G. I. Gurdjieff
The War Against Sleep

The Strange Life of P. D. Ouspensky

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For Cyril Tilburn, whose help was invaluable.

Contents for G. I. Gurdjieff: The War Against Sleep

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Introductory Note

IT WAS in 1951, a year after the publication of *In Search of the Miraculous* and *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson,* that I first came across the ideas of Gurdjieff. I was instantly aware of being in touch with one of the great minds of this century. I wrote about him for the first time in 1955, in the concluding chapter of *The Outsider,* where he figures (with Ramakrishna and T. E. Hulme) as one of the few men who have glimpsed a solution to the 'sickness of man in the twentieth century'. Since then I have written about him in several books — notably *The Occult* and *Mysteries.*

When the publishers of the present book suggested that I should write about Gurdjieff, I experienced misgivings; it would involve repeating a great deal that I have already written. But then, my own views on Gurdjieff have changed and evolved over the years, and the idea of getting them between two covers was an interesting challenge. So I brushed aside my doubts, decided to repeat myself where necessary, and wrote the book. And in repeating myself I discovered an entirely new set of meanings and implications in Gurdjieff.

It was an interesting lesson in the difference between 'grasping' and merely 'knowing' — a distinction that lies at the heart of Gurdjieff's thought.

Which is why I make no apology to those who have read me on Gurdjieff before. His ideas will bear repetition.

One
The Magician

ON A BRIGHT summer morning in 1917, an attractive Russian woman in her late twenties sat in Phillipov's café, in St Petersburg's Nevsky Prospect, waiting for the arrival of her friend Peter Demianovitch Ouspensky. Uncharacteristically, Ouspensky was late. When he finally hurried in, he was in a state of unusual excitement. His first words were: 'I think this time we've really found what we need.' And he reminded her that in Moscow, in 1915, he had met a remarkable teacher, who spoke of the fundamental problems of human existence with an air of knowledge and authority. His name was George Ivanovitch Gurdjieff. Now, said Ouspensky, Gurdjieff had come to St Petersburg — and was, at that very moment, waiting for them in another branch of Phillipov's across the road. The lady, Anna Butkovsky, says:

> When I entered the other Phillipov's I saw a man sitting at a table in the far corner, wearing an ordinary black coat and the high astrakhan cap that Russian men wear in winter. Signs of Greek ancestry could be discerned in his fine, virile features and in the look that pierced right through you (though not in an unpleasant way). He had an oval-shaped head, black eyes and an olive complexion, and wore a black moustache. His manner was very calm and relaxed, and he spoke without any gesticulation. Even to be sitting with him was very agreeable. Though it was not his native language, he could speak Russian fluently, in a manner not quite like ours, more exact and very picturesque. Sometimes he would speak in a 'lazy' voice, and you felt that each phrase was being carefully and specially

> put together, for that particular occasion, not at all like the ready-made phrases which we would normally use in conversation, devoid of creative power or individuality. You quickly grasped that he had a gift of assembling words expressively. And here I sat, and I felt that I was at last in the presence of a Guru.

Gurdjieff made the same kind of impression on everyone who met him. We have, perhaps, a dozen records by pupils describing their first meeting. Almost without exception, they mention that 'look that pierced right through you'. A young army officer named Thomas de Hartmann met Gurdjieff at about the same time. When two men wearing black coats and black moustaches approached him in the café, he wondered which was Gurdjieff. 'But my uncertainty was quickly dispelled by the eyes of one of the men'. J. G. Bennett, who met Gurdjieff in Constantinople in 1920, wrote: 'I met the strangest pair of eyes I have ever seen. The two eyes were so different that I wondered if the light had played some trick on me.' And all these different impressions are summarized in a remark made by the wife of the physician Kenneth Walker after she met Gurdjieff in Paris in 1948: 'The chief impression he gave me was the impression of immense vigour and of concentrated strength. I had the feeling that he was not really a man but a magician.'

Gurdjieff was, in fact, a kind of magician. There can be no doubt that he possessed certain magical or psychic powers. But he seems to have regarded these as irrelevant or unimportant. Gurdjieff's central concern was with the *potentialities* of human beings — or, more specifically, of human consciousness. Ouspensky expressed it clearly in a little book called *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution,* where he remarks that ordinary psychology is concerned with man as he actually exists. But there is another kind, that studies man 'not from the point of view of what he is, or what he seems to be, but from the point of view of what he may become; that is, from the point of view of his possible evolution.'

> the tiredness drain out of me, but at the same moment his body slumped and his face turned grey as if it was being drained of life. I looked at him, amazed, and when he saw me sitting erect, smiling and full of energy, he said quickly: 'You all right now — watch food on stove — I must go.' There was something very urgent in his voice and I leaped to my feet to help him but he waved me away and limped slowly out of the room.

What had happened, apparently, was that Gurdjieff had somehow *poured* vital energy into Peters by some psychic discipline — either that, or somehow touched the source of vitality in Peters himself; at all events, it drained Gurdjieff. Peters says: 'I was convinced... that he knew how to transmit energy from himself to others; I was also convinced that it could only be done at great cost to himself.'

What happened next is equally significant.

> It also became obvious within the next few minutes that he knew how to renew his own energy quickly, for I was amazed when he returned to the kitchen to see the change in him; he looked like a young man again, alert, smiling, sly and full of good spirits. He said that this was a very fortunate meeting, and that while I had forced him to make an almost impossible effort, it had been — as I had witnessed — a very good thing for both of us.

Gurdjieff's comment is of considerable importance. When Peters first came to the apartment, he looked tired — 'I have never seen anyone look so tired.' He made an effort that drained him even further, transmitting vitality to Peters. And then, within fifteen minutes, was completely renewed and refreshed. The implication seems clear. Gurdjieff himself had *forgotten* that he had the power to renew his own energies, until the exhaustion of Fritz

Peters forced him to make an enormous effort. Before Peters came, Gurdjieff had been taking his own fatigue for granted, as something inevitable. Pouring energy into Peters reminded him that he had the power to somehow call upon vital energy. This is why he told Peters that this was a fortunate meeting for both of them.

This story enables us to see precisely why Kenneth Walker's wife thought Gurdjieff a magician. It also makes it clear that his 'magical' powers were not of the kind that we normally associate with notorious 'occultists' or magicians, like Madame Blavatsky or Aleister Crowley. There are stories of Madame Blavatsky causing raps to resound from all over the room, of Crowley somehow causing men to go on all fours and howl like dogs; but never of their producing this wholly tonic effect on someone. It is not even necessary to assume that Gurdjieff revitalized Peters by some form of telepathic transfer of energy; a psychologist would probably argue that he did it by some form of suggestion.

As to Gurdjieff's power to renew his own energies, its essence had been understood by psychologists of the nineteenth century, decades before the age of Freud and Jung. William James speaks about it in an important essay called 'The Energies of Man'.

> Everyone is familiar with the phenomenon of feeling more or less alive on different days. Everyone knows on any given day that there are energies slumbering in him which the incitements of that day do not call forth, but which he might display if these were greater. Most of us feel as if a sort of cloud weighed upon us, keeping us below our highest notch of clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding. Compared with what we ought to be, we are only half awake. Our fires are damped, our drafts are checked. We are making use of only a small part of our possible mental and

> physical resources. In some persons this sense of being cut off from their rightful resources is extreme, and we then get the formidable neurasthenic and psychasthenic conditions, with life grown into one tissue of impossibilities, that so many medical books describe.
>
> Stating the thing broadly, the human individual thus lives far within his limits; he possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use. He energizes below his *maximum,* and he behaves below his *optimum*. In elementary faculty, in co-ordination, in power *of inhibition* and control, in every conceivable way, his life is contracted like the field of vision of an hysteric subject — but with less excuse, for the poor hysteric is diseased, while in the rest of us, it is only an inveterate *habit* — the habit of inferiority to our full self — that is bad.

James cites the well-known phenomenon of 'second wind' as an example of this power to draw upon vital reserves. When we are completing some task, he says, we make a practice of stopping once we feel tired — once we encounter the first layer of fatigue. If we *force ourselves* to press on, a surprising thing happens. The fatigue gets worse, up to a point, then suddenly vanishes, and we feel better than before. He mentions that one of the standard methods of treating 'neurasthenic' patients in the nineteenth century was to bully patients into making a greater effort than usual. 'First comes the very extremity of distress, then follows unexpected relief.' And he adds: 'We live subject to arrest by degrees of fatigue which we have come only from habit to obey.'

In this sentence, James has defined the essence of Gurdjieff's lifework. It is true that the ideas of Gurdjieff cover an immense range — of psychology, philosophy, cosmology, even alchemy. But at the core of his work lies this notion that we possess

greater powers than we realize, and that our apparent limitations are due to a peculiar form of laziness — a laziness that has become so habitual that it has developed into a *mechanism*.

And how can this mechanism be controlled or de-activated?
In his essay on vital reserves, William James points out that we call upon these deeper powers when we are stimulated either by crisis, or by some deep sense of urgency — of purpose. He quotes Colonel Baird-Smith, who was in charge of the defence of Delhi during its six week siege by Indian mutineers in 1857. His mouth was filled with sores and his body covered with them; a wounded ankle was a black, festering mess; diarrhoea had worn him to a shadow. Unable to eat, he lived almost entirely on brandy. Yet it seemed to have no effect on him. The crisis — the need to protect the lives of women and children — kept him in such a state of concentrated determination that he remained alert and energetic during the whole siege. Clearly, *he* did precisely what Gurdjieff did when he left Fritz Peters sitting in the kitchen: reached down inside himself, and summoned vital reserves.

In fact, this method — of deliberately seeking out stimulation, excitement, even crisis — is one of our favourite human devices for escaping that sense of 'a cloud weighing upon us'. A depressed housewife goes and buys herself a new hat. A bored man gets drunk. A discontented teenager steals a car or takes his knuckledusters to a football match. Generally speaking, the greater a person's potentiality for achievement, the greater his or her objection to that feeling of being 'cut off from one's rightful resources'. Shaw's Captain Shotover tells Ellie Dunne, 'At your age, I looked for hardship, danger, horror and death, that I might feel the life in me more intensely.' And this is clearly the motivation that drove Ernest Hemingway, for example, to spend so much of his time big game hunting, bullfighting, working as a war correspondent.

This desire to break the bonds of their own laziness may even lead men to behave in ways that are obviously contrary to their

best interests. Van Gogh threw up a comfortable job as an art dealer to become a lay preacher among the miners in Belgium. Lawrence of Arabia refused comfortable government appointments to become an ordinary aircraftman in the R.A.F. The philosopher Wittgenstein gave away an inherited fortune to become a badly paid schoolmaster. These 'outsiders' were driven by a need to escape a feeling of enstiflement, of stagnation. The aim was to throw off the 'habit neurosis' — the 'habit of inferiority to one's full self'.

But then, there is obviously an element of absurdity in deliberately seeking out danger or discomfort, since we otherwise spend so much of our lives trying to avoid them. There *must* be other ways of breaking through to our vital reserves, apart from risking our necks or sleeping on a bed of nails. For example, it is plain that it is not the crisis itself that creates the flow of vital energy; it is our response to it. It is as if some inner-voice gave an *order* that causes something inside us to snap to attention. Colonel Baird-Smith's response to the mutiny was to order himself to keep going, to ignore pain and starvation, until the crisis had been brought under control. The mutiny only instilled him with a sense of the seriousness of the situation, to which his 'vital reserves' responded. And if a man could generate that sense of seriousness, of the need for effort, then he ought to be able to summon the energies without the need for an Indian mutiny.

How is this to be done? According to Gurdjieff, the answer falls into two parts. First of all, a man must commit himself wholly and totally to the task of escaping his normal limitations; it requires the kind of commitment that made saints sit on top of pillars. Secondly, he must understand something of the workings of this complicated computer that houses the human spirit. (Gurdjieff died before the age of computers, so he used the word 'machine'; but he would undoubtedly have found 'computer' more convenient and accurate.) 'Understand the machine.' This body is a computer; so is this brain. Like all computers, they are capable of a far wider range of response than we ever demand

of them. But wider responses can only be obtained when they are thoroughly understood.

Gurdjieff's method of securing the first of these two objectives was simply to demand an unusual level of commitment. When the eleven-year-old Fritz Peters told him that he wanted to know 'everything about man', Gurdjieff asked him with great intensity: 'Can you promise to do something for me?' When Peters said yes, Gurdjieff gestured at the vast expanse of lawns of the Chateau du Prieuré, and told him that he must cut them all once a week.

'He struck the table with his fist for a second time. "You must promise on your God." His voice was deadly serious. "You must promise me that you will do this thing no matter what happens ... Must promise you will do no matter what happens, no matter who try to stop you."' And Peters adds: 'I would have died, if necessary, in the act of mowing the lawns.'

In fact, Gurdjieff then made him work harder and harder, until he was mowing all the lawns in four days.

The principle here is similar to that of commando training: that is, the trainee is made to tackle more and more difficult obstacles, until he can cascade down cliffs on his back and eat barbed wire for breakfast. This was the basis of Gurdjieff's method. But it was not simply a matter of developing strength and alertness. Hard work can become a mere habit, like any other. Gurdjieff's aim was also to persuade his pupils *not* to develop habits. Habit arises from doing something mechanically, with the mind 'elsewhere'. Gurdjieff's pupils were made to work hard; but it was important that they should maintain 'mindfulness', intense awareness.

At some fairly early stage in his career — which we shall consider at greater length in the next chapter — Gurdjieff became acquainted with certain types of eastern dancing that demanded an extraordinary complexity of movements. Anyone

who tries patting the head with one hand and rubbing the stomach with the other will know how difficult it is. Gurdjieff devised dances in which the student had to do something not only with both hands, but with both feet and the head as well. Again, these dances became fundamental to training in 'the work'. Their aim was to widen and extend the range of the body's possibilities — what Gurdjieff called 'the moving centre'. It is true that these dances (or 'movements') could, in themselves, become habitual. But, under certain circumstances, they could also be amazingly effective in producing new modes of consciousness. One of the most striking examples is to be found in J. G. Bennett's autobiography *Witness,* describing Bennett's experiences with Gurdjieff at Fontainebleau (the Prieuré) in 1923.

Bennett was suffering from dysentery, contracted in the east.

> Each morning, it was harder and harder to get out of bed, and my body shrank from the heavy work in the heat of the sun. The constant diarrhoea made me very weak, but somehow I kept going.
>
> Finally, a day came when I simply could not stand up. I was shaking with fever and very wretched in myself; feeling that I had failed. Just as I was saying to myself: 'I will stay in bed today,' I felt my body rising. I dressed and went to work as usual, but this time with a queer sense of being held together by a superior Will that was not my own.
>
> We worked as usual all the morning. I could not eat lunch that day, but lay on the ground, wondering if I was going to die. Gurdjieff had just introduced afternoon practices of the exercises out-of-doors under the lime grove. When the pupils began to collect under the lime trees, I

joined them.

We started by working on a new exercise of incredible complexity that even the most experienced Russian pupils could not master. The structure of the exercises was drawn on the board in symbols, and head, feet, arms and torso had to follow independent sequences. It was a torture for all of us.

Soon I ceased to be aware of anything but the music and my own weakness. I kept saying to myself: 'At the next change I will stop.' ... One by one, all the English pupils fell out, and most of the Russian women . . .

Gurdjieff stood watching intently. Time lost the quality of before and after. There was no past and no future, only the present agony of making my body move. Gradually I became aware that Gurdjieff was putting all his attention on me. There was an unspoken demand that was at the same time an encouragement and a promise. I must not give up — if it killed me.

Suddenly, I was filled with the influx of an immense power. My body seemed to have turned into light. I could not feel its presence in the usual ways. There was no effort, no pain, no weariness, not even any sense of weight... My own state was blissful beyond anything I had ever known. It was quite different from the ecstasy of sexual union, for it was altogether free and detached from the body. It was exultation in the faith that can move mountains.

All had gone into the house for tea, but I went in the opposite direction towards the kitchen

> garden, where I took a spade and began to dig. Digging in the earth is a searching test of our capacity for physical effort. A strong man can dig fast for a short time or slowly for a long time, but no one can force his body to dig fast for a long time even if he has exceptional training. I felt the need to test the power that had entered me, and I began to dig in the fierce afternoon heat for more than an hour at a rate that I ordinarily could not sustain for two minutes. My weak, rebellious, suffering body had become strong and obedient. The diarrhoea had ceased and I no longer felt the gnawing abdominal pains that had been with me for days. Moreover, I experienced a clarity of thought that I had only known involuntarily and at rare moments . . . The phrase 'in my mind's eye' took on a new meaning as I 'saw' the eternal pattern of each thing I looked at, the trees, the water flowing in the canal and even the spade, and lastly my own body... I remember saying aloud: 'Now I see why God hides Himself from us.' But even now I cannot recall the intuition behind this exclamation.

Bennett went for a walk in the forest, and encountered Gurdjieff, who began to speak about man's need for 'higher emotional energy' if he is to transform himself. He went on: 'There are some people in the world, but they are very rare, who are connected to a Great Reservoir or Accumulator of this energy... Those who can draw upon it can be a means of helping others.' The implication was clearly that Gurdjieff himself was such a person, and that he had 'supplied' Bennett with the necessary energy for his mystical experience. He added: 'What you have received today is a taste of what is possible for you. Until now you have only known about these things theoretically, but now you have experience.'

Bennett walked on into the forest; the most important part of his

experience was still to come.

> A lecture of Ouspensky came into my mind. He had spoken about the very narrow limits within which we can control our functions and added: 'It is easy to verify that we have no control over our emotions. Some people imagine that they can be angry or pleased as they will, but anyone can verify that he cannot be astonished at will.' As I recalled these words, I said to myself: 'I will be astonished.' Instantly, I was overwhelmed with amazement, not only at my own state, but at everything that I looked at or thought of. Each tree was so uniquely itself that I felt that I could walk in the forest for ever and never cease from wonderment. Then the thought of 'fear' came to me. At once I was shaking with terror. Unnamed horrors were menacing me on every side. I thought of 'joy', and I felt that my heart would burst from rapture. The word 'love' came to me, and I was pervaded with such fine shades of tenderness and compassion that I saw that I had not the remotest idea of the depth and the range of love. Love was everywhere and in everything. It was infinitely adaptable to every shade of need. After a time, it became too much for me, it seemed that if I plunged any more deeply into the mystery of love, I would cease to exist. I wanted to be free from this power to feel whatever I chose, and at once it left me.

Bennett obviously attached great importance to Gurdjieff's remarks on 'the Great Reservoir or Accumulator'. But to someone trying to understand the essence of Gurdjieff's ideas, this is less important than the simple fact that Bennett had achieved such total control over his emotions. For *this* is our central human problem: that we are almost constantly the victims of our emotions, always being swept up and down on a kind of

inner-switchback. We possess a certain control over them; we *can* 'direct our thoughts' — or feelings — in such a way as to intensify them. This is certainly our most remarkable human characteristic: imagination. Animals require actual physical stimuli to trigger their experience. A man can retreat into a book — or a daydream — and live through certain experiences quite independent of the physical world. He can even, for example, imagine a sexual encounter, and not only experience all the appropriate physical responses, but even the sexual climax. Such a curious ability is far beyond the power of any animal.

Yet our experience of imagination convinces us that it is bound, by its very nature, to be no more than a dim carbon copy of 'real' experience. And the consequences of this unconscious assumption are far greater than we realize. It means that we assume that the world of mind is very much a second best when compared with the world of physical actuality, a kind of sham, a make-believe. So when confronted by some painful emotion, or some physical problem, our natural tendency is to retreat and surrender. We are subject to arrest, not only from degrees of fatigue that we have come to obey by habit, but from degrees of self-pity and boredom. Bennett's experience suggests that, if only we made the effort, we could achieve a degree of control over our feelings that would at present strike us as miraculous. The novelist Proust experienced, for a few seconds, an intense consciousness of the reality of his own past — he describes it in *Swann's Way* — and he spent the remainder of his life trying to rediscover that curious power. Yet such a glimpse would have been a mere by-product of the kind of control that Bennett experienced. To actually *know* this consciously, to realize that we were not intended to reach breaking point so quickly and easily, would obviously alter a man's whole approach to his life and its problems.

To effect such an alteration in human consciousness was Gurdjieff's central aim.

Two
The Early Years

WHO WAS this man whose air of concentrated power impressed so many of his contemporaries?

One of the first published accounts of Gurdjieff is to be found in a book by J. G. Bennett, *What Are We Living For?,* which appeared in 1949, the year of Gurdjieff's death. Bennett says: 'To those who take an interest in such things it has been known for many years that a remarkable teacher had come to the West in the person of a man reputed to have gained access to sources of knowledge denied to any previous western explorer.' He went on:

> Gurdjieff has passed his eighty-third birthday... He was born in the Caucasus, of an old Greek family which migrated more than a hundred years ago from one of the ancient Greek colonies of Asia Minor. From his early childhood he had opportunities of meeting with a series of remarkable men, from contact with whom he acquired the conviction that something of vital importance was missing from the views about man and the world current in the European science and literature he had been set to study.

In fact, Gurdjieff was nowhere near the age of eighty-three when he died. His passport gave the date of his birth as 28 December 1877; if this is accurate, then he died shortly before his seventy-second birthday. In *The Occult,* I have accepted what seems to me the likelier date of 1873. The date makes a slight difference as far as Gurdjieff's nationality is concerned; if he was born in 1873, then he was a Turkish citizen; if in December 1877, then he was a Russian, since his place of birth, Gumru, fell to the

Russians during the Russo-Turkish war of 1877; it was renamed Alexandropol, after the Tsar's father.

Gurdjieff's father was Greek; his mother Armenian. Around 1878, the family moved to the nearby town of Kars; this had been taken by the Russians in 1877, and many of the Turkish inhabitants had been massacred. When Kars became part of Russia, thousands of Turks moved out and thousands of Russians moved in. It is important to realize that Gurdjieff was born into an ethnic melting pot; that is, into the reverse of a secure and settled culture. Conditions like these can create a sense of rootlessness and insecurity; they can also stimulate the will to survive. Gurdjieff was a born survivor.

His father was a carpenter by profession, a 'bard' or professional story-teller by choice. From the beginning Gurdjieff had a deep sense of kinship with the past. His father recited parts of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. One day, Gurdjieff read in a magazine that archaeologists had discovered ancient tablets of the *Epic* in Babylonia, and he speaks of experiencing 'such an inner excitement that it was as if my future destiny depended on all this.' He was impressed that the verses of the epic, as printed in the magazine, were almost identical to those his father had recited; yet they had been passed on by word of mouth for thousands of years. What matters here is the unstated implication: that in that case, other kinds of ancient knowledge may have also survived in the same way.

Like most children, Gurdjieff was fascinated by the world of the 'occult' and paranormal; but, unlike most children, he also had a certain amount of direct experience in this field. At the house of his tutor, Father Bogachevsky, Gurdjieff watched a 'table rapping' session, in which the table tapped out answers to questions with one of its legs. Gurdjieff was still grief-stricken about the death of a favourite sister, and spent the whole of that night awake, puzzling about the problem of life after death. When Gurdjieff asked his first teacher, Father Borsch, about such matters, Borsch asserted that it was all nonsense; as a result, Gurdjieff

found himself doubting the word of a man whom he had previously regarded as the incarnation of wisdom. He borrowed books on the subject, but found no satisfactory answer.

He was also intrigued when a half-witted fortune teller told his aunt that he would have a bad sore on his right side, and would have an accident with a firearm. In fact, the sore had been troubling him for some time, but he had told no one about it. A week later, when he was out duck shooting, Gurdjieff was shot in the leg. As a result, Gurdjieff himself consulted the fortune teller, who sat between two lighted candles and stared for a long time at his thumb nail — in which he saw 'pictures'. These prophecies were also fulfilled, although Gurdjieff does not tell us what they were.

In 1888, Gurdjieff heard the sound of a child screaming; he found that a group of children had drawn a circle around a Yezidi boy (the Yezidis were a religious sect, generally regarded as devil worshippers), and the boy was unable to break his way out of it. As soon as Gurdjieff rubbed out a part of the circle, the child was able to escape. Gurdjieff was fascinated; he went from person to person, asking what the phenomenon could mean. One man told him the children had been playing a joke on him, another that it was simply a form of hysteria. In later years, Gurdjieff tried the experiment with a Yezidi woman; when a circle was drawn round her, she could not move outside it, and it took Gurdjieff and another strong man to drag her out. Gurdjieff also confirmed that when a Yezidi is dragged out of a circle, he falls into a state of catalepsy, which disappears if he is placed inside again. Otherwise, says Gurdjieff, it vanishes after thirteen or twenty-one hours.

