within him.

OTHER ACCOUNTS OF THE CENTRES

These seven force-centres are frequently described in Sanskrit literature, in some of

the minor Upanishads, in the Puranas and in Tantric works. They are used today by many

Indian yogis. A friend acquainted with the inner life of India assures me that he knows of one

school in that country which makes free use of the chakras - a school which numbers as its

pupils about sixteen thousand people scattered over a large area. There is much interesting

information available on the subject from Hindu sources, which we will try to summarize

with comments in a later chapter.

It appears also that certain European mystics were acquainted with the chakras.

Evidence of this occurs in a book entitled Theosophia Practica by the well-known German

mystic Johann Georg Gichtel, a pupil of Jacob Boehme, who probably belonged to the secret

society of the Rosicrucians. It is from this work of Gichtel’s that our Plate III is reproduced

by the kind permission of the publishers. This book was originally issued in the year 1696,

though in the edition of 1736 it is said that the pictures, of which the volume is mainly a

description, were printed only some ten years after the death of the author, which took place

in 1710. The book must be distinguished from a collection of Gichtel’s correspondence put

forth under the same title Theosophia Practica; the present volume is not in the form of

letters, but consists of six chapters dealing with the subject of that mystic regeneration which

was such an important tenet of the Rosicrucians.

The illustration which we give here has been photographed from the French

translation of the Theosophia Practica, published in 1897 in the Bibliotheque Rosicrucienne

(No. 4) by the Bibliotheque Chacornac, Paris.

Gichtel, who was born in 1638, at Ratisbon in Bavaria, studied theology and law and

practised as an advocate; but afterwards, becoming conscious of a spiritual world within,

gave up all worldly interests and became the founder of a mystical Christian movement.

Being opposed to the ignorant orthodoxy of his time, he drew down upon himself the hatred

of those whom he had attacked, and about 1670 he was consequently banished, and his

property confiscated. He finally found refuge in Holland, where he lived for the remaining

forty years of his life.

He evidently considered the figures printed in his Theosophia Practica as being of a

secret nature; apparently they were kept within the small circle of his disciples for quite a

number of years. They were, he says, the result of an inner illumination - presumably of what

in our modern times we should call clairvoyant faculties. On the title-page of his book he

says that it is, “A short exposition of the three principles of the three worlds in man,

represented in clear pictures, showing how and where they have their respective Centres in

the inner man; according to what the author has found in himself in divine contemplation, and

what he has felt, tasted and perceived”.

Like most mystics of his day, however, Gichtel lacks the exactitude which should

characterize true occultism and mysticism; in his description of the figures he allows himself

lengthy, though oftentimes quite interesting digressions on the difficulties and problems of

the spiritual life. As an exposition of his illustrations, however, his book is not a success.

Perhaps he did not dare to say too much; or he may have wished to induce his readers to learn

to see for themselves that of which he was writing. It seems likely that by the truly spiritual

life which he led he had developed sufficient clairvoyance to see these chakras, but that he

was unaware of their true character and use, so that in his attempts to explain their meaning,

he attached to them the current symbolism of the mystic school to which lie belonged.

He is here dealing, as will be seen, with the natural earthly man in a state of darkness,

so he has perhaps some excuse for being a little pessimistic about his chakras. He lets the first

and second pass without comment (possibly knowing that they are chiefly concerned with

physiological processes), but labels the solar plexus as the home of anger - as indeed it is. He

sees the heart-centre as filled with self-love, the throat with envy and avarice; and the higher

centres of the head radiate nothing better than pride.

He also assigns planets to the chakras, giving the Moon to the basic, Mercury to the

splenic, Venus to the umbilical, the Sun to the heart (though it will be noted that a snake is

coiled round it), Mars to the laryngeal, Jupiter to the frontal, and Saturn to the coronal. He

informs us further that fire resides in the heart, water in the liver, earth in the lungs, and air in

the bladder.

It is noteworthy that he draws a spiral, starting from the snake round the heart and

passing through all the centres in turn; but there seems no very definite reason for the order in

which this line touches them. The symbolism of the running dog is not explained, so we are

left at liberty to interpret it as we will.

The author gives us later an illustration of the man regenerated by the Christ, who has

entirely crushed the serpent, but has replaced the Sun by the Sacred Heart, dripping gore most

gruesomely.

The interest of the picture to us, however, is not in the author’s interpretations, but in

the fact that it shows beyond the possibility of mistake that at least some of the mystics of the

seventeenth century knew of the existence and position of the seven centres in the human

body.

Further evidence of early knowledge about these force-centres exists in the rituals of

Freemasonry, the salient points of which come down to us from time immemorial; the

monuments show that these points were known and practised in ancient Egypt, and they have

been handed down faithfully to the present day. Masons find them among their secrets, and

by utilizing them actually stimulate certain of these centres for the occasion and the purpose

of their work, though they generally know little or nothing of what is happening beyond the

range of normal sight. Obviously explanations are impossible here, but I have mentioned as

much of the matter as is permissible in The Hidden Life in Freemasonry.