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NINETEENTH-CENTURY BYWAYS

The researcher into the esoteric maelstrom of the late nineteenth-century—the Rosicrucian revivals, the Theosophical Society, Spiritualism, Hermetism and Kabbalism, the Golden Dawn, etc. — often finds himself dragged backwards through the hundred years preceding these sharply profiled movements. For they all have their roots, not just in secret filiations, but in the very temper of the time which allowed such ideas as theirs to be entertained in consciousness. This is not an essay on the subject, but, in conformity with the principles of this Journal, an article of information on some sources that may be of use to researchers in this field.

Anyone who works seriously with earlier nineteenth-century material must either have access to a major library, or be a collector of rare books, for few of the works in question have kept their popularity long enough to be reprinted commercially; in fact, some of them died with their first editions, having been printed at the author’s expense and quickly satisfied both his vanity and the public demand. However, two publishers in the United States and Canada have, over the years, devoted themselves quietly to producing research copies of several hundred scarce titles, including the ones to be discussed.

A few readers will smile at the mention of the curious institution called "Health Research", whose address is Box 70, Mokelumne Hill, California 95245, because they will have seen the unattractively printed advertisements and catalogues in which titles on UFOs and unconventional medicine jostle with political ranting of a somewhat right-wing slant. However, one must be grateful to Mr. Wilbourn for keeping active the enormous backlist of his facsimile reprints, in which much gold is to be found among the dross. His books are ugly, being spiral-bound offset prints, but they are cheap (between 3 and 7 cents a page); they depress the bibliophile, but adequately serve the scholar who only requires easy access to the text.

The second institution is “Ballantrae Reprints” (hereinafter BR) run from The Universe Bookstore, 10 George Street North, Brampton, Ontario L6X 1R2, Canada. Mr. Ballantrae is an astrologer and a propagator of “channe-
led" teachings, and his choice of publications reflects this; but otherwise he is
a more discriminating publisher of facsimiles, in similar spiral-bound format
to those of Health Research (hereinafter HR), but more attractively produ-
ced, and a little more expensive (between 7 and 9 US cents a page).

It is intriguing that both publishers have made a secondary speciality of
erly encyclopaedic works on comparative religion. BR has actually issued
a facsimile of the three volumes (more than 1 600 pages) of Jacob Bryant's
New System, or, An Analysis of Ancient Mythology (1775-6). Bryant was a
Christian, and regarded all other pantheons as memories of the eight survi-
vors of Noah's Ark. His is an example of the old style of universal mytho-
graphy which gave to Judaeo-Christianity a privileged position among the
world's traditions, or regarded the newly-discovered religions of Asia as ab-
surd, if not positively comical.

Several things changed in the later eighteenth century, notably the political
climate in France, and the information available on Oriental philosophy and
religion. The paradigmatic work of this epoch is Charles Dupuis' encyclo-
paedic L'Origine de tous les cultes (1795): a work by a scholar who thought,
as Bryant did, that he had found the single key that would unlock the world's
mythologies – including Christianity, which Dupuis treated as just one, and
by no means primus, inter pares. There will always be people for whom the
discovery that their childhood or cultural idols have clay feet will come as an
expansion of the spirit, as the straitjacket of unquestioned faith is remo-
ved. Such is evidently the case with our publishers. Wilbourn of HR has
made an absolute crusade out of his anti-Christianity, publishing dozens of
forgotten anti-clerical books and exposés of the absurdities of exoteric doc-
trine; Ballantrae, a little less so. I will treat only the more interesting ones.

The most notorious British disciple of Dupuis' theories was the Revd.
Robert Taylor, who renounced his cloth and began preaching with all the
zeal of a convert. (As a result, he served more than one gaol sentence on a
charge of blasphemy.) Taylor's works are naturally popular with these pu-
blishers, who both issue The Diegesis: Being a Discovery of the Origin, Evi-
dences, and Early History of Christianity and The Devil's Pulpit: or, Astro-
Theological Sermons (both 1832; HR offers later, US editions), while BR
completes the trio with Syntagma of the Evidences of the Christian Religion
(1828).