One morning, Gurdjieff saw a group of women talking excitedly, and learned from them that a young man who had been buried the day before — under a light covering of earth, according to the Tartar custom — had tried to walk home in the night. Someone had seen him and raised the alarm; neighbours had cut the throat of the corpse and carried it back to the cemetery. (Stories

of vampires are current in this part of the world.) Again, Gurdjieff questioned everyone he knew about what it could mean.

Accompanying a group of pilgrims from Alexandropol, to the tomb of a saint on Mount Djadjur, Gurdjieff saw a paralytic crawl on to the tomb of the saint, and then walk away cured. He was equally fascinated when, during a long drought, a priest from Antioch brought a miracle-working icon, and prayed for rain. As the procession was marching back to the town, clouds gathered, and the rain poured down.

In the house next to Gurdjieff, a young married woman was dying of 'galloping consumption'. One morning, just after a doctor had been telling Gurdjieff that the woman would soon be dead, her mother-in-law came to ask permission to gather rose hips in the garden. The Virgin had appeared to her in a dream and told her to boil rose hips in milk and give them to the dying woman. The doctor laughed. But the next morning, Gurdjieff met the 'dying' woman coming out of church; a week later, she was completely cured. The doctor explained that all this was purely a matter of chance.

It looks as if, on the whole, Gurdjieff encountered rather more than his fair share of such odd events as a child and teenager — as if fate intended to steer his highly active intelligence in a definite direction. His family wanted him to become a priest. His first 'tutor', Father Borsch, Dean of the Kars Military School (and, in effect, 'bishop' of the whole region), insisted that priests should also have a certain medical knowledge, since they may be wasting their time trying to cure the soul if the illness lies in the body. Gurdjieff himself had a natural inclination for handicrafts — he enjoyed tinkering with things, taking them to pieces and mending them, repairing household articles that had been broken. He used to earn himself pocket money by travelling to Alexandropol and undertaking various repairs. (He went there from shame; he wanted no one in Kars to realize how poor they were.) So his time was divided between theology, medicine, and crafts like shoe repairing or clock mending.

Dean Borsch seems to have laid the foundation of Gurdjieff's life-work with remarks about the general 'laws' of human nature. He pointed out, for example, that many adults fail to grow up because they lack the 'corresponding type of the opposite sex' for their completion. If a person fails to find his or her own type, he is likely to end up with a second-best, who prevents his individuality from maturing. As a result, said the Dean, it is absolutely essential for each person to have beside him the person of the corresponding type of the opposite sex if he is to realize his possibilities. The comment sounds as if it might have been derived from Plato or Goethe, but the Dean attributed it to 'our remote ancestors' — so that, again, it sounded like a piece of ancient wisdom that had been transmitted by word of mouth.

In his early teens — Gurdjieff is never specific about dates — he took a job as a stoker in the railway station at Tiflis. He also formed his first important friendship with someone his own age: a theological student named Sarkis Pogossian, son of a Turkish dyer. According to Gurdjieff, he travelled to Echmiadzin, the Armenian equivalent of Mecca, hoping to find an answer to those questions about the supernatural that were tormenting him. He carried with him a parcel for the young novice, who invited him to share his room.

At this time, Gurdjieff's own orientation was basically religious; he describes visiting all the places of pilgrimage and praying at shrines. (It is important to realize that, under different circumstances, Gurdjieff might have ended as an archimandrite of the Greek orthodox church — or as a highly unorthodox religious teacher like Rasputin.) Later, Pogossian — now on the verge of becoming a priest — came to stay with Gurdjieff in Tiflis. The thought of the priesthood depressed Pogossian, and when Gurdjieff suggested that he should take a job at the station, he immediately agreed — becoming a locksmith. At this point, Gurdjieff spent several months helping to survey the route of a proposed railway between Tiflis and Kars. He supplemented his income by approaching the leading men in towns or villages through which the railway was scheduled to pass, and offering to

'fix' a halting place there. Most of them paid the bribes.

Back in Tiflis, he had enough money to give up his job on the railway and spend his days reading. In long discussions, he and Pogossian had reached the conclusion that there was some 'hidden knowledge' that had come down from ancient times. They had bought piles of old Armenian texts from a local bookseller; now they moved to the ruins of the ancient Armenian capital, Ani, built a hut there, and spent their days in study and discussion.

It must be emphasized that Gurdjieff owed his freedom to take such decisions to the unsettled character of life in that region after the Russo-Turkish war. If he and Pogossian had been born in St Petersburg or Constantinople, they would have found it difficult to avoid being ingested by the 'system' and taking up a respectable profession. In the Asiatic equivalent of the American wild west, nobody cared too much if they ignored their families' plans and pursued strange ideas of their own.

So Gurdjieff and Pogossian were able to spend their days talking, and poking around in the ruins of the ancient city. One day, exploring an underground passage, they uncovered a monk s cell, with some decaying parchments written in ancient Armenian. They returned to Alexandropol to decipher these manuscripts. They turned out to be letters to a certain Father Arem. And one of them referred to certain 'mysteries'; the postscript spoke of a 'Sarmoung Brotherhood' which used to exist at the town of Siranoush; they recognized the name as that of an esoteric brotherhood that, according to one of their books, dated back as far as 2500 B.C. They decided that the parchments dated back to the seventh century A.D., that a city called Nivssi referred to in the parchment was present day Mosul, and that the descendants of the Sarmoung Brotherhood were the present day Aïsors. The manuscript stated that the secret school had moved to a valley three days journey from Nivssi. This was not too far away — a few hundred miles due south — and Gurdjieff and Pogossian decided it might be worth

seeing whether any traces of the ancient school still existed. All they needed was finance for the expedition, and this was provided by a local committee of Armenian patriots, who had decided to send an expedition to a place called Moush. Pogossian persuaded them to appoint himself and Gurdjieff their representatives; and so Gurdjieff set off on his first journey in search of 'secret knowledge'.

Unfortunately, Gurdjieff preferred not to be specific about what he learned. He tells us (in *Meetings With Remarkable Men*) that he and Pogossian went south, disguising themselves for much of the journey as Caucasian Tartars. (They heard rumours that Englishmen had been flayed alive by Aïsors for trying to copy inscriptions.) At one point, Pogossian was bitten by a poisonous spider; Gurdjieff cut out the poison with a knife but the wound festered. An Armenian priest, to whom they had to deliver a letter, put them up in his house for a month. He told Gurdjieff a story about an old map he possessed — a Russian prince had offered to buy it for £500, and had finally paid £200 in order to be allowed to copy it. Gurdjieff asked to see the map, and was immensely excited to find that it was an ancient map of Egypt. When the priest was out, he and Pogossian managed to get hold of the map and copied it — Gurdjieff admits that it was immoral, but felt it was necessary. Later, at Smyrna, Gurdjieff and Pogossian got involved in a brawl between two groups of sailors, and both received minor injuries. The next day, at the harbour, they were recognized by the grateful sailors, who proved to be English. When they learned that Gurdjieff and Pogossian wanted to get to Alexandria, two of them went off to try and arrange it. The consequence was that Gurdjieff and Pogossian sailed on an English warship to Egypt, Gurdjieff polishing the brass while Pogossian worked in the engine room. Pogossian decided to go on to Liverpool with the ship, where he became an engineer; Gurdjieff went to Egypt, then on to Jerusalem, where he became a professional guide to Russian tourists. But we are not told whether he and Pogossian found their Sarmoung Brotherhood, or whether Gurdjieff made important discoveries by means of his map of 'pre-sand Egypt'. But he does tell of a curious

coincidence. Sitting at the foot of one of the pyramids — this was his second visit to Egypt — looking at his copy of the map, he looked up to observe a grey-haired man standing over him; the man asked, in great excitement, where Gurdjieff had obtained the map. He turned out to be the prince who had paid the Armenian priest £200 to copy it; his name was Prince Yuri Lubovedsky. He and Gurdjieff became close friends.

Bennett believes that Gurdjieff eventually found his Sarmoung Brotherhood — or its modern descendants. Bennett himself tracked down the 'valley three days' ride from Nivssi', and concluded it was a place called Sheik Adi, chief sanctuary of the Yezidis. Gurdjieff also mentions that the Brotherhood had a centre in the 'Olman' monastery in the northern Himalayas, where, he says, he spent three months. And it seems possible that it was there that Gurdjieff eventually discovered the secrets that he would one day pass on to his pupils.

In case the reader is, by this time, beginning to entertain the impression that Gurdjieff may have been a great leg-puller, and that he invented the amazing story of his 'search for truth', let me cite an anecdote that demonstrates his possession of esoteric knowledge. In *Meetings With Remarkable Men,* he tells the story of his acquaintance with a talented Russian girl, Vitvitskaia. She told Gurdjieff how she had always been fascinated by the effect of music, believing that it produces its impressions by means of vibrations, which somehow act upon the biological vibrations of our bodies. In an Afghan monastery she learned how to produce certain effects on an audience by playing definite notes on the piano. Gurdjieff himself was able to confirm some of her theories by telling how he had seen, among the Essenes, a plant made to grow from its seed in half an hour by means of ancient Hebrew music.

In his *Boyhood With Gurdjieff,* Fritz Peters tells how a Russian family came to the Prieuré. Gurdjieff told his followers that he could see that their daughter was susceptible to definite musical chords, and that if a certain chord was played, she would fall into

a trance. The unsuspecting girl came into the room; Gurdjieff asked his pianist, Hartmann, to play the piano. As he played the stated chord, the girl fainted, and it took a long time to revive her. Gurdjieff persuaded her to repeat the demonstration several times; on each occasion, Peters noticed her bewilderment and hysteria on waking up, and was convinced that there was no possibility of collusion.

This, then, was the kind of knowledge Gurdjieff was seeking — a knowledge that would bring power over people. But he was not interested in the power for its own sake. He wanted to know *why* a Yezidi boy could be confined within a 'magic circle', why a certain chord could send a girl into a trance. Vitvitskaia revealed part of the answer when she told Gurdjieff about the secrets she had learned from the 'Mono-psyche Brethren'. 'It cannot be denied that when the people present corresponded absolutely to the mentioned conditions, I could call forth at will in all of them laughter, tears, malice, kindness, and so on . . .' That is, their emotions could be *triggered,* as if they were machines. This was perhaps the most important single conviction that Gurdjieff gained from his study of esoteric religions: that man is almost entirely mechanical. He believes that he 'lives' because he laughs, cries, gets angry, feels sorrow. In fact, says Gurdjieff, such reactions are little more than computerized responses to certain definite stimuli, mere reflexes. This is the meaning of the title of one of Bennett's books about Gurdjieff: *Is There Life on Earth?* The answer is: very little. Most of what we call life is mechanical response.

But can we achieve a degree of freedom from our mechanisms? When people asked Gurdjieff that question, he told them that they had just taken the most important step towards developing free will.

Vitvitskaia's discovery about music clearly reveals that the 'machine' is controlled by vibrations — in this case, musical vibrations. And this insight was confirmed when Gurdjieff spent some time in a 'Sarmoung' monastery in Turkestan. He and his

friend Soloviev were taken there blindfold, and had to swear that they would never reveal its whereabouts, even if they could guess it. There Gurdjieff again saw Prince Lubovedsky — for the last time. Lubovedsky took him to the Women's Court in the monastery, to witness the sacred dances. There he saw a number of peculiar 'apparatuses', whose purpose was to teach the priestesses the basic postures of the sacred dances. Each apparatus, says Gurdjieff, consisted of a column standing on a tripod. From this column, in different places, there projected seven 'branches' or arms. Each arm, in turn, was divided in seven parts, the individual parts connected together by ball-and-socket joints, like a man's shoulder joint. There was also a cupboard full of plates, each one containing a mysterious inscription. These inscriptions were instructions for altering the position of the 'arms'. The positions were the basic alphabet of various postures and movements of the sacred dances. Gurdjieff says that when he saw these dances, 'I was astounded, not by the sense and meaning contained in their dances, which I did not as yet understand, but by the external precision and exactitude with which they performed them.' These dances were obviously the basis of the movements he taught his pupils. (Having seen them performed by Bennett's pupils at Sherborne House in Gloucestershire, I can confirm that their precision and exactitude rivet the attention, producing a strange aesthetic effect.)

But the point to note here is the *number* of the arms and their segments — seven times seven. As we shall see, the technical aspect of Gurdjieff's teaching depends on the notion of 'octaves' (i.e. the seven notes of the scale, completed by a return to the first note.) He asserts that the universe consists of seven levels of creation, which are also seven levels of vibration. (This notion of vibrations is central to Gurdjieff's thinking.) Man is subject to the 'law of seven'. Man also has seven 'minds', or centres, of which the intellectual mind is the lowest — or at least, the clumsiest. (There is also a moving centre — governing the body — an emotional centre, a sex centre, an instinctive centre, and also a higher emotional and higher thinking centre.) He is also subject to another law, the law of three, which asserts that all

action is the result of three forces (and not, as science declares, of two.) The first two forces, positive and negative, merely counterbalance one another; they require a kind of kick from a third force. It seems plain that the tripod at the base of the column was intended to symbolize this law of three.

In short, it looks as if Gurdjieff derived most of his important basic principles from the Sarmoung monasteries in which he was accepted as a pupil. We may say that his quest began in the underground monk's cell in the ruined city of Ani, and ended in the Sarmoung monastery in the Himalayas. Gurdjieff's account of his search is fragmentary, and sometimes confused. He states that he was one of a group who called themselves 'Seekers After Truth', headed by Prince Lubovedsky; but the part played by these other 'seekers' in *Meetings With Remarkable Men* seems to be minimal. But perhaps his most important pronouncement is one that occurs in his first book *Herald of Coming Good,* where he states that after spending some time in a Sufi monastery in central Asia, he came to the conclusion that the answers to his questions 'can be found... in the sphere of man's unconscious mentation' — meaning his unconscious mind. That is to say, the real answers are already there, inside us, and can only be discovered by minute self-observation, and by reasoning about and analysing what we observe.

So for practical purposes, we may ignore the remainder of Gurdjieff's 'search', which took him to various places in Asia. *Meetings With Remarkable Men* gives us a clear picture of these early days, but it should be read with caution. One whole section, describing how the 'Seekers of Truth' went in search of a lost city in the Gobi desert (taking twenty-foot stilts with them so they could walk above the sand storms) seems to be pure fiction — Bennett thinks it is probably an allegory of people who search for truth 'out there' instead of 'in here'. There is no knowing how much of the book is invention. Its chief value lies in the fact that it is the most accessible and readable of Gurdjieff's four books, and that it gives us an excellent picture of Gurdjieff as a real human being. He is never averse to describing the various

dubious ways in which he made money — like catching sparrows, dyeing them different colours, and selling them as 'American canaries'.

And his stories of his various companions — even of his dog —show him to have been a generous and warm-hearted man, a view confirmed by all who knew him well. But it seems unlikely that we shall ever know precisely what Gurdjieff did between 1891, when he set out on his adventures (either at the age of fourteen or nineteen, depending which date of birth we accept) until about 1910, when he first appears in Moscow and St Petersburg as a teacher of self-knowledge. It seems fairly certain there was an intervening period when Gurdjieff became a professional hypnotist and wonderworker — what his critics would doubtless describe as a charlatan. In the Ekim Bey chapter of *Meetings With Remarkable Men,* he describes how he and Ekim Bey (the man who taught him about hypnotism) earned some badly-needed money in Tashkent by hiring a hall and putting on a 'magical' show of hypnotism and other phenomena. An extraordinary photograph in Bennett's *Gurdjieff: Making a New World* shows a young Gurdjieff (with hair) 'as Professional Hypnotist', standing against some kind of a stage backdrop and looking like the villain in a Victorian pantomime. Bennett surmises that Gurdjieff's 'professional' period lasted from about 1907 until 1910.

But the most important event of these early years occurred around 1904, near a town on the edge of the Gobi desert; it is described in his last book *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'.* Gurdjieff's health had been breaking down for some time — in fact, since the year 1896, when he had been hit by a stray bullet on the island of Crete, then decided to walk back to Russia. In 1902, a second 'stray bullet' brought him close to death; he was unconscious for three months at a place on the edge of the Gobi desert, near Yangihissar. Two years later, he made the mistake of getting between the Tsar's soldiers and a group of revolutionaries; a third stray bullet again came close to ending his life. By an odd coincidence, he again found himself

convalescing in the same place on the edge of the Gobi desert.

One evening, when he was physically recovered, Gurdjieff lay in the moonlight, thinking over the past few years. His reflections plunged him into gloom; in fact, his own shortcomings struck him as so appalling that he experienced a sense of total worthlessness. The negative current of his thought was so powerful that he was unable to shake himself free; he felt he was about to lose consciousness when the movement of the camels distracted him and enabled him to throw off this 'dark night of the soul'. Lying next to a spring, he began a process of self-examination. It seemed that the various 'powers' he had acquired in the past few years had been used for the gratification of his worst impulses, self-love, vanity, pride, sexual lust. According to Gurdjieff, his powers 'had been brought to such a level that by only a few hours of self-preparation I could from a distance of ten miles kill a yak; or, in twenty-four hours, could accumulate life forces of such compactness that I could in five minutes put to sleep an elephant.' Yet in spite of these semi-magical powers, he still felt himself to be little better than a machine. He was still unable to maintain a state of self-remembering (intense self-awareness) for more than a few seconds.

What could he do to increase his self-awareness, to galvanize his inner being with a sense of urgency? The saints of old tried sleeping on beds of nails and wearing hair shirts; Gurdjieff had also tried such 'mechanical' disciplines, and found them insufficient. The only way, he decided, was to make some enormous sacrifice. (An inveterate smoker might, for example, give up tobacco, so that the misery of his deprivation would continually serve as a kind of 'alarm clock'.) What could he sacrifice? 'Thinking and thinking, I came to the conclusion that if I should intentionally stop utilizing the exceptional power in my possession . . . then there must be forced out of me such a reminding source.' In short, he would sacrifice his powers of hypnotism and telepathy.

'As soon as I realized the sense of this idea, I was as if reincarnated; I got up and began to run around the spring... like a young calf.'

Gurdjieff thereupon took an oath never again to use his powers merely for self-gratification — only for 'scientific' purposes.

It was at this point that he ceased to be a mere 'magician' — like his contemporary Aleister Crowley — and became primarily a teacher. It was the beginning of a new era in his life.

Three
Moscow and St Petersburg

IN THE year 1909, Gurdjieff decided that it was time to embark on his new career as a teacher. The reason, he explains in his first book, *Herald of Coming Good,* was that 'there was, among men, a widely prevalent... psychosis', known as occultism or spiritualism. He was, at this period, in Tashkent (now in Soviet Central Asia). There, as in Moscow and St Petersburg, there was a feverish interest in all forms of occultism and mysticism, in the doctrines of Madame Blavatsky and Rudolf Steiner, in seances and table-rapping and spirit-healing. And no doubt Gurdjieff reflected that he knew more about 'hidden knowledge' than all the fashionable occultists and mystics put together.

At all events, he began to frequent spiritualist and theosophical circles. He says:

> The ensuing circumstances of my life were so favourable to me that, within six months, I succeeded not only in coming into contact with a great number of these people, but even in being accepted as a well-known 'expert' and guide in evoking so-called 'phenomena of the beyond' in a very large circle.

In a short time, he says, he was regarded as a great maestro of all supernatural knowledge. He speaks frankly of his 'skill in producing tricks', so it seems likely that not all the 'psychic manifestations' he obtained were genuine. His aim, at this point, was to form a circle of disciples who were genuinely in search of power over themselves — not the kind of hysterical enthusiasts who were at that time following Rasputin in St Petersburg. His aim, he explains, was to be able to 'put into the lives of people what I had already learned.' That is to say, he wanted to put his

ideas to the test. He regarded his students as 'guinea pigs'.

His success was apparently very considerable — so much so that he ended by organizing no less than three groups in three different cities — he does not specify which these were. We know nothing of Gurdjieff at this period — none of the written accounts by disciples date back this far. Gurdjieff himself says that he decided to wind up his Tashkent venture because the people all tended to belong to only three or four different types, and that he felt that genuine success could only be obtained if his groups contained representatives of *all* human types. (He says there are twenty-eight.) So in the year 1912, he decided to move to Russia.

The move may have been decided as a result of a decision he took on 13 September — he gives the exact date in *Herald of Coming Good.* On this date, he says, he took an oath to spend the next twenty-one years leading 'in some ways an artificial life, modelled upon a programme which had previously been planned in accordance with certain definite principles.'

What exactly did he mean by 'an artificial life'? Bennett rightly says that most of the people who met Gurdjieff felt that he was in some way 'hiding himself'. People who came to know him well — insofar as anyone ever did — had the feeling that he was *acting a part,* never responding to people in a direct and spontaneous manner. Yet disciples like Ouspensky had no doubt that this was not because he had anything to hide. It was because he felt that he could only achieve certain results by approaching his pupils in an objective manner, as a doctor approaches the patient, and aiming to produce certain effects on them. (Modern psychologists do this a great deal — perhaps telling their subjects that they will experience a certain response, to see whether they will convince themselves that they have received a non-existent stimulus. Lying to the subject is an essential part of such an experiment.) After two years of 'teaching' in Tashkent, Gurdjieff may have felt that a new relationship to his pupils was necessary: not that of Master and

disciples, but something closer to a scientist and his assistants.

In addition to organizing his groups, Gurdjieff was also engaged in many business enterprises: he lists government contracts for supplying and constructing railways and roads, dealing in cattle (as his father had before he became a carpenter), and running stores, restaurants and cinemas. He also carried on a trade in carpets and antiques. In 1912, he sold his various businesses, realizing more than a million roubles, and moved to Moscow. There he purchased an estate, and prepared to set up his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man.

Historically speaking, he was unlucky. He had spent fifteen years seeking 'hidden knowledge', and another three years making a fortune; now he was ready to launch his institute — to consolidate his life's work — just at the time when Europe was about to plunge into the most disastrous and widespread war of all time. Gurdjieff was apparently unaware of the international situation; he later said that he chose Russia because it was 'peaceful, rich and quiet'. His years in Asia and Africa had given him no inkling of what was to come.

Bennett is convinced that Gurdjieff moved in court circles in these years and that he met the Tsar. Certainly, he was the kind of person who might have exerted a wholly beneficial influence on Russian politics in this period. Bennett suggests that he was associated with a moderate party surrounding the Tsar and that he was 'canvassed as a counter to the hated Rasputin'. The remark shows a lack of knowledge of Russian politics during this epoch. Rasputin himself had little or no influence over the Tsar at this period, although the Tsarina continued to believe in him — his drunkenness and indiscretions had led to his fall from favour. Insofar as Rasputin *was* an influence, it was for liberalism and reasonableness. (He made enormous exertions to dissuade the Tsar from going to war in 1914.) So there could be no question of Gurdjieff being a 'counter influence'. At all events, Gurdjieff was sufficiently close to the court to become acquainted with one of the Tsarina's ladies in waiting, Countess Ostrowska, whom he

married.

And now, at last, it becomes possible to draw upon first hand accounts of meetings with Gurdjieff. The earliest of these seems to be a 'story' or essay called 'Glimpses of Truth',(1) written by one of Gurdjieff's Moscow disciples in 1914 (with Gurdjieff's encouragement), and referring to the period when Gurdjieff first came to Moscow. The anonymous author tells how, at a certain period of his life, he became interested in occultism, no doubt reading books on the Qabalah, the Tarot, and so on. He pursued his search with an enthusiasm which seems peculiarly Russian. (Berdyaev tells a story of how, at five o'clock in the morning, one member of a discussion group remarked: 'We can't go to bed yet — we haven't decided whether God exists.') A friend, whom he calls A., was equally absorbed in the quest for esoteric knowledge. Then the friend seemed to lose interest; he had, unknown to the author, met Gurdjieff.

One day, the writer noticed an advertisement in a Moscow newspaper for a ballet called 'The Struggle of the Magicians'. The author was named as G. I. Gurdjieff. When he mentioned this to A., his friend revealed — with some reluctance — that he knew Gurdjieff, and agreed to try and arrange a meeting.

