THE LAST SONG OF THE SWAN

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by

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Whence the poetical but very fantastic notion--even in a myth--about swans singing their own funeral dirges? There is a Northern legend to that effect, but it is not older than the middle ages. Most of us have studied ornithology; and in our own days of youth we have made ample acquaintance with swans of every description. In those trustful years of everlasting sunlight, there existed a mysterious attraction between our mischievous hand and the snowy feathers of the stubby tail of that graceful but harsh-voiced King of aquatic birds. The hand that treacherously offered biscuits, while the other pulled out a feather or two, was often punished; but so were the ears. Few noises can compare in cacophony with the cry of that bird--whether it be the "whistling" *(Cignus Americanus*) of the "trumpeter" swan. Swans snort, rattle,, screech and hiss, but certainly they do not sing, especially when smarting under the indignity of an unjust assault upon their tails. But listen to the legend. "When feeling life departing, the swan lifts high its head, and breaking into a long, melodious chant--a heart-rendering song of death--the noble bird sends heavenward a melodious protest, a plaint that moves to tears man and beast, and thrills through the hearts of those who hear it."

Just so, "those who hear it." But who ever heard that song sung by a swan? We do not hesitate to proclaim the acceptation of such a statement, even as a poetical license, one of the numerous paradoxes of our incongruous age and human mind. We have no serious objection to offer--owing to personal feelings--to Fènèlon, the Archbishop and orator, being dubbed the "Swan of Cambrai," but we protest against the same dubious compliment being applied to Shakespeare. Ben Jonson was ill-advised to call the greatest genius England can boast of--the "Sweet swan of Avon"; and as to Homer being nicknamed "the Swan of meander"--this is simply a posthumous libel, which Lucifer can never disapprove of and expose in sufficiently strong terms.

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Let us apply the fictitious idea rather to things than to men, by remembering that the swan--a symbol of the Supreme Brahm and one of the *avataras* of the amorous Jupiter--was also a symbolical type of cycles; at any rate, of the tailend of every important cycle in human history. An emblem as strange, the reader may think, and one as difficult to account for. Yet it has its *raison d'etre.* It was probably suggested by the swan loving to swim in circles, bending its long and graceful neck into a ring, and it was not a bad typical designation, after all. At any rate the older idea was more graphic and to the point, and certainly more logical, than the later one which endowed the swan's throat with musical modulations and made of him a sweet songster and a seer to boot.

The last song of the present "Cyclic Swan" bodes us an evil omen. Some hear its screeching like an owl, and croaking like Edgar Poe's raven. The combination of the figures 8 and 9, spoken of in last month's editorial, has borne its fruits already. Hardly had we spoken of the dread Caesars and World-Potentates of old had for number 8, which postulates the *equality of all men*, and of its fatal combination with number 9--which represents the earth *under an evil principle*--when that principle began making sad havoc among the poor Potentates and the Upper Ten--their subjects. The influenza has shown of late a weird and mysterious predilection for Royalty. One by one it has leveled its members through death to an absolute equality with their grooms and kitchen-maids. *Sic transit gloria mundi!* Its first victim was the Empress Dowager of Germany; then the ex-Empress of Brazil, the Duke d'Aosta, Prince William of Hessen-Philippsthal, the Duke of Monpensier, the Prince of Swarsburg Rudolstadt, the wife of the Duke of Cambridge; besides a number of Generals,, Ambassadors, Statesmen and their mothers-in-law. Where, when, at what victim shalt thou stop thy scythe, O "innocent" and "harmless" Influenza?

Each of these royal and semi-royal Swans has sung his last song, and gone "to that bourne" whence every "traveler returns,"-- the aphoristical verse to the contrary, notwithstanding. Yea, they will now solve the great mystery for themselves, and Theosophy and its teaching will get more adherents and believers among royalty in " heaven," than it does among the said caste on earth.

A propos of Influenza--miscalled the "Russian," but which seems to be rather the scapegoat while it lasts, for the sins of omission and commission of the medical faculty and its fashionable physicians--what is it? Medical authorities have now and then ventured a few words sounding very learned, but telling us very little about its true nature. Then seemed to have picked now and then a clue of pathological thread pointing rather vaguely, if at all, to its being due to bacteriological causes; but they are as far off a solution of the mystery as ever. The practical lessons reaching from so many and varied cases have been many, but the deductions therefrom do not seem to have been numerous or satisfactory.

What is in reality that unknown monster, which seems to travel with the rapidity of some sensational news started with the object of dishonoring a fellow creature: which is almost ubiquitous; and which shows such strange discrimination in the selection of its victims? Why does it attack the rich and the powerful far more in proportion than it does the poor and the insignificant? Is it indeed only "an agile microbe" as Dr. Symes Thomson would make us think?

And is it quite true that the influential Bacillus (no pun meant) has just been apprehended at Vienna by Drs. Jolles and Weichselbaum--or is it but a snare and a delusion like so many other things? Who knoweth? Still the face of our unwelcome guest -- the so-called "Russian Influenza" is veiled to this day, though its body is heavy to many, especially to the old and the weak, and almost invariably fatal to invalids. A great medical authority on epidemics Dr. Zedekauer, has just asserted that that disease has ever been the precursor of cholera--at St. Petersburg, at any rate. This is to say the least,, a very strange statement. That which is now called "influenza" was known before as the *grippe*, and the latter was known in Europe as an epidemic, centuries before the cholera made its first appearance in so-called civilized lands. the biography and history of influenza, alias "grippe," may prove interesting to some readers. This is what we gather from authoritative sources.

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