Another English student of comparative religion who made use of Dupuis,
while not being in any way subservient to him (or to anyone else) was God-
frey Higgins. His first work was The Celtic Druids (1829), which has been
reprinted very handsomely by the Philosophical Research Society in Los
Angeles. A few limited reissues have appeared of Higgins' later, two-vo-
olume Anacalypsis: An Attempt to Draw Aside the Veil of the Saitic Isis (1836),
but even these have become scarce and very expensive. No commercial
publisher can think lightly about printing, storing, and selling a work of 1,500 pages in folio, as HR has done in reissuing this monument.

At least three other eccentric researchers devoted their lives to a task similar to Higgins'. One of them, E. V. Kenealy, has not yet lured the reprinters with his quaint, fat books of the 1860s: *The Book of God, The Book of Enoch, The Book of Fo*, etc. But BR now offers the major works of his contemporary S. F. Dunlap: *Sod: The Mysteries of Adoni*, and *Sod: The Son of the Man* (both 1861). The third scholar (if that is the right name for these omnivorous readers and fanatical theorizers) is Gerald Massey, whose work occupied the last two decades of the nineteenth and the first of the twentieth century. One does wonder who in 1990 will bother to read this turgid and totally unspiritual author; but here from our optimistic publishers is his gigantic life's work: *Ancient Egypt, the Light of the World*, 2 vols. (BR, HR); *The Book of the Beginnings* (BR, HR); *The Book of the Dead* (BR, HR); *Lectures of 1900* (BR); and, last but not least, *The Natural Genesis*, 2 vols. (BR, HR).

Each of the mythographers mentioned hitherto had his own axe to grind. Perhaps it was with something akin to the single-mindedness of the spiritual seeker that these essentially irreligious men fitted everything into their pet theories; one sees something not so different among many individualists of the Hermetic tradition and its offshoots, who once they have been vouchsafed a glimpse of universal order and meaning, work it into a system that thenceforth serves to explain all and everything—to them. Side by side with the solar theory of Dupuis and Voleny, later given the professorial *imprimatur* of Max Müller, went the less respectable theory that all religions were nothing but phallic worship in disguise, or, to be more exact, the alternative worship of the male and female generative organs. The pioneer of this theory was the English collector Richard Payne Knight, whose first work, *A Discourse on the Worship of Priapus*, was withdrawn on its appearance in 1786 but often enough reprinted since then. We find from BR his more substantial and mature *The Symbolical Language of Ancient Art and Mythology* (in the 1876 edition with Alexander Wilder's valuable additions). Payne Knight initiated a minor movement in comparative religion which must have brought its adherents some of the psychological release that Siegmund Freud would make available to a wider public, namely the freedom from the taboo of talking, or even thinking, about sex. Godfrey Higgins benefited from his work, as did the lonely Henry O'Brien, whose phallic oddity *The Round Towers of Ireland* (1836) is surely another candidate for our facsimile publishers. Besides BR's edition of John Bathhurst Deane, *The Worship of the Serpent* (1830), we find a large number of works from the latter part of the century, when, largely fueled by the irrepressible Hargrave Jennings, a veritable spate of works on phallic themes appeared, most of them absolutely devoid of anything to excite the prurient purchasers of these
limited and often anonymous productions. Our facsimiles include: Thomas
Inman, Ancient Pagan and Modern Christian Symbolism, 1874 (BR); Sha
Rocco, The Masculine Cross and Ancient Sex Worship, 1874 (HR); Hodder
M. Westropp & C. Staniland Wake, Ancient Symbol Worship. *Influence of
the Phallic Idea in the Religions of Antiquity*, 1875 (HR, BR); Hargrave Jen-
nings, *Phallicism, Celestial and Terrestrial, Heathen and Christian*, 1884
(HR); Hodder M. Westropp, *Phallic Tree Worship*, 1885 (BR); James Fergu-
son, *Tree and Serpent Worship*, 1888 (BR); Hargrave Jennings [?], *Ophiola-
treia: Or Serpent Worship*, 1889. In the same stream of thought – and here,
as in the case of Gerald Massey, one must confess to astonishment that there
is a public for this kind of thing – are BR's reprints of the tomes of General J.