On a Sunday afternoon, A. rang up. 'Be at the railroad at seven o'clock. We are going to see Mr Gurdjieff.' The writer felt that this was inconvenient — he had important business. But he decided to put it off, and arrived on time. His acquaintance was waiting, and they took a train to a 'country resort near Moscow'. On the way there, A. told him something about Gurdjieff — how he had spent years wandering in the East, and had now decided to set up an Institute near Moscow. This account also contains the inaccurate statement that Gurdjieff had come to Russia two or three years earlier and lived in St Petersburg. Typically, Gurdjieff never corrected this, although he allowed 'Glimpses of Truth' to circulate among his pupils.

From the station, a sleigh drove them to the gates of a country

house. They went in the front door, passed through a completely dark antechamber, hung with heavy curtains, and came into a room where a middle-aged man was sitting on a low ottoman, smoking a water pipe.

It is worth recounting these preliminaries, for they are, as we shall see, typical of Gurdjieff's way of meeting prospective pupils — the abrupt telephone call 'Be at so and so'. It was designed not so much to intrigue as to filter out those who lacked enthusiasm and determination.

Gurdjieff, says the writer, had an oriental complexion. 'His eyes particularly attracted my attention, not so much in themselves as by the way he looked at me, not as if he saw me for the first time, but as though had known me long and well.' The walls and floor were covered with rare oriental carpets, and the ceiling with beautiful silk shawls; the light came from a huge glass globe resembling a lotus flower. It sounds as if Gurdjieff was out to create the correct 'mystical' atmosphere. But his conversation turned out to be oddly concrete and down to earth — a fact that impressed most 'seekers' who met him. He spoke Russian badly and hesitantly (his native languages being Greek and Armenian).

Gurdjieff began with a discourse on the Hermetic formula 'As above, so below', illustrating it with the life of man, then with the life of the earth itself, then moving to the solar system. He spoke of the Law of Three — the three forces, action, resistance and equipoise. All this, understandably, left the occultist slightly breathless.

Gurdjieff continued with an outline of his basic 'cosmological' (as opposed to psychological) system. Since, in this book, I shall be more concerned with Gurdjieff's psychological ideas, it will be convenient to offer a brief outline of his cosmology at this point.

According to Gurdjieff, the universe is a living organism, which consists of seven levels, the highest of which is the supreme intelligence. These levels can be thought of as a ladder down

which energy is transmitted, changing its nature as it moves from level to level. In this sense, Gurdjieff's scheme resembles that of the Qabalah, whose Tree of Life could also be thought of as a kind of ladder which winds and twists as it ascends from man (at the bottom) to God (at the top). The 'levels', of course, are realms of spiritual reality, not physical worlds. But because of the law 'As above, so below', they can be regarded as physical worlds. For this reason, Gurdjieff identifies his seven levels with bodies in the universe: the moon, the earth, the planets, the sun, the galaxy, the totality of worlds, and the absolute. The moon is at the lowest level, and anyone who lives on that level is subject to no less than ninety-six laws. Men on earth are subject only to forty-eight laws. The planets are subject to twenty-four. The absolute is subject to only one law — its own. Gurdjieff calls this scheme 'the ray of creation'. Those who find it incomprehensible are advised not to worry; the essence of Gurdjieff's ideas can be grasped without it.

Equally important in Gurdjieff's cosmology is the notion of the notes of the octave. This is, basically, the major law governing our human activity. Everyone must have noticed that we seldom reach the long-term objectives we have set for ourselves. We make some important resolution and decide to carry it out with determination, step by step. And for a short time, we carry on in an undeviating straight line towards our goal. And then, without noticing it, we lose that original drive, and change our direction slightly. Then later we again change our direction. Sometimes we do this so often that we end up doing the exact reverse of what we set out to do. (This explains, for example, why so many fighters for political freedom end up as bullies and tyrants.)

The reason, says Gurdjieff, lies in the law of the octave. In terms of vibrations, there are two places in the octave which are 'weaker' than elsewhere — the space between *Mi* and *Fa,* and between *Ti* and *Do*; there are semitones between these notes, instead of full tones. And where our energies are concerned, these are the points where, unless we are deliberately *reinforced,* we change direction.

Creative processes depend on descending octaves. For example, in writing this book, I began by contemplating the whole of Gurdjieff's thought, and planning it into seven chapters. If I had possessed some computer that could instantly translate my vision into words, this book could have been written in ten minutes. But after it had been subdivided into seven sections, I then had to decide what to put into each section and what to leave out. If the final version of this book is anything at all like my original conception, it will only be because I have applied the law of octaves, and deliberately *reinforced* that original stimulus at certain definite points. That is, I have broken off, and carefully re-thought what I was doing. Every writer — or artist or musician — is thoroughly familiar with the process I am describing. This is why a painter keeps standing back to look at his canvas, then goes away to sleep on it and comes back to it afresh the next day. A work of art cannot be created in one long, continuous burst of application; if the artist ignores this rule, his work becomes, quite literally, broken-backed. (This is why so many of Balzac's novels start off so magnificently and end so badly.)

All these laws are outlined to the author of 'Glimpses of Truth'. After this, Gurdjieff explains that the body can be compared to a factory with three storeys, the head, the chest and the abdomen. These function on different kinds of 'food'. The stomach needs meat and drink; the chest needs air, while the brain needs impressions. This was an important part of Gurdjieff's doctrine — that impressions and experiences are just as much 'food' as bread is, and that we would starve without them. Experiments in sensory deprivation, using a black room, have shown the literal truth of his observation; but in 1912, such experiments were unknown, and his assertion sounded bizarre and unfounded. It is one of many such examples of the startling accuracy of his insights. The three kinds of 'food', says Gurdjieff, belong to different octaves.

He ended by telling the new disciple something about his ballet 'The Struggle of the Magicians', explaining that it was intended primarily to entertain, but that it also contained certain sacred

dances whose meanings related to the Law of Three and the Law of Seven. (We have already seen how Gurdjieff learned about these dances — and laws — in the Sarmoung monastery.) Gurdjieff was scathing about most contemporary art, explaining that it is purely subjective, a mere reflection of the neuroses of the individual artist. *Objective* art is a different matter, since it attempts to convey the same universal meaning to all.

The 'story' ends with A. drawing the blinds, and revealing that it is daylight — in fact, nine o'clock in the morning. Gurdjieff orders a carriage to take them both back to the station. And so the fragment breaks off.

It was through 'The Struggle of the Magicians' that P. D. Ouspensky, Gurdjieff's most influential exponent, became acquainted with the man to whose ideas he was to devote the remainder of his life.

Ouspensky, like Gurdjieff, was a seeker after 'hidden knowledge', and in 1914 he had travelled to India in search of it. He met various teachers who offered to accept him into their schools; but Ouspensky had no desire to settle in India. He returned to Moscow, where he saw a notice about 'The Struggle of the Magicians', and wrote an unfavourable comment on it for his newspaper. In the spring of 1915 Ouspensky gave several lectures about his search for 'hidden knowledge' to St Petersburg audiences, and two acquaintances he made there told him about the Caucasian Greek who was responsible for 'The Struggle of the Magicians'. Ouspensky was not impressed; Gurdjieff sounded like another mystical charlatan. His first meeting with him changed that impression, but still left him badly puzzled. He was introduced to Gurdjieff in a small café in a back street, 'a man of an oriental type, no longer young [Gurdjieff was about 40] with a black moustache and piercing eyes, who astonished me because he seemed to be disguised and completely out of keeping with the place and its atmosphere.' Gurdjieff spoke with a Caucasian accent — which, to a Russian, would sound rather

as a broad Lancashire accent to an Englishman — i.e. hardly associated with profound or subtle ideas.

They spoke of eastern philosophy and the 'search for truth', and Ouspensky quickly realized that Gurdjieff was a man who had experienced most of the things he talked about. At this point, he invited Ouspensky to a meeting of some of his pupils. On the way there, he told Ouspensky of the immense expense he had incurred in hiring the flat where the meeting took place. He also told Ouspensky that many professors and artists in Moscow were interested in his ideas, but when Ouspensky pressed for names, was silent. They arrived at the flat and Ouspensky was embarrassed to find that it was the kind of plain flat that was given to schoolteachers — rent free. Why had Gurdjieff told him the story about his enormous expenses? It was as if Gurdjieff was deliberately trying to confirm Ouspensky's original impression that he was some kind of a confidence trickster.

The 'disciples' seemed to be schoolteachers. One of them read aloud the 'Glimpses of Truth' manuscript, which Ouspensky found confusing and badly written. He asked what system Gurdjieff's pupils were studying, and was told that it was 'work on oneself'. But there was no further elucidation. Moreover, Gurdjieff asked whether the story could be printed in a newspaper, and Ouspensky had to say no — it was too long and had no beginning and end. It sounded as if Gurdjieff was trying to use Ouspensky to get personal publicity.

But later meetings in the same back street café left Ouspensky in no doubt that Gurdjieff possessed real knowledge. He told Ouspensky two things that instantly impressed him: that man is basically a machine, who merely responds to his environment, and that we are mistaken to think that we possess an ego, an individual 'I'. We possess dozens of 'I's', probably thousands. This is why it is so hard to work or behave consistently. One 'I' makes a new year's resolution, but another 'I' takes over a few hours later and decides to break it. This was the kind of down-to-earth psychology that appealed to Ouspensky's basically

scientific outlook.

When Gurdjieff told Ouspensky that his Moscow pupils paid a thousand roubles a year, Ouspensky said it sounded a lot. At this, Gurdjieff explained that it was important for his pupils to pay for what they received. First of all, people do not value what they receive too easily; second, people who could not find that much money per year would probably be bad at 'the work'; Gurdjieff emphasized that it is the competent, efficient people, not the neurotic dreamers, who can generate the power to change themselves.

The turning point in their relationship occurred when Ouspensky asked: 'Is it possible to stop being a machine?' Gurdjieff replied: 'If you had asked such questions more often, we might, perhaps, have got somewhere in our talks. It *is* possible to stop being a machine, but for that it is necessary first of all to *know the machine*. '

It might be said that Ouspensky had at last asked the right question. And Gurdjieff had given the right answer. From now on, Ouspensky was wholly committed to learning what Gurdjieff had to teach.

Man is in prison, said Gurdjieff. If he is to have a chance to escape, then he must begin by realizing that he is in prison. Until he has reached this point, he cannot even begin. Then arises the question: how to escape? Here, Gurdjieff made a statement that is also central to his work. A group of people stands a better chance of escape than a single person, for they can collaborate on a tunnel. A man on his own stands little chance. For man is basically *asleep*. He thinks that his everyday consciousness is 'waking consciousness', as opposed to the unconscious state he plunges into every night. This is perhaps his greatest mistake. In fact, when we wake up in the morning, we simply enter another form of sleeping consciousness. We merely react to circumstances, doing today what we did yesterday and the day before. Various things can give us flashes of 'awakening' — a

sudden crisis, the prospect of a need to change one's whole mode of existence, even setting out on a journey or a holiday. A mother holding her new baby for the first time may 'wake up' for a moment, and realize, in a flash, that the consciousness she accepts every day of her life is not *necessary,* that life could be completely different, far more fascinating and complex. In short, that she is *free*. But if, ten minutes later, she asks herself: 'What is this freedom?', she has already forgotten.

It may make Gurdjieff's approach easier to understand if instead of speaking about the 'machine', we use the term 'robot'. I have a robot in my unconscious mind who does things for me. When I learn to type, or drive a car, or learn a foreign language, I have to do it painfully and consciously, step by step. Soon, my robot-valet takes over from me, and types or drives much faster and more efficiently than 'I' can. This robot is of incalculable importance. When I was a child, he was far less efficient, and as a result, I was clumsy, and everything cost me far more effort. Now my robot takes most of the work of living off my shoulders.

There is one problem. He not only does the things I want him to do — like typing and talking French. He also does things I *don't* want him to do. I like music and poetry; but when I hear a symphony or read a poem a dozen times or so, it loses half its impact because *the robot is listening* instead of me. If I am preoccupied, he eats my dinner for me. He may even make love to my wife. I miss a great deal of interesting and fresh experience because I have become too dependent on the robot.

Plainly, Gurdjieff is talking about the robot, and our slavery to him. I *can* put the robot out of action, so as to experience the 'newness' of things. A couple of glasses of wine makes the robot relax. Psychedelic drugs like mescalin or LSD completely paralyse the robot, and the result is that the drug-taker is confronted by a blaze of reality that dazzles him; a flower or a tree may seem so real that they arrest the attention, bursting with meaning.

The trouble is that such drugs put the robot completely out of action. And this is not what is required. For we developed the robot in the first place because we wanted *more freedom*. It is not good sense to paralyse him. In fact, in moods of real freedom, the 'real me' and the robot seem to arrive at a perfect accord. William James remarks that a footballer may play the game superbly for years, yet one day, he breaks through some inner barrier, and suddenly he can't put a foot wrong; *the game seems to play him.* Or a musician may suddenly find that he is playing his instrument with a curious perfection, with a degree of control such as he has never achieved before. This, in fact, is what happened to John Bennett in the woods at Fontainebleau — except that his 'instrument' was his own body, his own mind, which could suddenly conjure up any mood he wanted. And *this* kind of freedom could not be achieved through a psychedelic drug. It requires active cooperation between 'the real me' and 'the robot'. Every writer, for example, knows that a glass of alcohol may remove his inhibitions and make him write more freely. Three or four glasses may produce a warm glow in which he feels he can pour a masterpiece on to the typewriter. But when he reads what he has written the next morning, it is nonsense. The wine had removed the inhibitions, but it had also removed the *critical checks* that select the right word, the right expression. Alcohol is no substitute for the kind of hard work that produces the sudden 'break-through', the perfect collaboration of criticism and inspiration, of robot and 'real me'.

Expressed in this way, we can begin to see what Gurdjieff was aiming at. We are talking about William James's 'second wind', about those curious influxes of power in which you feel more alive. How can we hope to produce these at will? By *not* doing things 'automatically', by not drifting through life with our eyes fixed on the outside world. The first step is to LOOK INSIDE, to observe the complex relationship between 'real me' and robot. This is not a way of meditation, or of mysticism, or of physical self-discipline. This is primarily a way of knowledge, a way that depends on knowing *certain definite things*.

Four
Ouspensky in Search of Miracles

IN THE last years of his life — he died in 1947 — Ouspensky wrote an account of these early days with Gurdjieff under the title *Fragments of an Unknown Teaching;* it was published after his death as *In Search of the Miraculous*. But in 1914, Gurdjieff would have forbidden any such attempt to write about his ideas. New members of the group were sworn to secrecy; they were not even to discuss the ideas among themselves. This was not due to some passion for playing at cloak and dagger. At one of their earliest meetings, Gurdjieff explained to Ouspensky: 'Can a man who does not know himself keep a secret? Of course, he can promise to do so, but can he keep his promise? For he is not one — there are many different people in him. *One in him* promises, and believes that he wants to keep the secret. But tomorrow *another in him* will tell it to his wife, or to a friend over a bottle of wine. . . .' So the demand for secrecy, the curious mystifications, the demand for high fees, were all part of an attempt to force everyone to try to assert a 'controlling ego'.

Gradually, Ouspensky began to understand the motives for at least some of the 'mystifications'. For example, Gurdjieff would come to Petersburg from Moscow about once every two weeks. But he would not allow Ouspensky to fix a meeting in advance. When a meeting *was* held, Gurdjieff would announce that he had to return to Moscow the next morning. But the next day he would say that he had decided to stay until evening. The day would be spent in cafés, where various people would come to see Gurdjieff. Then, not long before the time at which meetings were usually held, Gurdjieff would tell Ouspensky to ring up members of the group and invite them to a meeting that evening. Naturally, most people would already have other engagements, so only a few would turn up. Gurdjieff was quite deliberately creating obstacles. Eventually, there was a small group of people who

could all be reckoned on to drop whatever they were doing to attend a meeting, no matter how inconvenient. These were the ones Gurdjieff was interested in. 'People do not value what is easily come by', said the wily old sage.

Ouspensky was also puzzled by Gurdjieff's curious habit of arranging lavish dinners, with huge quantities of food and wine — of which Gurdjieff himself consumed very little. He seemed to want to create the impression of being a gourmand. But those who knew him well could see that this was 'acting'. 'Our feeling of this "acting" in Gurdjieff was exceptionally strong. Among ourselves we often said we never saw him and never would. In any other man so much "acting" would have produced an impression of falsity. In him, "acting" produced an impression of strength . . . .' But Ouspensky adds the heartfelt comment: 'although... not always; sometimes there was too much of it'. Even at this early stage, Ouspensky was beginning to feel that Gurdjieff was overdoing it. Eventually, the feeling would cause the break between them.

Ouspensky also noted with mixed feelings Gurdjieff's impish sense of humour. He tells how Gurdjieff would arrive in St Petersburg with a bale of oriental carpets and place an advertisment in a newspaper, which would bring crowds of potential buyers. Ouspensky used to sit and watch the haggling, and noticed how much Gurdjieff enjoyed playing on the weak side of his customers. One rich but tight-fisted lady had selected a dozen expensive carpets, but was haggling over them at some length. Gurdjieff had apparently grown tired of 'acting', for he suddenly offered her every carpet in the room for a quarter of the price of the ones she had selected. She was startled, but immediately began to haggle again. Gurdjieff told her good-humouredly that he would think over her offer overnight — but by the next morning he had returned to Moscow. He obviously wanted to show Ouspensky that people are so mechanical that they often act against their own best interests.

On another occasion, a well-known 'occultist' came to see

Gurdjieff and tried to establish a friendship. Gurdjieff looked at him with astonishment and insisted that he was not a guru —merely a carpet seller. He unrolled his carpets and tried to sell him some; the occultist went away convinced that his friends had been pulling his leg. This was not simply self-defence on Gurdjieff's part (the occultist would probably have been a waste of time); it was a delight in manipulating people, playing the puppet-master.

But Ouspensky was impressed by his self-sufficiency. A Persian came to mend carpets, and Ouspensky noticed how intently Gurdjieff was studying the complicated operation, which involved a metal hook. Gurdjieff tried to buy it from him but the Persian declined to sell. The next day, Ouspensky found Gurdjieff sitting cross-legged mending carpets as if he had been doing it all his life; he was using a hook which he had filed from an old penknife.

When Ouspensky asked Gurdjieff whether 'occult' literature might make a good preparation for Gurdjieff's own teaching — Ouspensky was thinking of the Tarot — Gurdjieff made the interesting reply: 'Yes . . . For instance, take yourself: you might already know a great deal if you knew *how to read*. I mean that if you *understood* everything you have read in your life... if you understood everything you have written in your own book *[Tertium Organum]* I should come and bow to you and beg you to teach me.' He was making the point that we can know something superficially without grasping its implications — without seeing how it *relates* to other things. And he went on to say: 'What a man knows *well,* that is his preparation [for understanding]. If a man knows how to make coffee well or how to make boots well, then it is already possible to talk to him. The trouble is that nobody knows anything well.' This could be compared with a comment by Hermann Hesse in *Journey to the East:* 'I then discovered how a long time devoted to small details exalts us and increases our strength.' It causes us to *slow down* the mind and allow thought to become permeated with feeling.

At another of these early talks, someone asked Gurdjieff about

personal immortality. Gurdjieff's reply was that immortality, like individuality, is a quality that is not naturally possessed by human beings; most people consist of such a crowd of 'I's' that there is little to prevent their total disintegration. Immortality, like individuality, can only be achieved by immense effort.

He went on to say that man consists of four bodies, each one of which is 'finer' than the one before. They are four independent organisms, mutually interpenetrating one another.

The first body is our ordinary physical body. The second is the emotional or astral body (Gurdjieff also called it the natural body). The third is the spiritual body. The fourth is the 'Master', the 'I', the presiding ego. But in most people this fourth body does not exist, or is so undeveloped as to be useless. He compared these four bodies to a horse and carriage. The physical body is the carriage. The emotional body is the horse. The spiritual or mental body is the driver who sits on the box. The 'divine body' or 'I' is the *owner* of the horse and carriage.

The trouble with most human beings is that they are entirely dominated by their bodies. The body is a machine, an automaton driven by external influences which produce physical appetites. These appetites in turn influence our emotions. Our emotions cause certain thoughts to arise in us. And these changing thoughts and desires cause a whole series of conflicting 'I's' to come into existence.

It should be the other way round. A man who has created a real 'I' exercises his will-power, which influences his thoughts, which influence his emotions, which influence his body . . . That is how it *should* be.

At the next talk, Gurdjieff explained that traditional religious disciplines attempt to alter the carriage, horse, and driver. A man who directs all his energy to disciplining his physical body is called a fakir. He might endure incredible sufferings for months or years at a time to subdue the body. The monk prefers to work

on his emotions. He fasts and prays and meditates and attempts to subdue his emotions and to fix his mind on God. The man who sets out to discipline the mind itself, and to alter the nature of his consciousness, is called a yogi. These three ways — of the fakir, the monk, and the yogi — have been developed by the great religious teachers. But, says Gurdjieff, there is also a *fourth way,* and this is the way taught by his own System. It could be called the way of the cunning man, for he is willing to adopt any method that will lead him to his goal. This involves work on all the other three bodies at once — the carriage, the horse, and the driver. To follow the fourth way, a man does not need to go into a monastery or retreat into the wilderness; he can continue to live a perfectly normal life. But he applies continual self-observation, and uses this to attempt to make himself less mechanical, less robotic.

To adopt slightly different imagery: we might say that man's total being could be compared to some vast cathedral organ; evolution has elaborated it over millions of years. Yet most of us have only the most rudimentary idea of how to play it; at best we can produce a few scales or an uncertain rendering of 'Chopsticks'. Our major problem is to learn about the organ by observation and experiment. With enough experiment, we could eventually learn to play symphonies and concertos — the possibilities are endless. But the first step is to *grasp* its possibilities. Most of us look at it with as little comprehension as a baby looks at a motor car. As soon as we grasp those possibilities, and begin to observe and experiment, we are following the 'fourth way'.

In subsequent talks, Gurdjieff began to elaborate on the structure of the 'organ'. Man does not possess only one mind, but several — seven, in fact. What we usually call the mind is simply the intellectual mind. Next there is the emotional mind, which controls his feelings; next, the physical mind, which controls bodily movements; next, the instinctive mind which controls such functions as digestion. Each of these minds is connected with a 'centre' — the intellectual centre, the emotional centre, the

'moving' centre (controlling bodily movements), and the instinctive centre. Apart from these, there is also a sexual centre, and two higher centres — higher emotional and higher intellectual. Each of these centres works with a different kind of energy. Our problem is that we tend to use the wrong kinds of energies — for example, we may try to do intellectual work using emotional energy or emotional work using sexual energy. According to Gurdjieff, most of the centres are inclined to steal energy from the sex centre, and in return, give the sex centre useless energy with which it cannot work. The result is that we seldom experience 'true sex'. 'It is a very big thing when the sex centre works with its own energy', said Gurdjieff — a statement that D. H. Lawrence would have understood immediately.

'Work on oneself' should begin with observation of the centres; we should try to recognize them, and then to control them. The moving centre makes a convenient starting point. If we try to rub the stomach with one hand and pat the head with the other, it is easy to see that our hands want to do the same thing. But they can be trained to function separately. In fact, with a little practice, it is possible to perform quite different movements with the two hands, the two feet and the head, all at the same time. Gurdjieff's 'dances' were basically aimed at control of the 'moving centre'. They were, in effect, an attempt to de-condition, and to re-programme, the robot.

And here, of course, one encounters a basic problem. Learning to make highly complex movements with the hands and feet may give us far greater control of the moving centre; but at the end of the day, we have merely re-programmed the robot. (A Bennett disciple who had completely mastered the 'movements' told me that he now took them for granted, and that they no longer served their purpose of increasing his sense of freedom.) So new 'shocks' are required. Gurdjieff's 'System' became, in effect, a search for new shocks — which may explain why (as we shall see later) it left so many of his students with a final sense of dissatisfaction.

