They had previously attempted to descend into Hades but had been retained there by Pluto, the dark prince of the underworld. Then Hercules
wrestled with his most powerful foe, Death himself, and forced him to release Theseus; however, the unlucky Pirithous had to remain in the land of the shades. Then Hercules also overcame Cerberus and brought him to the upper world. Then followed a horrifying sight: the saliva flowing from the mouth of the monster created poisonous plants all over the Earth. No human being could stand his appearance, and so he finally sank down to Hades again. This is a remarkable feature of the story, for it shows that even Hercules could not conquer the terrors of death, under whose spell humanity of the Greek Age found itself.

We can recognize this myth reflected in the constellation of Scorpion. We may now ask: Is there any mythological background to the constellation of Scales, which we find in the sky between Virgin and Scorpion—the cosmic representations of the last two labors of Hercules? This question leads us to the interesting fact that the imagination of Scales, or Balance, did not exist in ancient mythology. In part, people experienced the stars of Scales as belonging to either Scorpion or to Virgin. Only as late as in the time of Julius Caesar does it seem to have been recognized as Balance. There are, however, indications that this constellation was regarded, in very ancient times, as an Altar, or as the Tower of Babel. An Akkadian representation of the Zodiac calls it the Holy Altar. (The Akkadian culture was a contemporary of Sumerian civilization, about 3000 BC.) This Altar stands between Virgin and Scorpion. Virgin is the cosmic representation of the eternal source of all existence—the spirit-cosmos itself. Scorpion is, as we shall see later on, the cosmic imagination of death—Pluto and the underworld. Therefore Balance, or the Altar, is situated in the sky as a place of reconciliation between the images of the cosmos and the depths of the Earth. It is most illuminating to hear in the myth that Hercules was initiated in the Eleusinian Mysteries, thus sustaining himself for his dreadful descent to Hades/Pluto or, in cosmic language, to Scorpion. The Eleusinian Mysteries were a precise representation of Balance/Altar. Proserpina, the daughter of Ceres-Virgin, was once stolen away by the dark Pluto. Ceres, after a long and weary search, finally found her daughter in the realm of Pluto, in the dreaded subterranean place. Pleading for her return, Ceres finally had to agree to Proserpina being allowed to come back to the upper world for only half a year. For the second half she had to go back to the palace of Pluto. This mystery of the sacrifice of life-sustaining forces is cosmically represented in the constellation of Balance-Altar, and Hercules needed this grand imagination in order to face the descent to Hades-Scorpion.

In all ancient star wisdom, Scorpion was connected with death and the realm of the shades. For instance, the ancient Egyptians commemorated the death of the god Osiris every year when the Sun was in Scorpion, because it was a tradition among them that Typhon killed Osiris when the Sun was once in that constellation. Since that time, Osiris was residing in the underworld as the almighty judge of the dead. In Greek mythology the death of Orion seems to have been connected with Scorpion, and we can find many more instances of ancient mythology associating Scorpion with death.

Although Hercules succeeded on his errand to Hades-Scorpion, we see clearly that he, or rather the humanity of his age, failed to solve the riddle of death. He was not permitted to free Pirithous from the bonds of Pluto, and the dreadful image of Cerberus, the hound of Hell, sank back to the underworld because no human being could bear his appearance. Hercules did not really conquer death. Rather, he represents the problems of his age and the great hope that one day the One might come who would overcome death.

After the completion of the twelfth labor, Hercules was a free man. We hear in the myth that he then lived his own personal life, if we may call it such. However, the stories about his life present anything but a happy and peaceful career. It is full of the most tragic events and, if we really take the time to go into the details of these stories, we find one dominating trend in them. Hercules was subject to the mysteries of the unpurified blood, which is saturated with emotions. We met the mystery of the blood once before in the career of Hercules. This was when he destroyed the Lernean Serpent, whose blood was poisonous, and he then made use of it by dipping his arrowheads in it. Thus the destiny of the poisonous blood accompanied him on his further errands, and it ultimately became the reason for his own death, as we shall see.