Somewhat akin to the solar theorists are the encyclopaedists for whom
astrology is the key to universal understanding. This stream, in turn, di-
vides into those who believe in astrology themselves, and those who do
not. In England, the former group is headed by Ebenezer Sibly, a man born
out of time if ever there was one, whose four-volume *Illustration of the Cele-
tial Science of Astrology* (1790) has been reproduced by BR. Other pione-
ering works from the same press are John Bentley, *Historical Survey of the
Hindu Astronomy* (1825), and John Wilson, *The Lost Solar System of the
Ancients Discovered*, 2 vols. (1856). BR also offers the works of two prolific
researchers from the late nineteenth-century: John O'Neill, *The Night of the
Gods. An Inquiry into Cosmic and Cosmogonic Mythology and Symbolism*,
2 vols. (1893, 1897), and the following titles by the scholarly Robert Brown,
Jr.: *Researches into the Origin of the Primitive Constellations of the Greeks,
(1895), *The Unicorn. A Mythological Investigation* (1881). A little outside
our period, but fully in the same spirit and worth recording because of the
rarity of the original editions, are the twin studies of W. T. Olcott, which
both our publishers offer: *Star Lore of All Ages* (1911), and *Sun Lore of All
Ages* (1914).

Equally out of our period in the other direction is the Deist author John
Toland. But his *Critical History of the Celtic Religion* was long consulted
and reprinted (BR offers a facsimile of the 1815 edition), and he introduces a
series of rare studies of ancient British religion and mythology:

Edward Davies, *Celtic Researches*, 1804, and *Mythology and Rites of the
British Druids*, 1809 (both BR); W. Winwood Reade, *The Veil of Isis, or
Mysteries of the Druids*, 1847 (BR, HR); John Brand, *Observations on the
Popular Antiquities of Great Britain*, 3 vols., 1853 (BR); and Alfred Rimmer,

These are a few of the fields in which the researcher into the history of
esoterism periodically browses. Finally, I will mention a few of Ballantrae's facsimiles that may interest students of the Renaissance period. First he has reprinted John Dee's The Mathematicall Praeface (1590) in which the ingenuous mage sets out his plan for the improvement of all the arts and sciences; this is the best substitute for the New York facsimile of 1975, with its fine introduction by Allen G. Debus. BR also reprints James Orchard Halliwell's pioneer edition of The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee (1842), including the catalogue of his library of manuscripts, from the Bodleian and Trinity, Cambridge libraries. Next, two secondary sources that, for all their age, are still indispensable to any student of the first Rosicrucian period: J. B. Craven's Doctor Robert Fludd (1902), and Count Michael Maier (1910), occasionally reprinted but extremely hard to find. Finally, and climactically, there is at last a complete facsimile in ten spiral-bound volumes of William Law's edition of the works of Jacob Boehme (1764), priced at about $200. Having not seen this, I do not know how the printer has dealt with the many elaborate folding plates; but Boehme's words are there, and some will be grateful enough to have those.

In an ideal world, such publishers would be financed by a Medici, or blessed with the private means of a Richard Payne Knight, and their books would be as beautiful as the contents are fascinating. But they are not. Nevertheless, to devote one's time to this kind of book-production can only be a labor of love, and must be inspired by a world-view quite out of the ordinary. The history of esoterism is full of lonely souls, moved by a love of mankind (or by messianic delusions) to publish their insights into the cosmic machinery; and Messrs. Wilbourn and Ballantrae surely deserve a place among them.

Richard M. Brown