This brings us to one of the central questions that strikes the critical reader of *In Search of the Miraculous*. The sheer originality of Gurdjieff's System makes an enormous impact; it seems to turn most of our accepted ideas upside down. He tells Ouspensky, for example, that knowledge is material, and that is why it could not be shared out indefinitely; a certain quantity of knowledge, like a certain quantity of food, can only go so far, and if one person gets more, another gets less. He tells Ouspensky that the moon is not a dead planet, but a planet in process of birth; it is a living being that will one day become an earth, just as the earth will one day become a sun. Moreover, human beings are basically 'food for the moon'; our purpose is to produce a certain kind of psychic energy that will feed the moon. He insists that we cannot talk about consciousness because most human beings do not possess real consciousness; they are little better than machines. Man is in prison, and he can only escape if he recognizes that he is in prison, and that escaping requires a carefully co-ordinated plan.

It is also quite clear that he knows a great deal about the so-called 'occult'. For example, Ouspensky described to him how, in India, he had seen a fakir lying on a bed of very sharp nails, who did not receive even a scratch. Yet the man did not seem particularly 'holy'; on the contrary, he looked half asleep. Gurdjieff replied that the man was almost certainly not particularly holy. If bribed to tell how he did it, he would probably explain that he merely had to say a particular word or phrase to himself before climbing onto the bed of nails, and he would become invulnerable. According to Gurdjieff, such a man would be trained under hypnosis, and the hypnosis would somehow make him invulnerable to the nails. Later, the hypnotist would administer post-hypnotic suggestions, telling him that whenever he repeated a certain word, he would become invulnerable. Again and again, Gurdjieff demonstrated his knowledge on such matters.

Yet there are questions upon which one simply cannot take his word. Ouspensky asks, for example, whether there is life after

death; Gurdjieff replies that most people possess no 'hard core' that could survive death; only hard work upon oneself could make a man capable of surviving death. Ouspensky asks about the 'astral body'; Gurdjieff replies that the astral body can only be developed through hard work. Now there are, in fact, thousands of records of so-called 'out-of-the-body experiences', in which people have found themselves apparently outside their physical bodies. This could, of course, be some odd kind of illusion — a recurrent fantasy with its cause in some control unit of the brain. But if it is not, then it is evidence that, as the occult tradition asserts, all men possess an 'astral body'. In the same way, we may feel that the idea of life after death is wishful thinking. But anyone who takes the trouble to examine the hard evidence will find that it is oddly convincing. And *if* there is anything in it, then it applies to everyone, not just to people who have acquired an 'essential self'.

In short, the reader soon begins to feel a strong suspicion that not everything Gurdjieff says should be taken at face value. The moon landings seem to have shown beyond all doubt that the moon is not an embryonic planet, but some huge chunk of dead rock, captured by our earth millions of years ago. Gurdjieff's disciples would no doubt reply that what Gurdjieff said about the moon is nevertheless true symbolically. It would surely be simpler to accept that he said many things that he knew to be untrue, and that these should be taken as another form of the 'acting' that baffled so many of his pupils. The aim was to 'shake the mind awake', and to make his pupils see the whole question of 'what to do with our lives' in a completely different light. Gurdjieff wanted them to forget anything they had imbibed at Sunday school, or from their parents, or from vague dabblings in 'occultism' or Eastern religions. He also wanted to make sure that no one could cheapen his ideas, or dilute them and make them part of the general cultural heritage. Gurdjieff had no desire to be 'intellectually OK', to be immediately accessible to readers of the highbrow Sunday newspapers. He therefore went out of his way to make his ideas deliberately inaccessible. In some ways, he was far too successful; *Beelzebub's Tales* will always

have rather less readers than Hegel's *Logic*. And Gurdjieff's System will continue to repel many of the people who could most benefit from it because they find his 'cosmological' ideas too absurd to be taken seriously.

Yet in spite of the complications he introduced, Gurdjieff's ideas are basically very simple. He told Ouspensky: 'Man's possibilities are very great. You cannot conceive even a shadow of what man is capable of attaining. But nothing can be attained in sleep. In the consciousness of a sleeping man, his illusions, his 'dreams', are mixed with reality. He lives in a subjective world and he can never escape from it. And this is the reason why he can never make use of all the powers he possesses and why he lives in only a small part of himself.'

This is, in fact, Gurdjieff's starting point: the fact that man's powers are far greater than he realizes. The same observation had been made many times in earlier centuries. One of the great best sellers of the nineteenth century was *The Night Side of Nature* by Catherine Crowe, who studied the evidence for the 'supernatural' (or, as we would now say, the paranormal) — ghosts, 'phantasms of the living', clairvoyance, dreams of the future, telepathy, 'out-of-the-body experiences', poltergeists, and so on. She concluded that the evidence for such things was, in many cases, undeniable, and that at the very least, it indicated that man possesses a whole range of powers that are *unknown to himself*. Frederick Myers, one of the founder members of the Society for Psychical Research, adopted a far more scientific and systematic approach to the problems, and in his classic work *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* reached the same conclusion. He argued that the unusual powers of men of genius — for example, Mozart's ability to play a concerto note for note after hearing it only once — point in the same direction as the evidence for clairvoyance, telepathy, astral projection, and so on: that we possess all kinds of 'unconscious' powers that we seldom exercise. An American newspaper editor, Thomson Jay Hudson, reached the same conclusion after studying the remarkable feats of people under hypnosis, and decided that

man has two 'minds', which he called the 'objective mind' and the 'subjective mind'. The objective mind is the 'everyday self' that copes with reality; the subjective mind is the 'inner self', which is usually eclipsed by the more aggressive and assertive 'everyday self', but which can emerge when the everyday self has been immobilized by hypnosis. Hudson arrived at the conclusion that when its powers are unchained, the subjective mind can literally perform miracles; he believed that the miracles of Jesus were simply the result of his unusual power of allowing his subjective mind to express itself freely.

So this notion that man's powers are far greater than he realizes is by no means new. It was the same obscure conviction that had led Ouspensky to travel in the East, and to study magic and occultism. His encounter with Gurdjieff must have been like a bucket of cold water after these studies. Gurdjieff seemed to deny all the most cherished occult traditions. His teaching returned again and again to his fundamental insight: that most men are little more than machines, 'creatures of circumstance' and slaves of the environment. Man consists of thousands of 'selves'. But every time he has to make some real mental effort, two or three of these 'selves' fuse together. And if he can continue to make tremendous efforts of will, his inner being will gradually cease to resemble a bag full of marbles; instead, there will be increasingly large chunks of glass. And each time one of these chunks is created (Gurdjieff called it 'crystallization'), man becomes increasingly capable of a *directed* effort of will, and therefore of deliberately fusing more of them together. Little by little, he can escape this dream-like 'subjective consciousness' in which most of us spend our lives. He can experience flashes of 'objective consciousness', of seeing things as they really are. As this happens, the higher emotional and higher intellectual centres begin to function (they are inoperative in 'mechanical man'), and man at last becomes capable of exercising his latent powers.

What precisely are these latent powers? We have already encountered examples of Gurdjieff's powers in the opening

chapter: of how he was able to 'cure' Fritz Peters of his nervous depression by some kind of transfer of energy, and of how he was able to induce in John Bennett a state of 'higher consciousness'. In *Fragments of an Unknown Teaching,* Ouspensky tells of his own experience of Gurdjieff's 'magical' powers. Gurdjieff had told him:

> People who have an 'astral' body can communicate with one another at a distance without having recourse to ordinary physical means. For some such communications to be possible they must establish some 'connection' between them. For this purpose, when going to different places or different countries people sometimes take with them something belonging to another, especially things that have been in contact with his body and are permeated with his emanations... In the same way, in order to maintain a connection with a dead person, his friends used to keep objects which had belonged to him. These things leave, as it were, a *trace* behind them, something like invisible wires or threads which remain stretched out through space. These threads connect a given object with the person, living or in certain cases dead, to whom the object belonged. Men have known this from the remotest antiquity.

(This passage seems to demonstrate that Gurdjieff accepted the idea of 'life after death' without qualification.)

Gurdjieff demonstrated his own mastery of this occult tradition. On a visit to Finland with Gurdjieff and other members of the group, Ouspensky began to experience the kind of miraculous 'facts' that Gurdjieff had promised him at one of their earliest meetings. Ouspensky was fasting and practising breathing exercises. One evening, they were sitting on the floor practising certain postures, when 'the miracle began'.

> It all started with my beginning to *hear his thoughts* . . . Suddenly I noticed that among the words he was saying to us all, there were 'thoughts' that were intended for me. I caught one of these thoughts and replied to it, speaking aloud . . . Gurdjieff nodded to me and stopped speaking. There was a fairly long pause. He sat still saying nothing. After a while I heard his voice inside me, as it were in the chest, near the heart. He put a definite question to me ... I answered him in the affirmative . . . Z and S [other pupils] were visibly astonished at what was taking place . . . This conversation proceeded in this fashion for not less than half an hour.

Apparently there was some kind of fundamental disagreement between Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. 'The matter was concerned with certain conditions which I had either to accept or *leave the work*.' In considerable agitation, Ouspensky went for a long walk in the forest. There he saw that Gurdjieff was right; something in himself that he had considered firm and reliable did not really exist. On the other hand, he was convinced that he had found something else that *did* exist, although he felt that Gurdjieff would only laugh at him if he tried to explain it.

When he lay in bed, he heard Gurdjieff's voice inside his chest again, and was able to answer in the same way. Ouspensky is determined not to give the reader any clue to the nature of his disagreement with Gurdjieff, so the description of what happened is annoyingly vague; it seems clear that Gurdjieff was trying to drive Ouspensky into a corner, and Ouspensky was unwilling to be driven. The telepathic conversation continued the next morning at breakfast, to the bafflement of the others. And even when Ouspensky was back in St Petersburg that evening, he not only continued to converse with Gurdjieff — who was on a train going to Moscow — but also saw him.

These experiences left Ouspensky with an important conviction:

that no paranormal phenomena — clairvoyance, telepathy, foreseeing the future — can be studied in an ordinary state of consciousness. They are not like electrical or chemical phenomena, which can be studied in the laboratory under test conditions. Does this mean that all the efforts of psychical researchers are a waste of time? Not quite. What Ouspensky is saying is that they are based on a misconception: that 'ordinary consciousness' is an adequate vantage point of observation for all phenomena. Ouspensky is insisting that if these 'psychic' phenomena are to be understood, then the 'observer' must begin by *altering himself*. 'There is something in the phenomena of a higher order which requires a particular emotional state *for their observation and study*. And this excludes any "properly conducted" laboratory experiments and observations.'

This observation summarizes the essence of Gurdjieff's work. Western man's concept of knowledge is built on a fundamental error: the notion that the acquisition of knowledge only requires intelligence. It requires, in fact, a kind *of action*. Consciousness needs to be put into its 'active gear'. When this happens, then man is finally awake. Later in the *Fragments,* Ouspensky describes his own brief experience of being 'awake', and it may be regarded as the climax of the book. Gurdjieff had been forcing his students to do extremely hard physical exercise, such as running at top speed for two miles, standing with extended arms for long periods, or 'marking time' (marching on the spot) at the double.

> I had gone into a room where nobody could see me, and began to mark time at the double, trying at the same time to breathe according to a particular count, that is, to inhale during a definite number of steps and exhale during a definite number. After a certain time when I had begun to tire I noticed, that is, to speak more correctly, I felt quite clearly, that my breathing was artificial and unreliable. I felt that in a very short time I would be unable to breathe in that way while

continuing to mark time at the double and that ordinary normal breathing, very accelerated of course, without any count would gain the upper hand.

> It became more and more difficult for me to breathe and to mark time, and to observe the count of breaths and steps. I was pouring with sweat, my head began to go round, and I thought I should fall. I began to despair of obtaining results of any kind and I had almost stopped when suddenly something seemed to crack or move inside me, and my breathing went on evenly and properly at the rate I wanted it to go, but without any effort on my part, while affording me all the amount of air I needed. It was an extraordinarily pleasant sensation. I shut my eyes and continued to mark time, breathing easily and freely and feeling exactly as though strength was increasing in me and that I was getting lighter and stronger. I thought that if I could continue to run in this way for a certain time I should get still more interesting results because waves of joyful trembling had already begun to go through my body which, as I knew from previous experiments, preceded what I called the opening of the inner consciousness.
>
> But at this moment someone came into the room and I stopped.

It is interesting to observe the similarities between this account and Bennett's account (quoted in Chapter One) of his experience at Fontainebleau. Both Ouspensky and Bennett had driven themselves beyond the point at which most people would normally give up. Suddenly, the 'moving centre' took over and began to operate instinctively. Fortunately for Bennett, no one interrupted him, and he went on to the 'opening of inner consciousness'. And we observe that this 'opening' consisted of a far greater control over consciousness than we normally possess. It is also important to note that this control consisted of the use of the imagination. Bennett thought of love, horror, surprise, and so on, and his consciousness responded instantly by providing the emotion or sensation. When I normally imagine love or horror, my consciousness responds feebly, and the impression quickly vanishes. Bennett had caught a glimpse of the true potentiality of the imagination, and of the role it plays as the intermediary between the will and the body.

Ouspensky seems to have hovered on the brink of the same recognition, but was interrupted before he could grasp it. He admits that his attempt to recreate it later was a total failure. Ouspensky's desire for intellectual certainty was satisfied by Gurdjieff's teachings. But the craving for a personal miracle of transformation remained sadly unfulfilled.

Five
The Deluge and After

EVEN IN 1915, when he met Ouspensky, Gurdjieff must have realized that his plans for an institute were in danger of collapse. Fortunately, he was not the kind of person to take it to heart. Comfort and security could be far more dangerous than uncertainty — which has the advantage of keeping the mind alert. He continued his work with the various groups, but prepared to move on when the time came. The war always loomed over them. Ouspensky was particularly struck by the sight of a lorry loaded up with crutches, on its way to a military hospital — crutches for limbs that had not yet been blown off. Rival armies were responding to purely mechanical emotions of patriotism and indignation, and nothing could stop them slaughtering one another. Ouspensky's group in St Petersburg often discussed the idea of Noah's Ark — a ship that could survive the flood of coming events, and carry its builders to safety.

At this time, Gurdjieff was continuing to work in Moscow; members of Ouspensky's group occasionally went there, and returned with notes of Gurdjieff's latest lectures. The 'work' consisted basically of self-observation, based on Gurdjieff's teaching about the 'centres'. The fundamental problem was how to 'remember oneself'. Our normal state of consciousness lacks a central 'I'. When I open my eyes in the morning, things are 'seen', but it is not I who sees them; it is 'the machine', the robot. Ouspensky represented the concept with a convenient diagram. When I pay attention to the external world, I am like an arrow pointing outwards. When I close my eyes and sink 'into myself, my attention becomes an arrow pointing inwards. Now I try to do *both at once* — to point the 'arrow' in and out at the same time — I immediately discover that this is incredibly difficult. After a second or two, I either forget the outside world, and sink into a

daydream, or forget 'myself' and become absorbed in what I am looking at. Yet, said Gurdjieff, these moments of self-remembering, when the arrow points both ways at once, are the most important of our lives. In all moments of deep happiness, we get a feeling that could be expressed: 'What, *me — here?*' I am not only aware of what is happening to me, but that it is happening to *me*. One of Gurdjieff's most basic exercises in the Moscow days was to try to look at some object — say, a watch — and at the same time to become *aware of yourself looking at it.* His pupils soon began to realize the immense difficulty of self-remembering.

It is obvious, said Gurdjieff, that there is something badly wrong with man as he exists at present. Why should we experience so much, only to forget it immediately afterwards? Half our experience rolls off us like water off a duck's back. Yet experience is *food,* whose purpose is to enable us to evolve.

Ouspensky soon found that efforts at self-remembering could be tremendously worthwhile in this respect.

> Thus, for instance, at that time I used very much to like to wander through St Petersburg at night, and to 'sense' the houses and the streets. St Petersburg is full of these strange sensations. Houses, especially old houses, were quite alive; I all but spoke to them. There was no 'imagination' in it. I did not think of anything, I simply walked along while trying to remember myself and looked about; the sensations came by themselves.

Ouspensky was experiencing the beginning of the sense of control that Bennett experienced at Fontainebleau later.

Ouspensky also has an amusing story about an unsuccessful attempt to self-remember.

I was once walking along the Liteiny towards the Nevsky, and in spite of all my efforts I was unable to keep my attention on self-remembering. The noise, movement, everything distracted me. Every minute I lost the thread of attention, found it again, and then lost it again. At last I felt a kind of ridiculous irritation with myself and I turned into the street on the left having firmly decided to keep my attention on the fact that I *would remember myself* at least for some time ... I reached the Nadejdinskaya without losing the thread of attention, except, perhaps, for short moments. Then I again turned towards the Nevsky realizing that, in quiet streets, it was easier not to lose the line of thought and wishing therefore to test myself in more noisy streets. I reached the Nevsky still remembering myself, and was already beginning to experience the strange emotional state of inner peace and confidence which comes after great efforts of this kind. Just round the corner was a tobacconist's shop where they made my cigarettes. Still remembering myself I thought I would call there and order some cigarettes.

Two hours later *I woke up* in the Tavricheskaya, that is, far away . . . The sensation of awakening was extraordinarily vivid. I can almost say that I *came to*. I remembered everything at once. How I had been walking along the Nadejdinskaya, how I had been remembering myself, how I had thought about cigarettes, and how at this thought I seemed all at once to fall and disappear into a deep sleep.

At the same time, while immersed in this sleep, I had continued to perform consistent and expedient actions . . . And on the way while

> driving along the Tavricheskaya, I began to feel a strange uneasiness, as though I had forgotten something. *And suddenly I remembered that I had forgotten to remember myself.*

This anecdote brings out a number of important points. First, the odd sense of deep satisfaction and control — and it could almost be compared to sexual satisfaction — that accompanies self-remembering: the birth of a deeper and wider form of consciousness. Then it is worth noting that it was the thought of cigarettes that plunged him into 'sleep'. This explains why Gurdjieff felt it so important to deliberately give up certain old habits, so that the tension thereby produced acts as an 'alarm clock'. If Ouspensky had made a resolution to stop smoking, the thought of tobacco would have served as an additional 'shock' to maintain his purpose, to strengthen the weak point of the 'octave'.

Lastly, we note that the realization that he had forgotten to remember himself was literally like waking up. Gurdjieff's assertion that ordinary consciousness is a form of sleep is not intended as a figure of speech; it should be taken literally. On another occasion, Ouspensky describes how he achieved a state of self-remembering so intense that as he walked along the street, he could actually *see* that people were asleep, and see their heads wrapped in a kind of cloud of dreams. Again, this should not be taken as a figure of speech. Self-remembering seems to bring about an odd form of 'telepathy', in which consciousness becomes aware of a far wider field of reality. It seems likely that, in a sense, Ouspensky could literally see 'into their heads'.

As the winter of 1916 dragged on, it became clear to Ouspensky that their 'Ark' was not going to protect them from the chaos that surrounded them. Just after Christmas that year, the Tsarina's favourite, Rasputin, disappeared; he had prophesied that if he was killed by peasants, Russia would remain prosperous for hundreds of years; but if it was by the aristocracy, then the royal

family would be doomed and no nobles would remain in Russia. He was murdered by Prince Felix Yussupov, and his body was recovered from the Neva a few weeks later.

Gurdjieff went back to Alexandropol, his home town, and telegraphed Ouspensky to join him there. Ouspensky was intrigued by this glimpse of Gurdjieff's background, and particularly by an enlarged photograph showing a younger Gurdjieff in a frock coat. From this, says Ouspensky, he deduced what Gurdjieff's profession had been at the time, but has decided to keep the secret to himself. This was, of course, the 'hypnotist' photograph (reproduced by Bennett in *Gurdjieff: Making a New World)*.

Ouspensky was puzzled. Gurdjieff seemed to be working well, unperturbed by historical events. He told Ouspensky he felt things would soon quieten down and he would be able to continue his work in Russia. (If he was serious — which is something one can never be sure about with Gurdjieff — he was being singularly short-sighted.) Yet Gurdjieff was obviously brooding. On what? Probably on the feeling that his 'method' was still unsatisfactory, and that something new was needed — something more *practical*. People can comfortably absorb new ideas and go back to sleep. He had to devise new methods of keeping them awake.

Ouspensky returned to St Petersburg. Gurdjieff told him that he proposed to go to Kislovodsk to set up a new work group, and advised Ouspensky — and anyone else who was interested — to join him there. In fact, Gurdjieff went to Essentuki, in the Caucasus. He rented a villa, and a house on the edge of the village; there, for six weeks, his pupils worked with a new kind of intensity. To begin with, Gurdjieff introduced various exercises and techniques. Some of the exercises involved muscular exertion or relaxation, and would be familiar to any yoga student of today. Others were more complex. It was here that Gurdjieff introduced one of his most startling and spectacular exercises: the 'stop' exercise. When he called 'stop', everyone had to stop

instantaneously whatever they were doing, even if they were halfway through a step, or swallowing a mouthful of food. It was, he said, to try to make people aware of their way of doing things, of their exact posture and muscular response. In later years at the Prieuré, he might walk into the dormitory in the middle of the night and snap his fingers, and everyone had to be out of bed and in some complicated posture within a matter of seconds. He was trying to cultivate total *alertness*.

Gurdjieff explained that he was introducing them to the principle of super-effort. If a man walks twenty-five miles in bad weather, and gets home cold and hungry — and then decides to walk another two miles before going indoors, that is super-effort.

Here, I feel, Gurdjieff was failing to explain something important. It is not the super-effort itself that is important, but the energy we *summon* to meet it. The whole point of Gurdjieff's 'system' — and this is never sufficiently emphasized either in his own books or in those about him — is its basic assumption that man possesses far more energy than he realizes — a vast lake of 'vital reserves'. What cuts us off from these reserves is a feeling of laziness, or rather, of *reluctance*. We contemplate some effort, and think: 'What a bore.' And this feeling of boredom instantly lowers our vitality. If I performed a super-effort — like walking the additional two miles — with a groan of self-pity, it would be completely useless. Yet if some sudden crisis — or some sudden piece of good news (i.e. someone I love is waiting for me two miles away) — made me decide to walk the two miles, I would do it with a springy step, prepared, if necessary, to go ten times as far. This, then, is the real aim of the exercise: to summon that state of optimism, of inner purpose, that makes the super-effort easy. As the story of Fritz Peters demonstrates (see page 11), Gurdjieff had mastered the trick of drawing on these vital reserves, overruling his 'reluctance'.

But the practical significance of Gurdjieff's doctrine of super-effort was that he felt it provided a new basis for the 'work'. In St Petersburg or Moscow, the 'work' had been purely internal, so to

speak. Now Gurdjieff was quite deliberately looking for difficulties to which he could subject his followers, with the deliberate aim of making them 'summon' the necessary energy and attention. For example, when his pupil Thomas de Hartmann — an ex-army officer — arrived with his wife, Gurdjieff called to a follower called Zaharoff to make tea in a samovar. This involved a difficult ritual of lighting tiny pieces of wood and coal under the samovar; they burned only with difficulty, and if Zaharoff turned away for a moment, they went out, and he had to start all over again. For the remainder of his life, Gurdjieff apparently took immense pleasure in causing trouble and confusion — at one period, Fritz Peters broke with him in a rage. The aim was to force his pupils to make 'super-efforts'. Gurdjieff took Hartmann and his wife into the village to buy cake, and on the way back, accelerated his pace until they were practically running; again, it was an effort to accustom his pupils to super-effort.

Thomas de Hartmann's book, *Our Life with Mr Gurdjieff,* is perhaps one of the most fascinating and revealing of all accounts of Gurdjieff as a person. He goes on to recount another of Gurdjieff's deliberate 'tricks'. At Essentuki, he announced he intended to go to Persia — creating immediate alarm and confusion among his followers. Hartmann, for one, was still an officer, and could not become a deserter without much agony of conscience. But on the day announced for his departure, Gurdjieff declared he was only going to go to Tuapse, close to the Black Sea, and said that anyone who wanted to come was welcome. The Hartmanns and several others decided to go. But at Tuapse, they found Gurdjieff lying in bed, apparently in a state of indecision. There was a 'heavy atmosphere which overwhelms one when he does not know what to do.' And Hartmann adds penetratingly: 'Mr Gurdjieff certainly knew how to create such an atmosphere.' In other words, Gurdjieff realized that his followers were now becoming dependent on his own strong sense of purpose, and wanted to try and shake them out of this habit before it had time to consolidate.