Once, when Hercules was with his wife Deianira on one of his errands, they had to cross the river Euenus. There lived the centaur Nessus, who used to carry travelers on his back across the river. Hercules asked Nessus to bring his wife to the other shore, but in mid-stream Nessus suddenly decided to carry Deianira off. The woman shouted for help and Hercules could do nothing but shoot the malicious centaur with one of his deadly arrows. Nessus knew that he must inevitably die, and in his last moments his thought was of revenge. He advised Deianira to soak a garment in the blood which was flowing from his wound. This cloak he said she should give to Hercules as a kind of magic device if in future she had the impression that his love for her was waning. Deianira, of course, did not know that the blood of the centaur had become deadly poison, caused by
the arrowhead that Hercules had dipped in the blood of the Hydra. Eventually, the moment came when Deianira thought she should present Hercules with the magic love-vesture. This was when Hercules sent back the beautiful Iole from one of his war-like expeditions. On returning with his army, he put on the priestly garment, which Deianira had sent him in advance, and he proceeded to perform the rites of sacrifice for his victory. No sooner had the vesture touched his skin than he felt a burning pain penetrating his body. The Hydra poison, with which the linen garment was polluted, became active and began to destroy his physical frame. He demanded that a pyre be built, and with a last effort he mounted it. Soon the flames reached his body, but now those standing near saw a miraculous sight: they saw him carried up toward the sky. Zeus had taken his son from the pyre and placed him among the stars. Thus the constellation of Hercules came into being, according to the myth. And there he still stands, high above Scorpion, dominating the cosmic image of death.

Next to Scorpion we find the constellation of Sagittarius or Archer. In Greek mythology this is also connected with Hercules. A certain tradition says that it was a Centaur that was killed by Hercules for attacking his bride. We recognize in this picture, Nessus, and the story that we related above. This Nessus became, as we heard, the cause of Hercules’ own death. Thus the Centaur was involved in his destiny, and indeed the centaur “race” accompanied Hercules, as if it were a shadow of his own being. The famous centaur Chiron is said to have taught him music and the use of medical herbs. They became friends and yet, in the course of one of the earlier labors of Hercules, the latter killed Chiron by a tragic mistake. Thus, when Hercules went out to catch the Erymanthian Boar, he was involved in a fight with the centaurs. Chiron hastened to appease the foe, but unfortunately he was struck by one of the poisoned arrows of Hercules. The dying centaur, about whose fate Hercules himself was deeply grieved, was translated into the sky, and the Greeks said that he appeared as the constellation of Centaurus, below Scorpion and the Hydra. This deep connection between the Greek hero and the centaurian race coincides with an illuminating fact: the constellation of Hercules has also been called Nessus in Greek cosmo-mythology. The Scorpion (image of death) is surrounded by the centaurs Chiron and Nessus, and we can very well say that Nessus-Archer is a part of Hercules. In the Centaur, he was confronted with his own still unpurified blood; therefore, the poisonous blood of the Hydra plays such a prominent part in the episodes with Chiron and Nessus. In Sagittarius-Nessus we can see a picture of that Hercules, who had gone through death (Scorpion) and was confronted after death with his own emotional being, which had to be purified during the first stages after death. This picture of the experience of a purifying fire immediately after death is common to all ancient cosmologies and religions. Thus the constellation of Sagittarius-Centaur becomes an imagination of the ceaseless struggle of humanity for its evolution and ascent to higher forms of existence. The body of the Centaur is still bound to animal nature, but the front part, which reaches out to human nature, aims with bow and arrow at a far distant goal, the overcoming of evil and death indicated by Scorpion.

After his purification Hercules ascended to the realm of the Gods. We also find this further step in the sky in the constellation of Capricorn, or Goat, which the Greeks called the Gate of the Gods, the gate through which the souls of human beings ascend to heaven. Above this constellation flies the Eagle of Zeus, of which it is said that he took the youth Ganymede away from the Earth, because Zeus intended to make him the cup bearer of the Olympian Gods. This coincides with a later pictorial representation of the ascending Hercules. He stands upon a horned lion, and the group is enclosed by a triangular or pyramidal structure that rests on a cubic base called Pyra. From the apex of the pyramid, an eagle rises carrying the immortal being to the heavens. This picture has been found on Roman coins, but it seems to go back to Tarsus, even to Phoenician sources. As a matter of fact, it has been ascertained that the Greek Hercules myth has a deep connection with the Phoenician Melkarth myth. The god Melkarth of the Phoenicians of Tyre is, in a certain sense, a divine figure equivalent to Hercules.