What followed is again typical. Gurdjieff bought a cart and

announced that they would now leave. Gurdjieff drove off with the cart and luggage, and told the Hartmanns to walk over the mountains and meet him some miles away. The walk was long, hard and hot, and they finally discovered an inn where they could wait. Finally, after dark, Gurdjieff arrived. But instead of letting them go to bed, he proposed to continue the journey by moonlight. They plodded on — Madame de Hartmann in high-heeled shoes — until two in the morning, when it began to rain; Gurdjieff told them to make a fire, then said they would sleep — all except Hartmann, who was ordered to sit up on guard duty.

The next day, Hartmann was dizzy with fatigue, and Gurdjieff told him to climb on to the luggage on the cart. But Hartmann discovered that if he closed his eyes, he fell off the cart; so he had to fight against sleep. This, of course, is precisely what Gurdjieff intended. He believed that, through intense efforts, a certain form of energy is created — the energy man needs for self-transformation. Without that energy, he can think about self-transformation, even long for it, but can never achieve it.

And so the journey went on. At least Hartmann realized the purpose behind it. 'By speaking of going to Persia and by creating all kinds of emotional and physical difficulties, he was creating in strange surroundings a ladder of obstacles over which we had to pass to reach a certain little *do* in ourselves — the *do* in the scale of our general development.'

In a place called Outch-Dary, Hartmann became seriously ill, after eating plums from a tree (against Gurdjieff's advice), and came close to death. In his delirium, he even tried to kill his wife. When Gurdjieff came in, Hartmann hurled himself at him in a frenzy. But when Gurdjieff placed his hand on his forehead he felt a deep sense of peace, and relaxed. Gurdjieff still possessed his 'magical' powers. Eventually, Hartmann recovered, and they returned to Essentuki. The journey had apparently been designed to place the Hartmanns under unusual stress.

The same applied to an amusing incident involving a restaurant.

Hartmann felt that he would like to go to a social club and Gurdjieff pretended to think that he and a doctor friend were invited for supper. Inflation was a serious problem and Hartmann had no regular income; nevertheless, he took them to the restaurant. Gurdjieff proceeded to order the most expensive meal available, and Hartmann had to tip the waiter to go to his wife and collect another 500 roubles. But the next day, Gurdjieff returned the money to Hartmann, explaining that it had been done for his own good. Hartmann was still not behaving like an adult — as his misery and embarrassment about the meal demonstrated. It was the juvenile part of him that was being made to squirm.

The situation in Russia was now serious. The Bolshevik revolution had taken place; the provisional Kerensky government had been overthrown; Russia was torn by civil war. Students like Hartmann — and other ex-officers — were in danger. But for the moment, the Bolsheviks had only advanced as far as the northern slopes of the Caucasus; to the south, the Mensheviks — moderate socialists who opposed Bolshevism — were still in power. Unfortunately, Gurdjieff and his students were in Bolshevik territory. Gurdjieff began by ensuring good relations with the local Bolsheviks; he told one of his students, a White Russian lawyer, to go and offer his legal services to them. The lawyer managed to convince them that he was an ardent revolutionary, by making a fiery speech about Proudhon and Fourier, and was instantly accepted.

Gurdjieff also told the lawyer to write to the Essentuki Soviet, making a formal request to organize a scientific expedition to Mount Indue in the Caucasus; they would, he explained, search for standing stones — dolmens — and also for gold. Gurdjieff cunningly arranged for an article to appear in a newspaper in Piatigorsk — headquarters of the higher Soviet for the region — describing the expedition and the importance of its aims. Permission was given. Gurdjieff even persuaded the Bolsheviks to supply quantities of pure alcohol for 'washing the gold'; it was diluted for their own consumption. (Alcohol of any kind was by

then unobtainable.) The lawyer, who was by now in charge of the passport office, issued them all with Soviet passports.

Hartmann was puzzled to see Gurdjieff beating the horses on the belly and making them rear up in anger and alarm. He understood why when soldiers later came to requisition the horses, then brought them back two hours later, declaring that they were dangerous. Finally, the Bolsheviks provided the 'expedition' with a train to take them to Maikop, on the edge of Bolshevik territory. Two weeks after they had left Essentuki, a reign of terror began, and all ex-officers were shot.

Maikop fell into the hands of White Russian forces; it became necessary to obtain more passports, and the White Russians were difficult. But Gurdjieff's luck held; an admiral who was an old friend of one of the group appeared, and arranged everything. The day after Gurdjieff and his party left Maikop, it was retaken by the Bolsheviks. But by then they were on their way south. The journey to Tiflis was difficult and dangerous; at one point, Hartmann and his party were held up and robbed by brigands. (Gurdjieff — with typical luck — had gone ahead at this point and experienced no difficulties.) Fortunately, Hartmann's wife persuaded them out of taking some of their essential supplies. They were lucky to escape unscathed; other travellers had been killed on the same road.

Gurdjieff's announced intention of seeking for standing stones was not pure fiction. When, in a mountain village, he heard that there were dolmens in the area, he asked to be taken to one. The dolmen in question proved to be a sort of giant stone coffer with a lid. Asked about the nature of such stones, Gurdjieff replied that they were 'road signs' showing the way to places of initiation — a view that reveals that he possessed some esoteric knowledge about the stones and the purpose. This is confirmed by what happened next. Gurdjieff asked their guides if there were any more dolmens in the area; they said no. He then made certain measurements and calculations, and led them through thick woods, which had to be cleared with hand axes. He led the

party to two more dolmens, both heavily overgrown and unknown to local people. Their guides were astonished. In his own account of the journey, Gurdjieff has the cryptic remark that various experts among his pupils — in engineering, astronomy, archaeology — helped him to 'resolve the problem of the dolmens'. It is a pity that no record seems to exist of his 'solution'.

Finally, they arrived in Tiflis, the capital of Georgia, still in Menshevik hands. Gurdjieff not only had his followers to support, but also twenty-eight relatives, who had left Alexandropol in the face of the advancing Turks. (Gurdjieff's father had been killed.) Gurdjieff was himself still suffering from an illness he had contracted during the journey; but with typical determination, he set out to make money. Some of his students were sent to the surrounding area to buy up old carpets at rag-and-bone prices; others washed and repaired them; then the carpets were sold. In a few weeks, the business was flourishing and they had more than enough money for all their needs. It was another example of Gurdjieff's basic assertion: that those who are good at 'the work' would also be good at the practical business of staying alive.

In Tiflis, Gurdjieff once again set up his institute, with a certain amount of help from the government. He was slowly refining and developing his 'method'. Before leaving Essentuki, he had introduced the 'movements' or sacred dances as a basic discipline of the 'moving centre' — the aim was to endow the body with its own form of 'consciousness'. Now he produced a prospectus in which he spoke of 'Exercises for the development of will, memory, attention, hearing, thinking, emotion, instinct.' But the situation was precarious. The Georgian government was propped up by a British military presence; and when the British decided to withdraw, it was only a matter of time before the Bolsheviks took over.

The head of British military intelligence in Constantinople was a young British officer named John Bennett. Like Gurdjieff, he was

fascinated by the dervishes and their ceremonies. He had seen an old dervish lying on his back, with a razor sharp sword across his body, and a man standing on the sword; yet the old dervish's body was not even marked. Bennett had become convinced that the answer to the mystery of our human limitations lies in the concept of the fifth dimension.

Bennett had already met Ouspensky in Constantinople. Ouspensky had, by this time, decided to separate from Gurdjieff. The reason he gives — in *In Search of the Miraculous* — is that he felt Gurdjieff's work was becoming increasingly oriented towards religion. The real reason, almost certainly, is that Ouspensky was too dominant and original a mind to remain anyone's 'disciple', and that he found Gurdjieff's enigmatic personality too devious and oriental for his westernized comprehension. In Constantinople they pursued their separate ways. Ouspensky's first book *Tertium Organum* had recently been translated into English, and become something of a best seller — it led to Ouspensky being invited to London by Lady Rothermere. Bennett was not impressed by Ouspensky's ideas. And when he heard of Gurdjieff's presence in Constantinople, his first reaction was suspicion; he had received a despatch warning him that Gurdjieff was a Bolshevik agent.

His first meeting with Gurdjieff dispelled all doubts. This man 'with the strangest eyes I had ever seen' obviously possessed a vast and precise knowledge of subjects that Bennett only knew as a beginner. Bennett was invited to watch Gurdjieff's students perform their sacred 'movements', and was deeply impressed. It was a fascination that was to last a lifetime.

For a year — until September 1921 — Gurdjieff ran his institute from Constantinople. He had also — oddly enough —set up as a psychiatrist, and it was in this capacity that he cured a young Greek of drug addiction and alcoholism. In return, he had been given a half share in a ship, which had been requisitioned by the British navy. With Bennett's help, Gurdjieff was able to get the ship released and sold; his half-share provided enough money to realize an ambition he had felt ever since landing in Constantinople: to move his institute to Europe.

Six
The Awakening of Courage

> You think you know who you are and what you are; but you do not know either what slaves you now are, or how free you might become. Man can do nothing: he is a machine controlled by external influences, not by his own will, which is an illusion. He is asleep. He has no permanent self that he can call 'I'. Because he is not one but many; his moods, his impulses, his very sense of his own existence are no more than a constant flux. You need not believe what I tell you, but if you will observe yourselves you will verify its truth. Make the experiment of trying to remember your own existence and you will find that you cannot remember yourselves even for two minutes. How can man, who cannot remember who and what he is, who does not know the forces that move him to action, pretend that he can do anything? No, the first truth that must be grasped is that you and I and all men are nothing but machines. Man has no power to direct his private affairs, and he is equally helpless in his social and political life.(2)

This was the doctrine that Ouspensky taught in a London flat at 38 Warwick Gardens, in 1922. One indignant listener, the 'occultist', A. E. Waite, stood up and said 'Mr Ouspensky, there is no love in your system', and walked out of the room. But he was the exception. The rest of Ouspensky's audiences — which included many professional doctors, psychiatrists and writers — found his doctrines startling, original and fascinating.

As a Russian exile, Ouspensky was lucky to get a foothold in

London. Gurdjieff also attempted to set up his Institute in Hampstead, but was unable to obtain the necessary visas. It made no difference; he had already decided that Paris would be more suitable. (An earlier plan to establish himself in Germany was dropped when he realized that the political situation there was as volatile as in Russia or Turkey.)

Before leaving London, Gurdjieff gave a number of remarkable lectures. Bennett was present at some of these and took notes, which he quotes in *Gurdjieff, Making a New World.* Again, they reveal the remarkable *scientific* precision of Gurdjieff's insights. Gurdjieff was speaking of one of his most fundamental concepts: the difference between 'personality' and 'essence'. When a baby is born, it has only 'essence', its essential response to the world. At the age of six or seven the child begins to develop 'personality' — that is, to become aware of itself as a person among other people — *in response* to other people. And when this happens, says Gurdjieff, 'essence' often ceases to grow altogether; personality takes over. Some people who appear to have a powerful and vital personality are really empty inside; their essence ceased to develop as a child.

In *In Search of the Miraculous,* Ouspensky describes an extraordinary experiment performed by Gurdjieff to show his pupils the difference between essence and personality. Two people had been chosen for the purpose of the experiment; one a prominent middle-aged man with an important position, the other a rather scatter-brained young man whose conversation tended to be wordy and confusing. In some way, either by hypnosis or a drug (Ouspensky declined to be specific), both were plunged into a semi-trance-like state in which 'personality' vanished.(3) The older man became completely passive. Asked about the war — about which he had been expressing the most heated opinions a moment before — he said that it did not interest him. The young man, on the other hand, talked seriously and simply, making excellent sense. Gurdjieff explained that the young man had a reasonably developed 'essence' which had become overlaid with awkwardness, a tendency to overreact to

other people, so he appeared a nervous fool. The older man had little 'essence' left; he had developed a bombastic and opinionated personality, but there was nothing underneath.

At the end of the London lectures, Gurdjieff developed this concept of essence and personality: 'What you call "will" in yourself is only from personality. It has no connection with real will. Something touches personality and it says "I want" or "I do not want" . . . and thinks it is will. It is nothing. It is passive. Will can be only in essence.'

Essence, Gurdjieff explained, *has no critical mind:*

> It is trustful, but because it does not know, it is apprehensive. You cannot influence essence by logical argument, or convince it. Until essence begins to experience for itself, it remains as it always was. Sometimes situations arise where personality cannot react, and essence has to react. Then it is seen how much there is in [a person's] essence. Perhaps it is only a child and does not know how to behave. It is no use telling it to behave differently, because it will not understand your language.

Perhaps the most significant statement in this lecture on essence and personality is the following: 'Essence and personality are even in different parts of the brain.' At the time he made this statement, it could have meant very little even to the doctors and psychologists in his audience — unless they happen to recall a tag of the neurologist Hughlings Jackson, who remarked: 'Expression on the left, recognition on the right.' What he meant was that the human brain seems to be divided into two parts, and the left cerebral hemisphere is concerned with language and logic, while the right is concerned with recognition (i.e. of faces) and intuition. It was not until well after the death of Gurdjieff that an American scientist, R. W. Sperry, tried the experiment of cutting the isthmus of nerve fibre joining the two halves of the

brain, and made the astonishing discovery that we literally have *two different persons* inside our heads. If a 'divided brain' patient is shown something with his left eye only (which is connected, for some odd reason, to the right side of the brain), and asked what he has been shown, he cannot reply. But if he is asked to write what he has seen with his left hand, he can write its name without any trouble. If he is shown an orange with his left eye and an apple with his right, and he is asked what he has just seen, he replies: 'An apple'. Asked to write down what he has seen with the left hand, he writes: 'An orange'. Asked what he has just written, he replies: 'An apple'. If he is shown an indecent picture with the left eye only, he will blush. Asked why he is blushing, he replies truthfully: 'I don't know.'

That is to say, the 'I' inhabits the left side of the brain, the side connected with language and logic. A few centimetres away there is another 'I', an 'I' without a voice, of which the left appears to be totally unaware.

Psychologists are still completely ignorant of the nature of hypnosis. How is it that a person can be placed in a trance, and then persuaded to do things that he could not do in his conscious state: stop smoking, make warts disappear, even lie rigid between two chairs while a heavy man stands on his stomach? In trance, the conscious ego falls asleep, while some part of one's inner being remains wide awake. (A hypnotized person's brain rhythms are the same as when he is wide awake.) This suggests that hypnosis causes the left-brain to fall asleep, while the right remains awake. And when the critical, conscious ego is asleep, our natural powers can express themselves without constrictions. (We all know how too much self-consciousness makes us clumsy and inefficient.)

Anyone can learn a great deal about these two 'selves' by ordinary self-observation. For example, it is clear that the left-brain is the source of all ordinary acts of will: 'I' decide to do something. But the right-brain seems to be responsible for our *energy supplies*. When 'I' become tired and jaded, I can quickly

renew myself if I can forget the ego, become deeply absorbed in something that 'takes me out of myself'. This is clearly a trick that Gurdjieff understood, and which explains how he was able to renew his energies so quickly after 'recharging' the exhausted Fritz Peters.

In short, self-observation seems to confirm that we consist of two different 'selves' and that these correspond to Gurdjieff's essence and personality. What is most amazing is that Gurdjieff knew they could be located in different parts of the brain, although it seems likely that he knew nothing of brain physiology. Again, we are forced to conclude that he may have been telling the truth when he claimed that his system was based upon some ancient scientific knowledge that had been long forgotten by most of the human race.

In France, Gurdjieff soon located a house that seemed to be ideal for the setting up of his institute: the Chateau du Prieuré, near Fontainebleau, formerly the home of Madame de Maintenon, second wife of Louis the Fourteenth. It had large and rambling grounds — providing plenty of opportunity for 'work'. Gurdjieff rented it for a year, with an option to buy. But it left him penniless. Again, he had to find ways to make large sums of money. He started two Paris restaurants, and entered the oil business; he also set up once again as a psychiatrist, offering to cure alcoholism and drug addiction. His success in this field was apparently remarkable, although at present we possess no published account of his methods. All this involved enormous overwork, and the stretching of his vital energies to their limits. He tells us, driving back to the Prieuré one night in a state of exhaustion, he fell asleep, but somehow stopped the car at the side of the road; he was awakened next morning by a farm wagon trying to get past. As a result, he caught a severe chill whose effects were long-lasting.

One student, Gladys Alexander, wrote:

> Life [at the Prieuré] was spurred to a highly

> accelerated pace. It ranged from the heavy toil of the old-fashioned kitchen and scullery, from the work of the house and the laundry, the flower and kitchen gardens, to the care of horses, donkey cart, sheep and goats, cows and calves, hens, pigs, and dogs. It was lived in a seething atmosphere of speed and tension, of zeal and high hopes.

It was Gurdjieff's friend Pogossian who had told him the basic secret about work. Pogossian never relaxed; he always moved his arms rhythmically, marked time with his feet; he explained that his aim was to accustom his nature to love work, to overcome its natural laziness. Now Gurdjieff applied the lesson to his pupils.

But this was not the only purpose of the physical hard work at the Prieuré. It also sprang from Gurdjieff's recognition that 'personality' is one of the major obstacles to self-actualization. Personality is a fool; it over-reacts, it distrusts itself, it is inclined to despair. We can see this in the case of the young man whose 'essence' was far more sensible and controlled than his personality, which behaved like a buffoon. The problem becomes twice as difficult if there is a lack of serious aim and objective. Hard work and serious aims soon teach the personality to shut up and keep quiet. Many of Gurdjieff's pupils were rich people who had never done a hard day's work in their lives. So hard work was an essential first step in readjusting their inner balance. Physical labour has another immense advantage. When the body is tired, it relaxes; the 'personality' takes the hint, and also makes itself inconspicuous. This explains, for example, why it is far easier to 'sink into' music or poetry when you are physically tired. The personality ceases to form an obstacle, a barrier. It ceases to chatter and interrupt. So the contact between the essence of the listener and the essence of the music — or poetry — is more immediate and direct. And the contact between Gurdjieff's essence and that of his pupils would also become more direct.

Predictably, there was a great deal of misunderstanding and criticism. Rom Landau says in *God Is My Adventure* (published in 1935), 'Some of the pupils would at times complain that they could no longer support Gurdjieff's violent temper, his apparent greed for money, or the extravagance of his private life.' The last is probably intended as a covert reference to Gurdjieff's reputation for seducing his female students. (In Providence, Rhode Island, in 1960, a man was pointed out to me as one of Gurdjieff's illegitimate children. The professor who told me this also assured me that Gurdjieff had left many children around America.)(4) A consumptive Russian girl, Irene Reweliotty, who was introduced to the 'work' by her lover Luc Dietrich, was invited to dinner by Gurdjieff, who asked her (in Russian) to return after the other guests had left. Convinced that he had seduction in mind, she telephoned to say that her mother was expecting her home. 'Gurdjieff then insulted her in a way that left her no doubt of his intentions,' says Louis Pauwels in his book on Gurdjieff. When she told another disciple about this, he slapped her face. A few days later, she died of a heart attack.

But the accusation most frequently brought against Gurdjieff was that he reduced his pupils to automata through overwork. One woman disciple vomited blood and the doctor diagnosed a burst ulcer; Gurdjieff denied that it was blood and offered a different diagnosis. But an operation was to reveal that the doctor had been correct. The impression that Gurdjieff treated his students like a brutal drill sergeant was strengthened by stories that were circulated after the death of Katherine Mansfield. The New Zealand writer was already dying of tuberculosis when she decided to ask Gurdjieff if she could come to the Prieuré in October 1922. For the first six weeks she was allowed to live as an onlooker, then expected to join in with the work, preparing meals in the kitchen. Gurdjieff decided that she needed the breath of cows to improve her health, and actually installed *a* couch above the cows in the barn, where she could sit and inhale. It was all to no avail, and in January, ten weeks after her arrival, she died of a haemorrhage. Her letters to her husband, Middleton Murry, make it clear that there was no attempt to

overwork her. But her death gave Gurdjieff's Institute a sinister reputation.

All the same, it is clear that the hard work *could* be dangerous. Bennett not only survived his attacks of dysentery and overwork, but gained from them. Those with weaker spirits or less persistence may well have collapsed from exhaustion. Louis Pauwels states that 'after two years of "work"... I found myself in hospital, as weak as a kitten, one eye nearly gone, on the verge of suicide and calling desperately for help at 3 o'clock in the morning.' And he speaks of two American girls who had spent two years in a group directed by Madame de S. (presumably Jeanne de Salzmann): 'They were at their last gasp, ready to take the plunge into death, in fact, already bending over it — fascinated.' He advised them to break away from the 'teaching' and retire to a seaside resort.

All of which brings us to the heart of the Gurdjieff problem. As a young man — as we have seen — Gurdjieff was driven half frantic by the sense of his inability to control his 'forgetfulness'. For *this* is the central human problem: ordinary forgetfulness, like walking into a room to get something, and forgetting what you went in for. When we get something we want badly, or experience some enormous relief from misery or crisis, we feel that *we shall never forget* this happiness; but twenty-four hours later, nothing but a dim carbon copy remains, and we are again wholly absorbed in trivialities. If we could take a course in *not* 'forgetting', our lives would obviously be completely transformed. And, after all, any intelligent person can train himself to be less absent-minded. It seems preposterous that nothing except a little absent-mindedness stands between us and a life that is ten times as satisfying as the present one. Anybody who realizes this experiences Gurdjieff's tremendous sense of frustration, and is willing to make the most exhausting efforts to 'break through'.

And therein lies the problem. For exhaustion makes things ten times as bad. When we are healthy and wide awake we are always experiencing the sudden flash of sheer 'absurd delight'

that reawakens our sense of meaning and purpose. But exhaustion makes everything seem dead, so that no effort seems worth making. The world becomes 'stale, flat and unprofitable'. And if we are *taken in* by this apparent meaninglessness, this is a highly dangerous state. It becomes a vicious circle of depression and fatigue. Without a sense of purpose, a human being is like a sailor without a compass.

For men like Ouspensky and Bennett, the danger did not exist. Long before they met Gurdjieff, they had spent years searching for some kind of knowledge; so no amount of fatigue was likely to make them lose heart — that is, to be *taken in* by the sense of meaninglessness. A person like Katherine Mansfield was a different proposition. Even John Carswell's sympathetic book about her(5) makes it clear that she was an emotional dilettante, driven by a mixture of egoism and boredom. If she had recovered her health at the Prieuré, she might well have gone off and written a satirical short story about it all, portraying Gurdjieff as a charlatan. Gurdjieff was subjected to a great deal of criticism for the manner in which he got rid of unsatisfactory pupils — like Zaharoff, whom he sent back to Petrograd from Essentuki — but it seems clear that he failed to exercise enough of this kind of selectivity.

What emerges clearly from Gurdjieff's own account of the founding of Fontainebleau Institute is that he was in a state of physical exhaustion for much of the time, and was permanently

worried about money. If he drove his pupils to the limits of endurance, he also drove himself. And, as Bennett acknowledges, it worked.

> In spite of the obstacles, Gurdjieff during the period from November 1922 to December 1923 had accomplished something that had never been seen in Europe before. He created conditions for work that enabled scores of people to verify for themselves the potential for

> transformation that is latent in every human being. The basic method was simple: it consisted of offering pupils the opportunity and the means of stretching to the limit the capacity of their physical body for work, for attention, for the acquisition of skills, and for the production of psychic energy . . . No description of the external life at the Prieuré can give any adequate idea of what was happening inside people. They could see for themselves that miracles were possible and were occurring before their eyes. The atmosphere was happy and vital, not gloomy and monastic.

But to emphasize the work itself would be to miss the whole point. In a basic sense, the work was totally unimportant. Two stories illustrate this. Bennett says that one day Gurdjieff announced that ordinary physical labour was not enough: they all had to learn various skills: shoe-making, engineering, basket-weaving, and so on. He asked for volunteers, and everybody raised his hand. But the actual instruction failed to materialize. However, Bennett makes the interesting remark that the *expectation* of all this additional work galvanized everybody and made them more energetic.