When Hercules entered the realm of the Gods, Hebe, the goddess of eternal youth, was betrothed to him. Apart from the intention of the ancient Greeks to indicate in this picture that Hercules had entered the region of the spiritual world where neither old age nor death exists, it has also a cosmological significance. This further step of Hercules in the life after death is represented in the constellation of Aquarius or Waterman, which follows that of Capricorn. In Greek mythology, Waterman signified Ganymede, who had been taken away from the Earth by Zeus, so that he might serve the Gods as their cup bearer. The necessity to find a cup bearer had arisen because Hebe, who had held this office previously, had lost it. Thus we can well say that the original meaning of Waterman was Hebe, carrying the cup that contained the cosmic draught of eternal youth. It is this cup, in a certain sense, that is the ancient equivalent of the Christian cup of the Holy Grail, which is significant for Waterman. The constellation of Swan, standing high above Waterman, eminently illuminates this picture. Greek mythology says that Orpheus, the great musician-magus, became the swan in the sky after his death.
We can thus say that the constellations of the summer sky signify the great Greek myth of Hercules, and the constellation of the same name stands there in a central place. In the ancient presentation he is kneeling upon the Dragon, and above his head the Serpent hovers, which is carried by Ophiuchus. He stood there for Greek humanity as a cosmic symbol, as a sign of hope and expectation of the One who would one day come and in truth defeat death (Scorpion) and decay, for even the human Hercules had not succeeded in this. How was the One who was to come supposed to achieve the great victory? The ancient answer was, by holding the Dragon and the Serpent in check. Who is the Dragon? The constellation of the same name holds the pole of the ecliptic (the apparent path of the Sun and the planets) in its grasp. Furthermore, it almost completely occupies the circle which is described by the so-called precession of the pole of the celestial equator. We know that the Earth is revolving in the course of its diurnal movement around its axis, which extends between the North and South Pole. Thereby the impression is created that the whole sky is rotating daily from east to west around an axis which extends between the northern and southern pole of the sky. At present the northern celestial pole is in the Lesser Bear, and this celestial pole is swinging round in a circle that is completed in about 26,000 years. This movement is called precession, and it is due to a swinging movement of the axis of the Earth. In other words, the celestial pole, which is at present in the Lesser Bear, was some thousands of years ago in the tail of the Dragon. Still further back it was at the feet of Hercules, and so on. Thus it describes, in time, a complete circle in the sky, and within this circle stands the Dragon. However, as we said above, this circle is really a reflection of the movement of the axis of the Earth (see Fig. 1). As the axis of the Earth is the external expression of the “uprightness” of our planet in cosmic space, we can well compare it with the meaning of uprightness in the human being. It is our uprightness that distinguishes us from the animal. Our posture is due to our capacity for inner independence and thinking. Thus, we may say that the precessional circle of the celestial pole, within which the Dragon dominates, is a cosmic representation of the capacity of the “thinking” of the Earth. The danger of this capacity for us, besides its merits, is complete detachment and emancipation from the universe—consequently, a kind of extreme spiritual sterility and death. This cosmic power is kept in check by the image of Hercules. Therefore, Hercules was an expression of the hope of humanity that the One might come who will save humanity from the death resulting from the loss of all contact with the living universe.

What is the Serpent? It is, in a certain sense, the continuation of the constellations of the Hydra, Orion with the two Dogs, Eridanus, and Cetus. All of them occupy successively, in time, the celestial equator, which is the continuation of the equator of the Earth into the sky. In other words, these constellations have stood, or will stand, alternately on the celestial equator, according to the precession of the vernal point. At present Orion is in this position. Some time ago, when the vernal point was in Ram (about one to two millennia BC), the major part of the Serpent covered the celestial equator.