Fritz Peters was told to mow the lawns once every four days. When he had achieved this, Gurdjieff — instead of praising him — told him that he now had to do it all in one day. Seeing Peter's disappointment and frustration, he took him to a nearby field, full of high grass, and told him when he had learned to mow the lawns in one day, he would be transferred to this field, which he would have to learn to scythe in one day. (Peters was a rather small eleven-year-old at the time.) Understandably, Peter's heart sank at the prospect. Yet he pressed on and managed to mow all the lawns in one day, finding that his self-pity and resentment vanished as he worked. When, finally, he asked Gurdjieff when he had to scythe the field, Gurdjieff made the curious reply: 'Not necessary. You have already done the work.' That is to say, the

prospect of the far harder job of scything the field had made Peters begin to treat his lawn-mowing problem as a minor task. *This* is what Gurdjieff was interested in — something that might be called 'the awakening of courage'.

In early 1924, Gurdjieff's precarious financial position made him decide to try to refill his coffers in America. A demonstration of his dances at the Theatre des Champs-Elysées in December 1923 was a considerable success, and it may have been this that gave Gurdjieff the idea of earning money across the Atlantic. Ouspensky was able to help by putting him in contact with Claude Bragdon, who had translated *Tertium Organum*. A. R. Orage, who had given up the editorship of the *New Age* to work with Gurdjieff, was sent ahead to prepare the ground. (Orage ended by staying on in New York.) Gurdjieff and his troupe arrived in January 1924 — forty of them — and gave a demonstration at Leslie's Ballroom on the 23rd.

The pupils performed their 'movements', to the accompaniment of eastern music and a beating drum, and then gave an exhibition of 'magnetism, clairvoyance and mind-reading'. Members of the audience were asked to show some personal object to a pupil in the audience. Pupils on stage then gave accurate descriptions of what had been shown. Names of operas were suggested to pupils in the audience, who 'transferred' the information to Thomas de Hartmann on stage, who then played excerpts from the opera. In the same way, pupils in the audience 'transmitted' the names of living animals to an artist on stage, who then drew them on large sheets of white paper. It was a remarkable exhibition of mind-reading, and at least one member of the audience, A. S. Nott (who later wrote *Teachings of Gurdjieff: The Journal of a Pupil),* was baffled and deeply impressed. Another member, William Seabrook, was inclined to dismiss them as mere conjuring tricks. (Orage told the audience that the performance would involve 'tricks, half-tricks and true supernatural phenomena', and left the audience to guess which was which.) Seabrook wrote:

What excited and interested me was the amazing, brilliant, automaton-like, inhuman, almost incredible docility and robot-like obedience of the disciples. They were like a group of perfectly trained zombies, or like circus animals . . .

The group consisted of young and youngish women, most of whom were handsome and some of whom were beautiful; and of men who looked as if they had come, and probably did in most cases, from the best British and Continental homes and universities. I met some of these disciples, and they were almost without exception people of culture, breeding and intelligence ... And there was no fake about it, regardless of whether it was supernormal or not, because if they hadn't learned supreme co-ordination, they'd have broken their arms and legs, and maybe their necks, in some of the stunts they did. But what I felt the demonstrations showed, even more than their control over themselves, was the terrific domination of Gurdjieff, the Master. At his command, they'd race, spread out, at breakneck speed, from left to right across the stage, and at another low command from him, freeze full flight as if caught by a race-track camera ...

Gurdjieff himself, a calm, bull-like man, with muscles in those days hard as steel, in immaculate dinner clothes, his head shaven like a Prussian officer's, with black luxuriant handle-bar moustaches, and generally smoking expensive Egyptian cigarettes, stood casually down in the audience, or off to one side beside the piano ... He never shouted. He was always

> casual. Yet always in complete command. It was as if he were a slave-master or wild-animal tamer, with an invisible bull-whip slashing inaudibly through the air. Among his other qualities, he was a great showman, and a climax came one night which literally had the front row out of their seats. The troupe was deployed extreme back stage, facing the audience. At his command, they came racing full tilt towards the footlights. We expected to see a wonderful exhibition of arrested motion. But instead, Gurdjieff calmly turned his back, and was lighting a cigarette. In the next split second, an aerial human avalanche was flying through the air, across the orchestra, down among empty chairs, on the floor, bodies pell-mell, piled on top of each other, arms and legs sticking out in weird postures — frozen there, fallen, in complete immobility and silence.
>
> Only after it had happened did Gurdjieff turn and look at them, as they lay there, still immobile. When they presently arose, by his permission, and it was evident that no arms, legs or necks had been broken — no one seemed to have suffered even so much as a scratch or bruise — there were storms of applause, mingled with a little protest. It had been almost too much. (6)

Llewellyn Powys also has a brief description of the Gurdjieff troupe in *The Verdict of Bridlegoose:*

> [Gurdjieff] had a high, bald head, with sharp, black eyes. His general appearance made one think of a riding master, though there was something about his presence that affected one's nerves in a strange way. Especially did one feel

> this when his pupils came on to the stage, to perform like a hutchful of hypnotized rabbits under the gaze of a master conjurer.(7)

In spite of much favourable publicity, the New York audiences steadily diminished. In the midst of the jazz age, New Yorkers were not deeply interested in oriental dances. The 'troupe' was actually looking for other work when Adolf Bolm, late of the Diaghilev ballet, invited them to Chicago. Their performances there were a success, as was a final performance at Carnegie Hall. But the American visit had not brought Gurdjieff as much as he had hoped.

Olga de Hartmann has a typical story of Gurdjieff at this period. He asked her to return to Paris alone, because he needed her husband with him in New York for a while. She flatly refused; Gurdjieff was displeased, but knew she was immovable. She and her husband returned to Paris without Gurdjieff. When she had purchased the boat tickets, she realized they had no money left, so she pawned one of her rings. It was one she particularly valued, and she left a message for her brother — who was in New York — to redeem it. In fact, Gurdjieff found out about it, and redeemed it himself, giving it back to her when he returned to the Prieuré. He was not a man to bear grudges.

Back at Fontainebleau, work continued as usual. On 5 July 1924, Gurdjieff spent the day in Paris. The steering wheel of his car needed attention, and he left it at a garage. He told Olga de Hartmann to do some secretarial work at his Paris flat, then return to the Prieuré by train. She was annoyed because it was a hot day, and she usually drove back with Gurdjieff in the car. In Gurdjieff's flat she fell asleep and was suddenly awakened by his voice calling to her. But he was nowhere to be seen.

In fact, Gurdjieff had crashed into a tree — probably due to the defective steering column — and was lying badly injured and unconscious at the time she heard his voice.

Seven
New Directions

GURDJIEFF'S accident — which brought him close to death —was the beginning of a new epoch in his life. He decided that his ideas had to be transmitted to posterity. One morning, in the Café de la Paix, he started dictating to Olga de Hartmann: 'It was in the year 223 after the creation of the World . . . Through the Universe flew the ship *Karnak* of the 'trans-space' communication'. It was the beginning of his enormous book *Beelzebub's Tales to His Grandson*.

This was a period of deep gloom for everybody. Gurdjieff's accident left the disciples shattered; they felt he should be invulnerable. Gurdjieff himself was profoundly shaken; he felt that the accident had caused his consciousness to revert to an earlier stage in its development. In his state of broken physical health, it was obvious that the institute could not continue in the same way as before. He announced to his assembled students that he intended to close it down. Most of the Russians packed up and left the following day. In fact, the institute continued to function. But Gurdjieff no longer looked upon it as his life's work.

There were further problems. His mother — who, together with his sister and brother, was living at the Prieuré — was suffering from a liver complaint; soon after his accident, she died. Gurdjieff had been deeply attached to her, and it was a considerable blow. Here again, Bennett had a story that reveals much about Gurdjieff. Many years later, in 1948, Bennett went to see Gurdjieff in Paris. Bennett lost his own mother, and Gurdjieff asked him about her. Then Gurdjieff made the curious comment: 'She is in need of help because she cannot find her way by herself. My own mother is already free and I can help her. Through her your mother can be helped, but you have to bring them into contact.' He instructed Bennett to take two chairs, and

to stand in front of them, envisaging his own mother in one and Gurdjieff's mother in the other. Bennett tried hard for weeks, and found the exercise immensely difficult. On one occasion he sobbed for half an hour. Nothing seemed to be happening, until one day he became aware of presences in the room. These finally took the shape of his own mother and Gurdjieff's. Eventually, he felt that the two had established contact, and experienced an immense wave of relief and gratitude. Gurdjieff had told him: 'You cannot help her yourself: but through my mother I can help you.' It seems clear that Gurdjieff believed that he was somehow in contact with his mother after death.

The motor accident involved another tragedy. For some time Gurdjieff's wife had been suffering from cancer, and he had been making immense efforts to cure her by a technique from Central Asia that made use of astral power. His motor accident made this impossible; his wife died soon after. Yet a story told by Olga de Hartmann again demonstrates his curious powers. Towards the end, his wife was in such pain that she could not eat, or even drink. Gurdjieff asked for half a glass of water, and held it in his hands for five minutes; then he asked Olga de Hartmann to give it to her. His wife succeeded in drinking the water without pain, and was suddenly able to take liquid food again.(8)

Slowly, Gurdjieff recovered from the effects of his accident. He was inclined to believe that some 'hostile power' had caused it, and was trying actively to interfere with his work. But he now directed all his energies to writing. Much of his income now came from America, where Orage had started his own Gurdjieff group. Gurdjieff was not entirely happy about Orage as a teacher of his ideas, but he was grateful for the money.

Gurdjieff's writing — particularly *Beelzebub* — will always be a matter of contention. The style is so impossibly involved that it makes an immediate impression of pretentious nonsense. It is also full of outlandish words: kundabuffer, gaidoropoolo, geneotriamazikamnian, harhrinhrarh, blastegoklornian, and dozens of others. (The last means simply the circumference of

the atmosphere of our planet, which leads one to wonder why Gurdjieff needed to invent this new word.) The explanation offered by many of his followers is that the style has been made deliberately difficult in order to force the reader to work at it. This view is reinforced by the study of his early book *Herald of Coming Good,* where the difficulty of the style is due simply to the insertion of dozens of subordinate clauses. Here is an example:

> This protracted and, for me, absolutely unnatural life, absolutely irreconcilable, too, in every way with the traits that had entrenched themselves in my individuality by the time of my maturity, was the direct consequence of my decision, founded upon the results of my previous study of a whole series of historic precedents with a view, first of all, — to preventing, by to a certain degree unnatural outward manifestations of myself, the formation, in relation to me, that already noted from ancient times 'something', termed by the great Solomon, King of Juda, 'Tzvarnoharno', which, as was set out by our ancestors, forms itself by a natural process in the communal life of people as an outcome of a conjunction of the evil actions of the so-called 'common people' and leads to the destruction of both him that tries to achieve something for general human welfare and of all that he has accomplished to this end.

Here, Bennett's explanation that 'Tzvarnoharno' is probably derived from the Pahlavi word for majesty does nothing to make Gurdjieff's meaning any clearer. Fortunately, a passage in his last book, *Life Is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* throws some light on it; Gurdjieff says there that he considers his serious motor accident a manifestation of that 'something' accumulating in the common life of people, which seems to imply that it is a kind of hostility directed — unconsciously — at those who have achieved too much success.

In any case, it is clear that the obscurity of the passage is increased by Gurdjieff's habit of inserting a dozen parentheses into the sentence. This, I suspect, is a habit of mind rather than a deliberate attempt to irritate the reader. Gurdjieff's spoken lectures were always clear and to the point. But when he took up a pen, his mind flowed naturally into a more elaborate and flowery eastern mould.

Orage was of the opinion that when it came to expressing his ideas on paper, Gurdjieff was simply incompetent. William Seabrook came to hold the same opinion. He tells how, in January 1931, Gurdjieff asked him to invite a group of cultured New Yorkers to Gurdjieff's apartment to hear a reading from his new book. Marvellous and elaborate eastern food had been prepared (Gurdjieff was a celebrated cook). The audience included the writer Lincoln Steffens and the psychologist J. B. Watson. After the reading had been going on for some time, Watson interrupted, saying that this was either an elaborate joke, or it was piffle. In either event, it might be better to drop the reading and talk. The author accepted this without offence, and was so amusing and witty during the meal that the guests began to press him to admit that his book was a joke. Gurdjieff, according to Seabrook, remained unoffended, but implied that it was simply above their heads.

Whatever else *Beelzebub* is, it is certainly not a joke. Gurdjieff himself makes this clear. He writes that in 1927, after three years of hard work, he realized that he had not, after all, succeeded in conveying his ideas to his readers, and that extensive rewriting would be necessary. His exhaustion and the difficulties of authorship made him contemplate suicide. But the book *was* totally rewritten. There can be no doubt that, even after these immense labours, it is still not a book for those approaching Gurdjieff for the first time. (I know one highly intelligent man who has remained unalterably convinced that Gurdjieff is a charlatan because he attempted to become acquainted with his ideas through *Beelzebub.)* On the other hand Bennett, who was thoroughly acquainted with Gurdjieff's main ideas, told me that

he had read it a dozen times, and that each time he had found new meanings that he had never noticed before. On the whole, it is probably safe to assume that it is the most important single product of Gurdjieff's immensely productive life.

The tremendous labours involved in writing *Beelzebub* brought Gurdjieff another important insight. He tells how he was sitting on the bench at the Prieuré where he used to sit with his wife and mother, and that it suddenly struck him that his creativity had been increased by the suffering he had experienced as a result of their deaths. In effect, this suffering had strengthened his 'essence'. He had also noted, when lying in bed after his accident, that friends who came to visit him sucked away his energy, leaving him exhausted. They were sucking away what he called *hanblezoin,* or the energy of the astral body, which is essential to creative work. The insight that came to Gurdjieff was that *hanblezoin* must be created by conscious effort and by 'intentional suffering' — the kind of suffering that saints experience on their bed of nails.

With this in mind, Gurdjieff began deliberately ridding himself of many disciples — like the Hartmanns. He felt that not only were they building up too much dependence on him, but that they were making him too comfortable. A quarrel about some English kippers was used as a pretext for sending the Hartmanns to live in Paris in 1929. Various other disciples were also requested to leave. Yet all who left remained loyal to Gurdjieff, convinced that this was not mere caprice.

Orage had to bear an unusually difficult rejection. Gurdjieff came to New York while he was in England, and required Orage's group to sign a document agreeing to break off relations with Orage. When Orage was shown this document, he took the blow calmly, and signed it himself.

In trying to assess Gurdjieff's motives for actions like this, it is as well to bear in mind a story told by Olga de Hartmann. Gurdjieff suggested that she should ask her parents to leave Leningrad

and come to the Prieuré, since political conditions were becoming increasingly dangerous. Her sister and parents came, but were not happy at Fontainebleau 'because,' as Mme de Hartmann says, 'of the ruthless manner in which Mr Gurdjieff very often spoke with all of us.' One morning, Gurdjieff and Olga's father were sitting on a bench when she came to ask some question. Gurdjieff answered her angrily, and her father looked upset and miserable. Then Gurdjieff turned to her father and said: 'You see, father, what you make me do. You never shouted at your daughter, so she has not had this experience, and all sorts of impressions are necessary for people. So now I am obliged to do it in your place.' Her father, apparently, understood what he meant.

'And all sorts of impressions are necessary for people.' This seems to have been the principle behind some of Gurdjieff's most puzzling actions. Peters himself came to recognize this after a particularly traumatic experience. In 1934, Peters had to go to Chicago, and Gurdjieff announced that he would accompany him. The trip was a nightmare. Gurdjieff arrived late at the railway station, and made Peters go and make up a story to have the train delayed. Peters actually succeeded in doing this. It took three-quarters of an hour to get Gurdjieff to his berth, complaining loudly all the way, although the conductor kept begging him to be silent for the sake of the sleeping passengers. Gurdjieff then decided to eat, drink and smoke, until the conductor threatened to throw him off at the next stop. When Peters lost his temper, Gurdjieff asked him sadly why he was treating him in this way.

Once in his berth, Gurdjieff demanded water — to the fury of the other passengers. He settled down to sleep only at 4 a.m. The next morning, at breakfast, Gurdjieff made an endless fuss about wanting yogurt, then, after driving everybody to a frenzy, ate a normal American breakfast. During the remainder of the trip he kept his fellow passengers in a constant state of annoyance by smoking, drinking heavily, and producing strong smelling cheeses.

When they reached Chicago, Peters told him angrily that he was leaving, and Gurdjieff set up such an outcry that Peters had to consent to going with him and the group of adoring disciples. Peters finally shocked the disciples by denouncing Gurdjieff in four letter words, and strode out. But when he saw Gurdjieff again in New York a few years later, it struck him that the whole incident had been designed to force him out of his attitude of blind hero-worship. It had undoubtedly worked.

Peters has another story that illustrates Gurdjieff's skill in 'handling' people, as well as his sense of humour. Gurdjieff had invited a group of 'important' people to dinner. Before they arrived, he asked Peters to teach him every obscene word and phrase he knew. The guests arrived — many of them journalists — and sat down to dinner. In a slightly patronizing manner, they began asking Gurdjieff questions about his work. Gurdjieff then began to explain that most people are not really motivated by the desire for truth or order, but by their sexual drives. He spoke to a well-dressed, attractive woman, and told her that the care she took of her appearance was based on a 'desire to fuck'. He began to speak of his own sexual prowess, then of the sexual habits of various races, always using the crudest words he could find. After the meal, the guests began to flirt with one another, and many of them were soon lying around in a state of partial undress. The woman whom Gurdjieff had complimented began making passes at him, while another woman tried to corner Peters in the kitchen; when he rebuffed her, she accused him of being 'that dirty old man's little faggot'.

Suddenly, in a stentorian voice, Gurdjieff called them to attention, and began to mock them, telling them that they now knew what kind of people they really were. He ended by saying that he deserved to be paid for giving them this lesson, and would be glad to accept cheques. As a result, he collected several thousand dollars.

By 1935, Gurdjieff had also given up writing, abandoning a final book, *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'*, when it was less than

half finished. Since he was still scarcely more than sixty (or only fifty-eight, if the date of his passport is accurate), it seems unlikely that he regarded his life-work as finished. But the Institute had collapsed, and he seemed to have no plans for further writing. The Prieuré was sold in 1933, and when Peters met Gurdjieff in New York in the mid-thirties he was again short of money, which he earned by treating drug-addicts and alcoholics. (This period, fortunately, was brief.) So Gurdjieff continued to lecture and teach in America — dividing his time between the groups in Chicago and New York — while Ouspensky carried on the work in London.

Both were in the paradoxical position of wanting to spread the teaching, yet wanting to prevent it from spreading too fast or indiscriminately. Peters comments of the Chicago group:

> They seemed to me to have been attracted to his teaching for a variety of not very good reasons — because of loneliness, or perhaps because they considered themselves misfits or outcasts. Most of them had dabbled in the arts, theosophy, the occult ... I began to sense a certain danger in his teaching when it was carried on without his personal supervision.

Ouspensky's London pupils were made to behave like conspirators, and ordered not to discuss the teaching with any outsiders; when Bennett asked permission to quote Ouspensky, he was refused.

The chief difference between Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, as teachers, was that Gurdjieff always seems to have found human beings amusing and interesting, while Ouspensky struck his followers as a scientist, a man wholly preoccupied with spreading the idea of the 'fight against sleep', with little interest in people as individuals. Gurdjieff seems to have derived a great deal of quiet amusement from his disciples. Peters tells a story about a girl, a dancer, who achieved a certain amount of authority within one of

his groups, but was aggressive and difficult. One day, after she had openly challenged some statement he had made during a lecture, Gurdjieff sent her a message asking her to come to his room alone at three in the morning, where he would show her some astonishing things. Peters relayed the message, and the girl was indignant; she said she recognized a proposition when she heard it, and would never have anything more to do with Gurdjieff. When Peters carried back this message, Gurdjieff chuckled with satisfaction and said this is precisely what he had hoped. He added the interesting remark that it was just as well that she had turned him down, because he would not have had time to deal with the 'reverberations' that would have followed if she had accepted his invitation. The implication seems to be that no 'involvement' can be without consequences. 'Casual sex' is a contradiction in terms. Again, one senses that Gurdjieff was aware of certain underlying laws of human existence.

Shortly before the Second World War, Gurdjieff returned to Paris. When the Germans invaded France, he seems to have ignored pleas to escape to 'free France', but stayed on at his flat in the Rue des Colonels Renards. One of the first of the American followers to see him after the war was Fritz Peters who — as we have seen in the first chapter — came to him suffering from deep nervous depression, which Gurdjieff cured instantaneously with some kind of infusion of vital energy. He told Peters that he had managed to live comfortably during the war by selling rugs; he also owned a company that made false eyelashes. He also told Peters that he had made deals with many people — Germans, policemen, black marketeers — and so had managed to keep himself supplied with necessities like tobacco and brandy. He was still surrounded by disciples, who also provided part of his income. But Peters also noticed a number of rather shabby, old people who visited the flat, and whom Gurdjieff treated with *a* kindliness and gentleness that was completely unlike his attitude to his students; he apparently regarded these as his 'pensioners'.

Other American students began to drift back to Paris. Bennett came with his wife, who was suffering from a mysterious illness.

He found Gurdjieff looking older and sadder, although he held himself as erect as ever. Gurdjieff was now casually dressed in open necked shirt, untidy trousers and a red fez. During lunch — at which about forty people were wedged into the tiny dining room — he noticed that Mrs Bennett was in pain. Gurdjieff fetched two pills and told her to swallow them. Later he asked her: 'Where is your pain now?' She answered: 'It is gone.' 'I ask you where is it now?' Her eyes filled with tears and she answered: 'You have taken it.' In fact, her health now suddenly improved.

Kenneth Walker and his wife also came to the flat; Walker had been a student of Ouspensky's for many years, having been introduced to him by Maurice Nicoll, one of the original Prieuré group. Walker describes the flat as looking like a crowded junk shop. Gurdjieff entered while they were all listening to a reading from *Beelzebub*. Walker comments that he was shorter and stouter than he expected; he also noted the piercing eyes. Again, an enormous number of people were present at lunch, and everyone was made to drink toasts in Armagnac or vodka. Gurdjieff explained once that he always made his guests half drunk because this was the quickest way of making them drop the 'personality' and reveal what was inside them. It was after this encounter that Walker's wife described Gurdjieff as a magician.

Several other Ouspensky disciples visited the flat. Walker remarks that 'too much theorizing [had tended] to make the minds of his London followers too rigid, and our behaviour too calculated and grim. We were in danger of acquiring the chapel-going faces of Plymouth Brethren.' Gurdjieff's boozy lunches and dinners (which always began well after midnight) were just what was needed to make them relax and bring them closer together. This again illustrates the basic difference between Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Walker observes that Gurdjieff gave him a completely new attitude towards the 'work'. Ouspensky was a disciplinarian; when he set a task, Walker carried it out as scrupulously as possible, but never tried to go further than that.

> With Gurdjieff I began to develop a sense of personal responsibility and to experience a new freedom. At the same time it was a freedom which must be very carefully used for the punishment for error was very great. It was the punishment of seeing one's teacher gravely inconvenienced by one's mistake, and it was difficult to be in close touch with Gurdjieff for long without developing an affection for him.

That autumn — 1948 — Gurdjieff went back to America once more. Ouspensky, convinced that Europe was doomed, had carried on his work in New York during the war years, but illness finally drove him back to London. He died in 1948, leaving the manuscript of his most important book, *Fragments of an Unknown Teaching,* later published under the title *In Search of the Miraculous*. Gurdjieff took over the Ouspensky group in New York, and his impact is described by Irmis B. Popoff in her book *Gurdjieff*. She speaks of the enormous impression of kindness and compassion that he made.

Gurdjieff's stay in New York seems to have been as hectic as his days in Paris — vast meals for dozens of people, dancing classes, lectures, interminable sessions in Child's Restaurant. Gurdjieff also read the manuscript of Ouspensky's book, and prepared his own *Beelzebub* for publication; he admired Ouspensky's work, but insisted that *Beelzebub* was a better source book of his teaching.

Child's Restaurant was the scene of one of his last displays of 'magical' power. Bennett was in New York, and went to join Gurdjieff in Child's one morning. Gurdjieff told him to take a sheet of paper and write. Bennet found his hand writing automatically, in a style that was not his own. It was an announcement of the forthcoming publication of *Beelzebub,* and a request that as many pupils as possible should buy copies at £100 per copy. Later that day, Gurdjieff read the letter aloud to a gathering of pupils, many of whom commented that no one but Gurdjieff could

have written it.

Gurdjieff returned to Paris the following spring. Kenneth Walker noticed that his health was deteriorating seriously, and advised him to have an operation to remove fluid from his abdomen. Gurdjieff apparently ignored this advice.

Bennett also continued to see him regularly, and found that Gurdjieff was as demanding as ever. Bennett stretched himself to breaking point to meet impossible requests, until it suddenly dawned on him that this was another of Gurdjieff's 'tricks', Bennett's problem was an inability to say no, and Gurdjieff was trying to teach him to develop it. When this realization came to him, he experienced immense relief.

Once again, with Gurdjieff's help, Bennett began having unusual experiences. When reading aloud before the evening meal at Gurdjieff's flat, he suddenly left his body and stood several feet away, listening to his voice continuing to read. After that, he experienced a return of the ability to command his emotional states at will; he also discovered that he could be aware of events happening in other places. One day, to confirm this, he rang his wife in London, and verified that she had been at a certain meeting with women friends, as he had seen during his state of 'clairvoyance'.

In October, when Bennett returned to Paris, it was clear that Gurdjieff was now very ill. Eighteen months before, he had been involved in another car accident that had caused serious damage; Bennett had then been impressed by the vitality that prevented him from dying. Now, with his legs swollen with dropsy, he seemed to have no more will to live. Bennett found him sitting in a café on the morning of Saturday, 22 October 1949, looking ill and tired. He told Bennett: 'The next five years will decide. It is the beginning of a new world. Either the old world will make me "Tchik" (making a sound like a louse being squashed) or I will make (i.e. squash) the old world "Tchik". Then the new world can begin.' Which suggests that Gurdjieff

expected to live for at least another five years. Bennett drove home with him in his car, an act of considerable courage, for Gurdjieff was always an atrocious driver, and now his legs were so swollen that he was unable to use the brake. Crossing the Avenue Carnot, a lorry swept down towards them; Gurdjieff continued at the same pace, missing it by a hair's breadth. In order to stop the car outside his flat, he had to allow it to run down.

Four days later, Gurdjieff's American doctor saw him, and ordered him to be moved to the American hospital. His blood pressure was too high to inject serum. The enormous quantity of liquid was drained off from his stomach, but it was apparently too late. By the following Saturday, 29 October, he was dead. There seemed to be some doubt even about that. Four hours after his death, his forehead was still warm. And when Bennett stood alone beside the body in the chapel of the American Hospital, he could hear someone breathing — even when he held his breath and closed his eyes. He suspected Gurdjieff of a last practical joke.

When the autopsy was performed, the doctors were baffled. His intestines were in such a state of disintegration and decay that he should have been dead years ago.

Eight
Gurdjieff versus Ouspensky?

BEELZEBUB'S Tales to his Grandson, which Gurdjieff regarded as the essence of his teaching, is over twelve hundred pages long. Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous,* undoubtedly the best summary of Gurdjieff's ideas, is over four hundred. Even for the intelligent and well-disposed reader, this represents a considerable problem. According to Gurdjieff and Ouspensky, it is an inescapable problem. The length demands from the reader a certain effort which is indispensable if the ideas are to be grasped and digested, rather than merely swallowed whole.

Yet Ouspensky's own book amounts to a compromise with his original position, that the ideas could only be conveyed directly, from teacher to pupil, and that any attempt to convey them in writing would dilute their very essence, and so falsify them.

What bothered Ouspensky was the modern tendency to simplify important ideas for popular consumption: *Relativity Made Easy, Kant for Beginners.* But he was overlooking a vital point: that such books are not necessarily for the lazy. If you intend to try to learn about Kant or relativity from scratch, you would undoubtedly do better to start with a simplified account rather than trying to plunge directly into *The Critique of Pure Reason* or Einstein's collected mathematical papers.

With this in mind, then, let us see whether it is possible to make the approach to Gurdjieff less formidable.

We might well begin with the conflict between Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Bennett writes: 'Gurdjieff frequently complained that Ouspensky had ruined his pupils by his excessively intellectual approach, and that he [Gurdjieff] did better with people who came to him with no preparation at all.' And we have already

noted Kenneth Walker's observation that Ouspensky had made them too rigid and grim. Bennett quotes Ouspensky as telling his pupils that 'all in London should make sure to avoid the smallest departure from the letter of the System as contained in the writings I have left.' When Bennett sent Ouspensky a paper he had written on the fifth dimension, Ouspensky dismissed it with the remark: 'Nothing new can be found by intellectual processes alone. There is only one hope: that we should find the way to work with the higher emotional centre.' And he added the sad comment: 'And we do not know how this is to be done.'

In short, Ouspensky's basic approach is curiously pessimistic and negative. He believes that the 'System' is man's only salvation from his 'mechanicalness', from his complete inability to 'do'. But he feels that the road is tremendously steep and difficult. Bennett's wife told him: 'You do not trust yourself, and that is not good ... Why don't you follow your own line more, and stop trying to imitate Mr Ouspensky?' She recognized that this was the trouble — Ouspensky's gloomy, almost Calvinistic attitude to the 'System'.

Gurdjieff's approach was altogether more optimistic. He told his Prieuré students: 'Every man can achieve this independent mind: everyone who has a serious wish can do it.' There is no suggestion here that the path is too difficult for all but the most desperate or determined; a serious wish was enough — the kind of seriousness you would have to bring to learning a foreign language or studying mathematics.

Yet from descriptions of life at the Prieuré, it seems clear that Gurdjieff himself was at least partly responsible for Ouspensky's attitude. The immense physical efforts required of the disciples, the fasts, the rebukes and emotional shocks, all seem to imply that freedom from 'mechanicalness' demands an almost superhuman dedication. And Bennett himself had his doubts. He writes: 'But in spite of these results there was something not right. It was too frenzied, we were all in too much of a hurry . . . We all wanted to run before we could walk.'

And, however hesitantly, Bennett blames Gurdjieff:

> Looking back, it seems Gurdjieff was still experimenting. He wanted to see what European people were capable of. He discovered that we were prepared to make efforts that few Asiatic people will accept — for the simple reason that on the whole Asiatic people are not in a hurry. The difference is deceptive and it may be that Gurdjieff misjudged the capacity for effort, and took it for ability to accept the need for inward change. As I see it now, we did not really grasp the profound change of attitude towards oneself that is needed before the process of the 'Work' can act freely in us. We were perhaps misled by Gurdjieff's insistence on effort and yet more effort.

Now, as all the major religious teachers have recognized, excessive effort can in itself be counter-productive. For the 'I' that makes the effort is the anxiety-ridden left-brain ego. This conscious 'will' is hampered by its own self-awareness. The 'true will' seems to operate from elsewhere — from the realm of 'essence' — which, as Gurdjieff says, is located elsewhere in the brain. And it is actually repressed and rendered non-operative by the fussy anxiety of the left-brain 'personality'.

If this is, in fact, a valid criticism — not only of Ouspensky's approach but of Gurdjieff's — then it suggests that the 'System' was not as complete or final as Ouspensky liked to believe. No one had any doubt that it *worked*. Leading followers like Ouspensky, Bennett, Orage, de Hartmann, Walker, have left us in no doubt about that. Yet it seems equally clear that all of them ended with a certain sense of unfulfilment, as if they had somehow failed to gain what had originally been promised. Accounts of Ouspensky's last years make it clear that he was a tired and sad man. Bennett was struck by Gurdjieff's sadness

when he saw him after twenty-five years, and this sadness can be seen in all the later photographs.

It may seem naïve to expect that the 'Work' should bring about the same kind of inner transformation — complete with visions and ecstasies — of religious conversion. Yet it *does* seem reasonable to expect it to bring about some degree of inner satisfaction and serenity. And accounts by various Gurdjieff disciples make it clear that it failed even in this respect. The problem of why this should be so presents an interesting challenge. At all events, it is worth examining more closely.

Perhaps the best way of beginning is to try to re-define the question which Gurdjieff's 'System' attempts to solve.

Everyday consciousness is limited by 'mechanicalness', 'the robot'. We become so accustomed to the repetitive routine of everyday life that we end by being bound hand and foot by habit, like a fly wrapped in spider-web. Yet no one, even the laziest, is really happy with this state of affairs, for we recognize that it robs us of a certain intensity, a feeling of being fully alive. We need security; but it tends to conflict with that desire to be 'wide awake'. *This* is more often associated with insecurity. Sartre, for example, remarked that he had never felt so alive as when he was in the French Resistance, and was likely to be arrested and shot at any moment.

This conflict produces the problem that I have identified as 'the dilemma of the Outsider'. Dominant human beings prefer insecurity and intensity to security and boredom. Of course, even the less dominant ones hanker after 'intensity'; but they are unwilling to trade it for security. The ideal state of affairs for everyone would be a combination of security *and* intensity. This has, in fact, been the basic aim of all the major religions. For example, a monastery is a place whose walls guarantee security, but whose inhabitants are dedicated to spiritual intensity through discipline and prayer. Throughout history, prophets, saints and spiritual teachers have addressed themselves to this problem: to

prescribe a mode of life that combines 'wide awakeness' with a reasonable degree of security and normality.

Extreme solutions have never been popular. The Buddha turned his back on the harsher forms of yogic discipline. The Fathers of the Church have always frowned on 'enthusiasm' (i.e. fanaticism) and have burnt some of its more notorious advocates. The trouble is that the less extreme solutions — those that made room for human timidity and laziness — have always been just as unsatisfactory in the long run. Man seems to be driven by a deep-rooted craving to escape his normal limitations.

Gurdjieff's method is remarkable for the scientific precision of its approach to the problem of mechanicalness. We need security in order to realize our creative potentialities, since a man without security can think of nothing but where his next meal is coming from. But security causes a certain automatic relaxation, precisely analogous to the way that a hypnotist can send a good trance subject to sleep with a snap of his fingers. Recent experiments with sensory deprivation — in the 'black room' — have demonstrated this even more clearly. Deprived of all external stimuli, the mind not only falls asleep; it literally disintegrates. We are held together by external challenges and problems. Deprived of these, we drift apart, like a raft whose ropes have been cut.

Theoretically, the answer is simple enough. We must de-hypnotize ourselves, devise ropes that will continue to hold even when we have achieved security; *inner* bonds that will hold even when the external bonds have dissolved. Gurdjieff decided that the answer lay in what might be called 'artificial insecurity' — not hair shirts and beds of nails, but intellectual efforts, physical disciplines, emotional shocks. It was a combination of the way of the fakir, the monk and the yogi — physical, intellectual and emotional effort. But Gurdjieff also recognized the need for a 'fourth way', which he called the way of the 'cunning man'. This is the man who has a certain precise knowledge, and who uses this 'inside information' to gain his end. That is to say, Gurdjieff

was aware that mere brute force and effort are «of the whole answer. In spite of which, the emphasis in the 'System' swung inevitably towards 'effort and yet more effort'.

In the case of Ouspensky, it is easy to see what went wrong. His starting point was his insistence on man's mechanicalness, his total inability to act or 'to do'. In fact, man's mechanicalness — or bondage — is *not* the starting point, either of Gurdjieff's System or any other. If we were mechanical all the time, we would feel no need to search for 'freedom'. The real starting point is the *glimpse of freedom* — the moments of intensity, of 'wide-awakeness' — what Abraham Maslow calls 'the peak experience'. *These* are what make us dissatisfied with our ordinary states of consciousness.

The next thing we note is that we experience glimpses of freedom every time some problem or emergency *galvanizes us to a sense of urgency*. This became the centre of gravity of Gurdjieff's method: to train his pupils to a permanent sense of urgency. Beelzebub tells his grandson that the only way mankind can be saved is by developing an 'organ' which would enable us to grasp the inevitability of our own death, and of the death of everyone around us. The point is underlined in the fragment of a lost story (described by Bennett) about a man who wakes up after dying 'and realizes that he had lost the chief instrument of his life, his body, and recalls all he could have done with it while he was still alive.'

One way of creating this sense of emergency is to seek out challenge. Graham Greene has described how, as a bored teenager, he played Russian roulette with a loaded revolver; when the hammer clicked on an empty chamber, 'it was as if a light had been turned on ... and I felt that life contained an infinite number of possibilities.' Greene had chosen a rather dangerous way of 'shaking the mind awake', but his experience makes us clearly aware that the mind (or the brain) contains a *mechanism* for getting rid of the robot and waking us up. It can be switched on, like a light.

A little 'self-observation' makes us aware that this 'mechanism' could also be compared to a powerful coiled spring inside the brain. When we are galvanized by a sense of emergency or excitement, some deep source of will inside us *winds* the spring up tight, and we experience a sense of power and control.

Unfortunately, this 'spring' is only partly within our conscious control — the control of the 'personality'. It lies in the realm of that 'other self' — what Gurdjieff calls essence. The 'personality' *lacks authority* to convince this 'other self' of its seriousness. The spring responds to what might be called 'the vibration of seriousness'. This is why a hypnotist — the voice of outside authority — can persuade it to make efforts that are far beyond the power of the conscious will. Significantly, Gurdjieff understood the nature of hypnosis — a problem that still baffles modern psychology; he defines it as the suspension of 'false consciousness', the 'ruling master of their common presence', so that 'genuine consciousness' can make itself felt.(9) That is to say, it is the suspension of 'left-brain consciousness' (which, as Gurdjieff recognized, is the ruling ego of our double-consciousness), so that the far more powerful right-brain consciousness can express itself without interference.

This left-brain consciousness is both man's greatest triumph and his undoing. With its logical precision it has enabled him to create civilization, as well as the immense body of modern scientific knowledge. But in order to operate at full efficiency, it requires the backing of man's 'other' being — instinctive or intuitive consciousness. This explains why we feel most 'alive' when we are engaged in some important activity, something that gives us a sense of crisis or emergency. Then that 'other self' gives left-brain consciousness its full backing and support. But if I watch television for too long, or try to read a long book in a single sitting, I begin to experience an odd sense of unreality. I feel 'lightweight', unreal. This is because our 'other self' has decided that no backing is required; we are dealing with unrealities, so it feels it can go off duty.

This, then, defines our problem. In this world of trivial emergencies and unimportant decisions, man has developed a reliance on left-brain consciousness that dominates his existence. He has become so accustomed to this 'lightweight' consciousness, with its accompanying sense of unreality, that he has almost forgotten what 'real consciousness' is like. His 'other self' is almost permanently off-duty.

How can it be persuaded to return to its proper work of 'backing' left-brain consciousness? Many methods have been suggested. D. H. Lawrence thought sex was the answer. Hemingway advocated 'adventure' — big game hunting, bullfighting, and so on. But Gurdjieff saw that these are insufficient. That 'other self' has to be galvanized and shaken awake again and again, day after day. The 'personality' (left-brain consciousness) has to be undermined by crisis and unexpected challenges. Knowledge is also important, of course — understanding of the mechanisms of the 'computer'. But theoretical knowledge once again strengthens the rational ego — what Lawrence called 'head consciousness'. So the correct solution is a balanced diet — theoretical knowledge carefully mixed with 'effort'. This was Gurdjieff's solution, and it was transformed into a rigid system by Ouspensky.

Gurdjieff himself perceived the dangers of rigidity. He recognized that in matters as difficult and complicated as this the attempt to understand the mystery of man's inner-being — language can easily betray us. It is necessary to keep an open mind, and approach the problem from many different angles. The result is that anyone who reads Gurdjieff's four books, then turns to accounts of his lectures by disciples, will often find himself puzzled by contradictions. These contradictions are a proof that Gurdjieff was not the recipient of some mysterious 'ancient wisdom', which he passed on to his followers like the tables of the law. He was a psychologist of genius, whose insight was continually developing. His basic recognition was that man is a vast computer, with many levels of control. At present, he has so little control of this vast machine that he is virtually its slave. But

theoretically, he could achieve *total* control. And since the resources of the computer seem greater than anyone has ever imagined, he could, in theory, become a kind of god.

His basic task therefore, is, to *know the computer*. This is not too difficult — in theory, at least. It merely requires constant self-observation. But the second task is far more difficult. Self-observation is best carried out in states of insight and intensity, states when the 'two consciousnesses' are in harmony and in close co-operation. *How can we induce these states at will?* If there was some simple method, man's problems would be at an end. If, for example, he could achieve it through sex, or bullfighting, or by swallowing some drug, then he would have solved the major problem of his evolution. Unfortunately, to judge by their advocates, none of these methods can give long-term satisfaction.

And what of Gurdjieff's 'System'? This can certainly show far more spectacular results. Yet, as we have seen, it could also involve his pupils in a great deal of misery, exhaustion and confusion. And for many of them, the end result was not as satisfying as they might have wished. Bennett, for example, later became a disciple of the Indonesian 'messiah' Pakh Subuh, and after that a Roman Catholic — a fairly clear indication that the 'system' left certain aspects of his nature unfulfilled.

So far in this book, I have deliberately kept my own views and attitudes in the background; but at this point it becomes necessary to admit that, after nearly three decades of absorbing Gurdjieff's ideas, I feel that there *were* a number of small but important points which that master of self-observation failed to take into account.

Gurdjieff's enormous emphasis on man's 'mechanicalness', and the difficulties of escaping it even for a moment, seems to imply that moments of 'non-mechanicalness' are rare or non-existent. In fact, as I have pointed out, this is untrue. Human beings are

always experiencing flashes of 'awakeness', glimpses of freedom. T. E. Lawrence describes one of them in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom:*

> We started on one of those clear dawns that wake up the senses with the sun, while the intellect, tired after the thinking of the night, was yet abed. For an hour or two, on such a morning, the sounds, scents and colours of the world struck man individually and directly, not filtered through or made typical by thought; they seemed to exist sufficiently by themselves.

In effect, the left-brain (the 'intellect') was still asleep; so Lawrence was in a state analogous to hypnosis, in which the right-brain could perceive things directly, unimpeded by his 'thought riddled nature'. Moments like this are not rare; children experience them all the time, as Wordsworth pointed out; and even after the 'shades of the prison house' have begun to close, healthy people still experience them with reasonable frequency as moments of 'optimistic expectancy', 'peak experiences'.

The most interesting thing about these 'glimpses' is what might be called their 'meaning content'. Greene says that when his revolver failed to explode 'it was as if a light had been turned on ... and I felt that life contains an infinite number of possibilities.' And this is common to all such experiences. They produce a sense of *revelation,* of 'absurd good news', a feeling that the world is infinitely more meaningful than we normally give it credit for. The reason is clear. We normally 'see' the world through the dark-glasses of the rational ego. (The 'I' inside my head lives in the left-brain.) When we accidentally remove the dark glasses, we are startled by the vistas of forgotten meaning that burst upon us. Clearly, this precise and fussy left-brain leaves a great deal out of account. And it is because it leaves so much out of account that it is so subject to pessimism. And *this* is what is wrong with ordinary consciousness. This is why we are slaves of the robot. Ordinary consciousness involves an in-built

assumption of lack of meaning. And it is the lack of meaning that triggers the sleep mechanism. (When you feel there is nothing to look forward to, you become bored and sleepy.) If we could switch on meaning at will, as Greene switched it on with his Russian roulette, the problem of 'sleep' would vanish. *Meaning* would awaken us far more effectively than any amount of violent and exhausting effort. Meaning instantly creates energy. If only we could locate the switch of the 'light' that Greene turned on by squeezing the trigger.

But in expressing the problem in this way, we are leaving an important factor out of account. Man's 'two consciousnesses' *are* interconnected. The conscious and the unconscious do not operate as separate entities; neither do the right and left halves of the brain.

It is important to understand the way that 'negativeness' operates. When I wake up in the morning, it is my rational ego that confronts the world. If 'I' see that it is raining outside, and remember that I have a dental appointment, and that my bank manager wants to talk to me about my overdraft, my 'heart sinks'. So does my *energy*. When I am happy and full of eager expectancy, a spring of energy bubbles up from my unconscious mind; meaning creates energy. Conversely, when I feel gloomy and discouraged, my energy seems to drain away. The resultant sense of fatigue deepens my sense of discouragement; and this — unless something intervenes to cheer me up — deepens my fatigue. That is to say, there is an effect of *negative feedback* between my 'two selves'.

If, on the contrary, I wake up to bright sunlight, and remember that in a few hours time I shall be setting out on holiday, my rational ego reacts with a chortle of satisfaction, and I experience the beginning of a pleasant inward glow. 'Positive feedback' has been established.

What we observe here is that although it is the 'unconscious' that controls the energy supply, its decisions are entirely governed by

the *suggestions* of the 'rational ego'. If I happen to be a weak and self-pitying sort of person, most of these suggestions will be negative, and I shall feel exhausted and depressed much of the time. If I am a cheerful and rational sort of person, my unconscious will respond to positive suggestions, my sense of meaning, by keeping me well provided with energy. Moreover, this energy will have the effect of making the world *look* a happier and brighter place — making me see *more* meaning — thus confirming my optimism.

When we consider modern humanity in general, one thing stands out fairly clearly: that our basic attitude towards existence tends to be negative, tinged with distrust. This indicates that most of us have fallen into the habit of 'negative feedback'. There seems to be good reason for this: modern life is difficult and complex; humanity faces many problems. But anyone who has understood Gurdjieff's ideas will know that these 'reasons' are irrelevant. It would be equally true to say that mankind is now happier and more comfortable than it has ever been. The real issue is our *habit of negation*.

Gurdjieff taught that this habit is stupid and unnecessary. The really important thing about man is that he possesses a possibility of real freedom, once he has grasped the fact that, at the moment, his life is almost entirely mechanical. He must turn the searchlight of his reason, his analytical processes, upon all his unconscious assumptions.

And it is when we turn the searchlight upon the contrasted activities of our 'two consciousnesses' that we grasp a fundamental truth about human existence — a truth, I suspect, that Gurdjieff only partly understood. The rational ego tends to be pessimistic because it sees things *too close up*. This is like trying to decide on the merits of a large picture by examining the canvas through a magnifying glass or microscope. In fact, such an examination, no matter how conscientious, would fail to reveal what the painter had put into the picture. Right-brain consciousness, on the other hand, deals in terms of meanings,

of overall patterns. And, as we have seen, undiluted right-brain consciousness always produces the feeling of sheer delight, of 'absurd good news'.

In short, the 'worm's-eye view' of the left brain is negative by nature. The 'birds-eye view' of the right-brain is positive by nature, revealing vistas of meaning and interconnectedness that are invisible to the worm.

Our practical problem, the problem we confront every day of our lives, is to decide which of the two is telling the truth. But unless we understand that one of them deals in 'immediacy perception' and the other in 'meaning perception', we have no means of weighing their testimony. To begin with, it is the left-brain that tries to do the weighing. Second, the 'moments of vision' are so much rarer than moments of boredom and discouragement that, on purely arithmetical grounds, we are inclined to believe the negative testimony. But what we need to know is that the 'rational ego', for all its logic and clarity of perception, is essentially a microscope, which can only see things piecemeal. The 'other self' may have no power of self-expression, but it has an instantaneous grasp of meanings. Once we know this, there can be no possible doubt about which testimony we accept. The left is not fundamentally a liar, but its partial-vision leads it to incorrect inferences about the world. It is in the position of the blind beggars in Ramakrishna's parable, who try to describe an elephant by the sense of touch alone.

Then there is the most convincing piece of evidence of all: that when the right and left achieve one of their infrequent moods of harmony — those strange, relaxed moments that seem to combine insight with intellectual excitement — the left is totally convinced that the right was correct all along. It now sees clearly that its pessimism was based on false interpretation of insufficient facts; there is a sense of direct revelation that can only be expressed in the words: 'Of *course*!'

Yet since the left is, by nature, limited to piecemeal perception,

the problem seems insoluble — until we realize that this is a problem we solve every day of our lives. The left is, in fact, continually accepting truths that run counter to its own perceptions. Immediacy perception tells it that the sun goes round the earth and that the earth is flat; but it has no difficulty in accepting the Copernican theory. Immediacy-perception tells it that a book is a two-dimensional object; yet it takes it for granted that it has three.

What is even more to the point is that the left's perceptions tell it that a book is merely a combination of paper and black ink; yet it knows perfectly well that a book has yet another dimension — that what matters about the book is its content, its *meaning*. A child who loves reading feels an immediate lift of the heart, a kind of instinctive delight, at the sight of a book. But it is *not* instinctive; it is 'taught'. The left may be a sceptic by nature, but it is a believer by training.