In the equator of the Earth, as well as in the celestial equator, we can see an expression of the “feeling” of the Earth, i.e., if we can accept the idea that the Earth is a living organism and that its movements are brought about by a kind of inherent psychical faculty. We compare it with feeling, because it is an expression of the impulse of the Earth to turn toward the Sun and the stars or to turn away, which is a kind of expression of sympathy or antipathy. Therefore these constellations, especially the Serpent, are representations of a dream-bound consciousness that is constantly in danger of being overpowered by egotistical emotions and desires. Greek mythology has expressed this in a picture on a majestic scale. It regarded Ophiuchus, the Bearer of the Serpent, as the starry image of Aesculapius. He was a son of Apollo and a famous healer, who performed miracles of healing deeds. He not only cured all kinds of illnesses but he even saved people from certain death. Finally Pluto, the prince of Hades, became alarmed because Aesculapius brought back to life people who had already died. The realm of Hades became depopulated on account of these miracles, and Pluto complained to Zeus. The unlucky Aesculapius was struck down by a thunderbolt, but he ascended to the sky and there he stands as Ophiuchus. He holds in his strong arms the serpent, in which we can see the symbol of ancient healing, the Caduceus, a staff with a serpent wound around it. These forces that are more akin to the horizontal plane of the equator, in contrast to the uprightness of the Dragon forces, can have a healing quality. They correspond to the rhythmic organism of our body, to breathing and the heartbeat. But they become deadly poison if they are abused for egotistical purposes. The myth expresses this when it speaks of the punishment of attempts to prolong human existence unrighteously, thus robbing humanity of the possibility to be spiritually reborn through death. Again one might say that the hope expressed in this picture was that the One might come who will not escape death, but will make it the portal to higher existence—to resurrection.

The constellations of the Crown and of the Lyre, to the left and right of Hercules, fit very well into this great
cosmic imagination, although in Greek mythology they are not directly connected with the Hercules myth. The Crown, or Diadem, is said to have been presented to Ariadne by Bacchus (Dionysos) after she had been deserted by her husband Theseus. This beautiful constellation stands to the west of Hercules, and it is more connected with that part of the sky in which we saw the cosmic images of the main labors of the great Greek hero. We can say that to those who labored on the Earth were offered the insignia of royalty, the celestial Diadem. The Lyre to the east of Hercules was recognized by the Greeks as the Lyre of Apollo, which he presented to Orpheus. The latter played upon it in such a masterly way that even Pluto, the prince of Hades, was charmed when Orpheus pleaded for the release of his wife Eurydice from the underworld. A poet says of this magic instrument:

I saw with its celestial keys,
Its chords of air, its frets of fire,
The Samian’s great Aeolian lyre
Rising through all its sevenfold bars
From earth unto the fixed stars.

The Greeks regarded it as the instrument of the “music of the spheres”, the seven strings being the harmonic ratio of the order of the seven planets. A modern astronomer of the 17th century, Kepler, still had an understanding of that harmonic ratio of the distances of the planets, or the music of the spheres. This lyre is connected with that part of the sky in which we saw the stages of the dramatic ascent of Hercules to the heavens. He was endowed with the magic instrument leading to the realization of the harmonies of the spheres, the planetary spheres through which the soul passes after death.

Thus we can indeed find that the constellations of the stars were for the Greek mind something like a gigantic chronicle, in which they could read the deeds of a divine world and their manifestations in humanity. There is nothing in this picture of the world that is not in its proper place and relationship. The entire sky is like a living organism, and if modern humanity experiences this picture as a chaotic and arbitrary assortment of Greek mythology, then the fault lies with the limitations of the modern mind which can no longer comprehend the grandeur and meaning of ancient mythology.

We saw that the winter sky was, for the Greek mind, the grand vision of the opening phases of a struggle for the attainment of new capacities in humanity. In Greek terms these were the powers of thinking and of day-wake sense perception. At the same time, their attainment meant the closing of the door to more ancient faculties of penetration into the depths of the meaning of human existence. Thus, the vision of the summer sky was more an attempt and a hope than an actual achievement. It was the hope that one day divine guidance might again give to humanity the power to penetrate with new faculties that spiritual background of existence.

We can ultimately look at the Greek sky of mythology as an ingenious interpretation of the constellations of the Zodiac. The Zodiac was the expression of that closing of the door following in the wake of the new capacities. This had to happen. It was, so to speak, included in the divine plan of evolution in order to give humanity a chance to develop self-consciousness and independence. That the Zodiac was the vision of that central drama of the Greek Age, the closing of the door, is clearly expressed in the Greek interpretation of the constellation of Fishes, the last which we have to discuss. It was connected with the myth of Venus and Cupid, or in Greek terms, with Aphrodite and Eros. Aphrodite and her son, Eros, were persecuted by a terrible giant, whose name is recorded as Typhon. In order to save them from destruction, the two were transformed into fishes. These, the Greeks said, are the two fishes that one can see in the constellation of Pisces.

In this seemingly simple story, we see the central drama of the Greek Age. Aphrodite is none other than the Egyptian Isis, or the Mesopotamian Ishtar of very ancient days. Isis is, in Egyptian mythology the wife, or sister of Osiris. We hear that Osiris was slain by his sinister brother Set, or Typhon. Thus, so the myth says, the glorious golden age of Egypt came to an end. Isis rescued the body of her divine husband, but again it was taken away by Set and cut up into fourteen pieces. Then Isis collected the pieces and buried them in various places all over Egypt. The myth then goes on to say that temples dedicated to Osiris were erected above these burial places.

Thus we can see in Isis, the guardian of the ancient temples or mystery places. She was, in the garment of a female deity, the divine soul of Osiris, in whom we can see the being of the ancient, direct, Sun wisdom, working in the natural clairvoyance of an ancient humanity. The soul of Osiris-Isis was the reflection of the spiritual light of the Sun, as the Moon in the sky bears the reflection of the sunlight, and the being of Osiris was
buried in the depths and the secrecy of the ancient temples.

Then came a time when even Isis and her son, Horus, were persecuted by the powers of darkness and spiritual ignorance. So she was transformed, and transferred into the world of the far distances of the universe. Another version even speaks clearly of Isis having been killed by Set-Typhon and put into the grave of the stars. We see here a remarkable difference; Osiris is put into the grave of the Earth, but Isis vanishes into the opposite direction, into the depths of the starry world.

We have here, indeed, a most masterful description of the “closing of the door”, which the Greek spirit saw approaching humanity. And we need not go very far in order to realize the actual facts in modern times. The world of the stars is the grave of Isis. The descendants of that original sun-like power of thinking, after having become the modern cold and deadening power of the intellect, have created aspects of the starry universe that indeed represent it as a graveyard. In ancient times, the external cosmos was the expression and manifestation of a powerful and creative divine world. Since the 16th century AD, modern science has presented a universe that consists only of dead material bodies moved by sheer mechanical forces. The cosmos is considered to be a kind of gigantic, lifeless machine. This is the grave of Isis, after she had been slain by the power of death-spreading intellectualism.

The myth also spoke of the age when Isis will rise again from her grave. Horus will grow up, it said, and will avenge the death of his father. This time seems to be at hand. The withdrawing Isis was experienced in Egypt as saying to those who still tried to approach her in the mysteries, “I am the Great Universe that was, that is, and that will be. No mortal being has ever lifted my veil.” To this a modern poet and scientist, Novalis, remarked that, if no mortal being can lift the veil of Isis, then we must become immortals in order to find the mysteries again. Such a remark is a confirmation that the age of the awakening of Isis is approaching. It is certainly true, however, that we must first find the eternal, spiritual kernel of our own “human” being. Then, and only then, will we be able to see again face to face the living Isis, the wisdom of the deity, manifest in the world of the stars. Divine beings can die only in the consciousness of the human being, and it is there that they can also rise again. Through the means of modern spiritual science, the universe of the stars can be perceived as a living, breathing organism. Such concepts of the cosmos need not contradict the objective facts found by modern astronomy; however, they will certainly destroy the hypothetical conclusions in time, which have been attached to the mere facts of astronomical research.

What is written here, however small and incomplete it may appear, seeks to be a contribution toward that high aim of the reawakening of Isis, the Divine Sophia. The forces of darkness, of Set, are still threatening humanity. Therefore, so much the more must we make the first steps toward the new.