All this implies that the outcome of Gurdjieff's ideas could be more important and exciting than Gurdjieff himself ever realized. He devoted his life to solving the problem of how to re-unite the 'two consciousnesses', so that essence and personality could develop in harmony. He devised all kinds of methods for shaking 'essence' into a state of wakefulness, so as to rescue the ego from its sense of absurdity and unreality. He failed to realize that we already possess a faculty for doing it spontaneously. The mind does not need to be shaken awake; it can be educated awake. All that is required is a change of attitude. The rational ego has acquired a deeply-ingrained habit of mistrust. Western man receives his 'melting moods', his 'moments of vision', with a certain scepticism, as if they were related to being drunk. Understanding of the different functions of the 'two consciousnesses' enables us to see that this mistrust is unnecessary. The 'moments of vision' were telling the truth all along. The moment we really grasp this — rationally and logically, as we grasp that the earth is round — we shall begin to *see* the vision of infinite possibility that Greene experienced as he played Russian roulette; but as a steadily-held insight, not a

sudden glimpse.

Greene's experience underlines a nother point to which Gurdjieff paid insufficient attention. The brain possesses a *mechanism* for freeing us from the robot — a mechanism that I have compared to a powerful coiled spring. If I try to contract this 'spring' by an act of will, by sheer concentration, I find the effort painful and exhausting, A sudden crisis is far more effective. Yet the really important recognition is that I *can* contract it by a determined effort of will. The mental 'muscle' I use for this purpose is undeveloped. But all muscles can be developed. In fact, if I make a habit of deliberately contracting this 'muscle' of attention or concentration, my ability to make use of the 'spring' quickly begins to develop.

And at this point, it becomes possible to answer with more precision the question: how can the right-brain be persuaded to return to its proper task of 'backing' left-brain consciousness? The solution lies in the fact that right-brain consciousness moves at a far more leisurely pace than the left. The left is always in a hurry. Which explains why it reduces the world to symbols, to flat, two-dimensional surfaces. If I glance at something quickly, I take in only its surface characteristics.

If, when I am in a hurry, something suddenly arrests my attention and arouses my interest, I immediately *slow down,* just as I would slow down in a car if I passed through interesting scenery. And this mental act of slowing-down has the immediate effect of revealing fine shades of meaning that I had previously been in too much of a hurry to notice.

In fact, man invented art specifically for this purpose of slowing him down. You cannot enjoy a picture gallery or a symphony concert without 'unwinding' and giving your full attention to the pictures or music.

And what happens when I 'slow down' and become deeply absorbed in a book or piece of music? That 'other dimension' of

meaning begins to open up. I suddenly become aware of my own feelings, my inner-states, at the same time that I am absorbed in the book or symphony, i.e. I achieve a state of self-remembering naturally and without undue effort. And an interesting phenomenon occurs. If I think of the 'me' of an hour ago, rushing along through the crowds, tense with anxiety, I find myself looking back on him with a kind of pitying superiority. I no longer feel identified with him. My 'personal centre of gravity' has moved from the left to the right. I am now 'identifying' with this more relaxed, perceptive self.

All this is not to say that the answer lies simply in 'relaxation'. Ordinary relaxation does not have the effect of moving the 'personal centre of gravity'. What is important here is the *mental act* that causes the slowing-down. I slow down *because* I am deeply interested, because my total attention is demanded (e.g. imagine a man defusing an unexploded bomb). Moreover, the slowing-down process also involves that 'spring' that controls our energy supply. To make a deliberate and determined effort of will is to automatically slow down. And, in fact, the slowing-down process can be achieved by a deliberate effort of willed concentration.

It is immensely important to grasp that relaxation in itself is *not* the point. The point is the *motive* behind the relaxation: the recognition that our ordinary perception does not disclose the reality of the world. If you suspected that a stranger on a train was someone you knew, wearing some kind of disguise, you would stare intently, *trying to penetrate the disguise*. Here, the basis of the 'mental act' would be your suspicion that your ordinary perception is deceiving you, and the consequent desire to deepen your perception. It is an act that we instinctively perform when we experience intense pleasure: the desire to apply a brake to the usual headlong flow of consciousness.

Once this perception of 'another dimension' has been achieved, there is an instant sense of relief, and an immediate flow of vitality, a feeling of renewal. Meaning summons energy. In this

state, we can recognize clearly how our 'ordinary consciousness' runs down our energies without replenishing them. The moment consciousness is connected to meaning, the revitalizing process begins.

It can be seen why Gurdjieff's emphasis on 'effort and yet more effort' was counter-productive. Which still leaves a puzzling question: how did a psychologist as penetrating as Gurdjieff come to overlook the crucial importance of the slowing-down process, the focus upon *meaning?* The answer, I think, lies in the opening chapter of *Beelzebub,(10)* where he speaks of the nature of man's 'two independent consciousnesses'. He goes on to identify these as 'mechanical' consciousness created by experience (i.e. the robot) and man's 'hereditary' or instinctive consciousness. (He adds that this hereditary consciousness is what we call the 'subconscious', and that it ought to be our real consciousness.) It can be seen that this rough division misses the important fact that 'mechanical' consciousness deals with 'immediacy', while the other type is concerned with overall patterns and meanings.

The misconception is deepened in the chapter in which he speaks about 'the organ Kundabuffer' — Beelzebub's explanation of how man came to be so entrapped in illusion. Gurdjieff explains that a commission of archangels became worried in case man developed 'objective reason', and so came to object to his basic purpose on this planet, to provide 'food for the moon'. They decided to avert this possibility by planting in man an organ called Kundabuffer, which would distort his perception and cause him to mistake illusion for reality. This could be regarded as Gurdjieff's own version of the legend of original sin, Newman's 'primeval catastrophe' in which the whole human race is implicated.

But, as we have seen, it is not a question of illusion — merely of the *partial perception* of the rational ego. Close-upness deprives us of meaning. In creating a legend of illusion or sin, Gurdjieff has given his philosophy a pessimistic orientation. This is

emphasized by the story of the sheep and the magician, quoted by Ouspensky.(11) The magician was too mean to hire shepherds; so he hypnotized his sheep, suggesting to them that they were immortal, so that no harm was being done to them when they were skinned; on the contrary, they would enjoy it. They were also told that the magician was a good master who loved his flock. These suggestions kept the sheep docile until they were ready for the butchers. This, added Gurdjieff, is a very good illustration of man's position. So again, the philosophy is cast into a pessimistic mould. The need to escape becomes a matter of extreme emergency, a matter for 'effort and yet more effort'.

Which brings us to an altogether more personal and delicate question. Like Gurdjieff's disciples at the Prieuré, I have also found myself puzzling about Gurdjieff's lifelong accident-proneness. Generally speaking, it is the unhappy or self-divided people who are accident-prone. It is as if a powerful sense of purpose generated an intuitive defence system. It is true that Gurdjieff was an appalling driver; yet his two most serious accidents seem to have been through no fault of his own.

The accident-proneness seems to me to be connected with his tendency to involve himself with large numbers of people. Of course, he saw this as the only logical way to convey his teaching; yet all his attempts to set up an institute ended in disaster. The war and then the revolution closed down the Russian institute. The Ataturk revolution drove him out of Turkey. The German revolution frustrated the hope of a Berlin institute. The British Home Office put an end to the hope of an institute in Hampstead. With immense difficulty, Gurdjieff acquired the Prieuré — only to see his hopes undermined by his car accident in less than two years. At last he was forced to do what he should have considered many years before — write down his ideas. The result was two extraordinary works — *Beelzebub* and *Meetings With Remarkable Men.* But he abandoned *Life Is Real Only Then, When 'I Am'* when it was less than half-completed, and went back to the exhausting drudgery of teaching his ideas

direct. The reading of *Beelzebub* — described by William Seabrook — makes it clear that he hoped that his writings would make an immediate impact. Unfortunately, the total incomprehension of ordinary literate people convinced him that this was not the answer.

If, in fact, Ouspensky had published *In Search of the Miraculous* in 1930 — at the time Gurdjieff was adding the final touches to *Beelzebub* — there seems little doubt that it would have made just the impact that *Beelzebub* failed to make. But then, Ouspensky's peculiarly narrow and puritanical view of the 'Work' convinced him that writing was somehow forbidden. In fact, the final publication of his own book, as well as that of many brilliant books by others involved in the 'Work', proved beyond all doubt that the essence of Gurdjieff's ideas can be conveyed perfectly well on the printed page. There may, as Bennett insists, be aspects of the teaching that can only be conveyed direct from teacher to student; but generally speaking, Gurdjieff's ideas gain from being read and studied.

All this, I suspect, explains why Gurdjieff struck Bennett as a sad man in his last years. His life-work had been extraordinary; he had gone out in search of 'hidden knowledge' and found it. The 'System' he brought back was, in terms of western culture, of startling originality. He would have been less than human if he had not hoped to see these ideas make maximum impact on the world of the twentieth century. This was not vanity; all thinkers experience a desire to convey their ideas: it is part of the evolutionary impulse. Yet during his lifetime, Gurdjieff remained virtually unknown to most people. In Rom Landau's *God Is My Adventure* — one of the few things published about him in his lifetime — he is merely one of a gallery, which included Rudolf Steiner, Krishnamurti, Shri Baba, Dr Frank Buchman and 'Principal' George Jeffreys. Ironically, Ouspensky is also given a chapter to himself; Gurdjieff receives a brief — and rather patronizing — mention, but there is no indication that the 'war against sleep' was Gurdjieff's idea, not Ouspensky's.

This, it seems to me, was Gurdjieff's tragedy — that he dropped the idea of spreading his ideas by writing, and returned to the only other role he knew, that of the teacher. Accounts of his students by various writers — Fritz Peters, Margaret Anderson, Irmis Popoff — make it clear that they must have tried his patience. On the whole, a 'teacher' cannot choose his pupils; he has to take what fate sends him. Inevitably, a large proportion are fools. A few students like Bennett and Ouspensky may have consoled Gurdjieff for the poor quality of so many others; but there must have been times when he felt that fate had saddled him with a particularly heavy cross. As a published writer, Gurdjieff could have sat back and waited for people to come to him; as it was, he did it the hard way. His optimism was immense, his vitality tremendous. Yet it seems that he had to console himself with large quantities of Armagnac and big black cigars. He was the kind of man one would expect to live to be ninety; instead, he died in his early seventies. At the time of his death, he must still have wondered whether his ideas would survive. Within five years, there could be no possible doubt about it. It was Gurdjieff's bad luck that he never knew how far he had succeeded.

If Gurdjieff's ideas could be summarized in a sentence, it would be that man is like a grandfather clock driven by a watch-spring. Or like an enormous water mill driven by a muddy trickle of water. The strange paradox is that in spite of the inadequacy of his driving force, an enormous and complex mechanism *already* seems to exist. Like a ladder, man consists of many levels. The problem, then, is clear: to increase the driving force. Man may be more than half mechanical; but he can choose whether to live in a blank, hypnotized state, or whether to live as though some immense unguessed meaning lay on the other side of his curtain of everyday reality, waiting to reveal itself to a sense of purpose.

Gurdjieff's 'System' is probably the greatest single-handed attempt in the history of human thought to make us aware of the potential of human consciousness. Whether he realized it or not, his life-work *had* achieved its purpose.

Endnotes for G. I. Gurdjieff: The War Against Sleep

1. Included in *Views from the Real World,* London 1973.

2. *Witness,* J. G. Bennett, p 87.

3. In *Venture With Ideas,* Kenneth Walker says that Ouspensky told him Gurdjieff used a drug on this occasion.

4. [Gurdjieff] spoke of women in terms that would have better suited a fanatical Muslim polygamist than a Christian, boasting that he had many children by different women, and that women were for him only the means to an end.' — *Witness,* J. G. Bennett, p 258.

5. Life and Letters — Studies of A. R. Orage, Beatrice Hastings, Katherine Mansfield, J. M. Murry and S. S. Koteliansky. London 1978. Carswell's account of Gurdjieff is unsympathetic and ill-informed, but should be read as an interesting example of the kind of misunderstanding Gurdjieff continues to arouse.

6.William Seabrook: *Witchcraft, Its Power in the World Today* (1942), Part 2, Chapter 3.

7. The Verdict of Bridlegoose, Chapter 17

8. This technique — of transmitting healing power through water — is well known to 'spirit healers', and in recent years, experiments have suggested that an actual change takes place in the molecular structure of the water.

9. 'An omission from p 568 of *Beelzebub*' — Guide and Index to *All and Everything,* p 673.

10. Pages 24 and 25.

11. *In Search of the Miraculous,* p 219.

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The Strange Life of P. D. Ouspensky

For Richard Foreman

Contents for The Strange Life of P.D. Ouspensky

Foreword

A FEW hours before setting out for America in 1987, I casually picked up *A New Model of the Universe,* which happened to be lying by the bed because I had been duplicating the chapter on Time for a friend. I began to read 'Experimental Mysticism', and realized suddenly that this was the single most important chapter in all Ouspensky's work, and that what he was saying fitted closely with my own conclusions on the 'relationality' of consciousness, as outlined in the final chapter of my *Beyond the Occult,* which I had just finished. Oddly enough, I had read 'Experimental Mysticism' before — the chapter was heavily marked in pencil — yet, until that day, had never grasped its full significance. I duplicated it, took it with me to America, and used it as the basis of a number of lectures from New York to Los Angeles. On my return home I hastened to add sections on Ouspensky and 'Experimental Mysticism' to *Beyond the Occult.*

All this led me back to *Tertium Organum,* and to the recognition that even if he had never met Gurdjieff, Ouspensky would have been one of the most interesting thinkers of the twentieth century. This had, in fact, been the thesis of a book called *Ouspensky: The Unsung Genius* by J.H. Reyner. I had felt, at the time, that Reyner was pitching Ouspensky's claims too high; now I found myself feeling that, if anything, he had pitched them too low. Hence my own attempt in this book to stake Ouspensky's claim as an individual thinker and man of genius.

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I WISH to thank Messrs Routledge and Kegan Paul for their permission to quote from the works of Ouspensky. Dr James Rentoul has drawn my attention to some interesting aspects of Ouspensky's work, as has Chloë Daly, of Laguna Beach, California.

I have dedicated this book to Richard Foreman — another student of the Work — in acknowledgement of the stimulus I received from his immense library while staying in his flat in New York.

CW, January 1992

One
The Dreamer

IN THE last years of his life, Ouspensky struck acquaintances as a sad and disappointed man; he drank too much, and spent a great deal of time brooding nostalgically about the good old days in Tsarist Russia. It was not entirely Slavic melancholy. He told J.G. Bennett in a letter that nothing could be found by intellectual processes, and that 'there is only one hope: that we should find the way to work with the higher emotional centre'. To this he added the sad comment: 'And we do not know how this is to be done.'

The disappointment may also have been due to a sense of creative unfulfilment. At the age of 20, he had made his reputation with a book called *The Fourth Dimension*. By the time he reached his mid-thirties — in 1913 — Ouspensky was one of the most promising young intellectuals in Russia, a fine novelist and writer of short stories, and the author of a brilliant and profound volume of philosophy called *Tertium Organum*. In fact when it was published in America after the First World War, it made him famous. His third book, *A New Model Of The Universe,* was even finer, and guarantees him a place as one of the most important thinkers of the twentieth century. Ouspensky should have gone on to have become as well-known in the West as contemporaries like Berdyaev, Merejkovsky and Bunin. Instead, he descended into a self-chosen obscurity, preferring to regard himself as a teacher of 'the Work', the 'System' of his great contemporary George Ivanovich Gurdjieff. The latter achieved a considerable degree of celebrity in America during the 1930s. And Ouspensky, as far as he was known at all, was regarded simply as Gurdjieff's chief disciple — although, in fact, they had gone their separate ways soon after the First World War, and Ouspensky even forbade his pupils to mention Gurdjieff's name.

Ouspensky must have known that he was one of the most remarkable minds of the century — that he was no more a 'disciple' of Gurdjieff than, say, Coleridge was a disciple of Wordsworth, or Pushkin of Byron. No doubt he would have dismissed the whole question as an absurdity — fame, after all, is little more than a delusion — yet there is something in all of us that wishes to leave behind a name for posterity. And Ouspensky virtually renounced his own name and fame to become an anonymous teacher. Even those who revered him regarded him as a mouthpiece of Gurdjieff''s ideas.

When he returned to England from New York in 1947, his former pupil Kenneth Walker was shocked by the change in him: ' . . . he appeared to me to be a man who had lost all of his former enthusiasm and drive.' What was even more shocking was that Ouspensky had apparently lost faith in the System to which he had devoted his whole life. 'There is no System,' he replied in answer to a question. And so the sick man dragged himself on without faith for another nine months. His disciple Rodney Collin wrote: 'In Ouspensky's last months one saw how he accepted being old, sick, ugly, helpless, in pain, misunderstood . . .' And when, after a final talk to a small group of disciples, he died at dawn on 2 October, 1947, at the age of 69, Rodney Collin locked himself in Ouspensky's room for a week without food.

What had gone wrong? In fact, *had* anything gone wrong, or had Ouspensky brought his life's work to a kind of genuine fulfilment? To answer that question, we must go back to the beginning . . .

Pyotr Demianovich Ouspensky was born in Moscow on 5 March, 1878, the son of an officer in the Survey Service and a talented artist. Since in Russia one was either a peasant or a gentleman, Ouspensky was emphatically a gentleman. As his maternal grandparents were also members of the 'intelligentsia,' he grew up among writers, artists and thinkers.

In a more stable society, he would undoubtedly have gone on to become one of the most important philosophers of his time and

ended as a 'grand old man' whose name would have ranked with contemporaries like Bertrand Russell, Bernard Shaw and Thomas Mann.

Unfortunately, Holy Russia was one of the most unstable societies in the world. At the time of Ouspensky's birth, liberals were clamouring for a constitution. Organizations with titles like 'Land and Liberty' and 'The Will of the People' talked openly about revolution, and were persecuted by the police. Just after Ouspensky's third birthday, Tsar Alexander II was blown up by a bomb made of nitro-glycerine enclosed in glass. His successor, Alexander III, made a bizarre and heroic attempt to prevent Russia from advancing into the twentieth century by inaugurating a regime of repression, but died of exhaustion after a mere 13 years' rule. His successor, Nicholas II, 'the last of the Tsars', did his best to give the liberals the constitution they wanted, but it was too late: Russia was already living in the shadow of the immense tragedy that would engulf Europe and wipe out the Tsar's own family. In 1918, the year the Tsar and Tsarina were murdered at Ekaterinburg, Ouspensky set out on the journey that would take him into exile. The years of security were over and, at the age of 39, he had to start all over again.

Under the circumstances, it is not surprising that the young Ouspensky came to share the 'spirit of the age,' and became imbued with a feverish romanticism; before he was seven, he was reading Turgenev's *Sportsman's Sketches* and Lermontov's *Hero of Our Time,* the latter a Byronic work by a poet who was killed in a duel at the age of 26. Both had been regarded as revolutionary works at the time of their publication and had earned their authors a period in prison.

Ouspensky's later description of memories of childhood — some dating from the age of two — indicate that, like the young Proust, he experienced life with an almost hallucinatory intensity. He spoke of the river near a town called Zvenigorod, with its smell of tar, its old monastery, and its hills covered with forests, and recalled the illuminations at the coronation of Tsar Alexander III,

when he was three. Yet he also experienced a curious sense of the fundamental unreality of this world around him. He later told his pupils how, at the age of six, he had visited a place near Moscow (perhaps Zvenigorod) and thought that it was not as he remembered it from four years earlier. Then he realized that he had *not* been there before, and that his 'memory' of it must have been a dream.

He also told Kenneth Walker about the occasion when his mother took him to his first school. In a long corridor, when his mother admitted she was lost, Ouspensky told her that there was a passage further down, and that at the end of it there were two steps, and a window through which they would see the headmaster's garden, with lilies growing in it. The door of the headmaster's study was nearby. He proved to be correct, although he had never been in the building before. This sense of the mystery and ambiguity of time continued to haunt his childhood; between the ages of six and eleven, he kept having experiences of *déjà vu* — 'I have been here before.' He and his young sister — to whom he was very close — shared an ability to foretell the immediate future: they would sit at the nursery window and predict — accurately — what would happen in the street. They never spoke to the adults about this, convinced that they wouldn't understand anyway.

Nevertheless, Ouspensky was fortunate in his parents. Through his mother he came to love poetry and the visual arts. But his father was also a keen amateur mathematician, who was fascinated by the then-fashionable subject of the fourth dimension, and by the age of 12, Ouspensky was as interested in science as in literature and art. The Latin master who caught him reading a physics textbook in class confiscated it, and his fellow pupils murmured mockingly that Ouspensky read physics. From the autobiographical novel *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* — started when he was in his mid-twenties — we gather that he had a particular dislike of this master, a German, and that he was generally a rebellious pupil.

Osokin is, in fact, our main source of information about Ouspensky's childhood and teens. It is a novel about 'Eternal Recurrence,' in which the hero, on the verge of committing suicide because he has lost the girl he loves, goes to see a magician, who offers to allow him to live the past few years over again. But it makes no difference; he makes all the same mistakes, loses the girl again, and once more goes to see the magician, to ask to be allowed to live his life over again . . .

How can we be sure that *Osokin* is autobiographical? Because Ouspensky admitted that the girl, Zinaida, was a real person, and we know that certain other events in the novel also happened to him — for example, that he was expelled from school for a silly practical joke, that his mother died within two years of his expulsion, and that he went to Paris. His portrait of the rebellious young Osokin is also close to what Ouspensky tells us about himself elsewhere. Like Osokin, Ouspensky was a boarder at the Second Moscow Gymnasium; like Osokin, he found the place stifling and squalid. 'I often want to smash my head against the wall from sheer boredom.' His neglect of his studies led the headmaster to order him to stay behind after school one day. Osokin finds that the caretaker has forgotten to lock him in. He walks along the corridor, adorns a bust of Julius Caesar with a pair of blue spectacles, and writes on the wall underneath it 'Welcome your Excellency' — his Excellency being a school inspector who was expected later in the day. The next day he is expelled.

Ouspensky's own expulsion — at the age of 16 — seems to have done him no harm. He enrolled as a 'free listener' at Moscow University, and completed his education by reading. He was an excellent linguist, who had already learned English (although he never learned to speak it without a strong Russian accent), and in the 18 months after leaving school learned Italian well enough to read Dante. But a deep distaste for Latin and Greek prevented him from going on to take a degree. In the year he left school he discovered Nietzsche, and was deeply struck by his concept of Eternal Recurrence. This, Ouspensky concluded,

was what he had experienced in childhood — the moods of 'I have been here before.'

A year later, his mother died. Perhaps to recover from the shock, Ouspensky began to travel — to Paris and to remote parts of Russia. In *Osokin,* he describes a visit to an uncle who lives on his country estate, and a love affair with his uncle's ward Tanechka (a diminutive of Tania). The girl is two years Osokin's senior. They flirt, kiss and go for long walks in the woods. He is covered with embarrassment when she calls him and he finds her standing naked in a stream. After that she spends the night in his room — it seems clear that she is the one who does the seducing. Osokin's uncle finds out and sends him back to Moscow to become a student at the military academy. As far as we know, Ouspensky was never at a military academy — but information about his early years is so sparse that he may well have been. What we *do* know is that he attended parties, drank too much vodka and was known to every policeman in Moscow because, far from being quarrelsome when drunk, he tried to act as peacemaker. 'One night', he told Carl Bechhofer Roberts, 'I remember I got home with the left sleeve of my overcoat missing. How I lost it, and where, I have never discovered.' Apart from such glimpses, we have virtually no idea of what Ouspensky did during the 10 years between his expulsion from school and 1905, when his affair with Zinaida came to an end and he tried to exorcise his misery by writing *Ivan Osokin* (originally entitled 'The Wheel of Fortune') as a kind of film outline.

This was also the year of the abortive revolution, when troops fired upon peaceable crowds who had marched to the Winter Palace to present a petition to the Tsar. In the past 20 years, Russia had become increasingly ungovernable, and the new Tsar, Nicholas II, was a vacillator who changed his mind every day or so. He could not decide whether to establish a military dictatorship or to give the liberals the constitution they wanted. Finally, he gave a constitution with one hand and took it back with the other: that is, he allowed the people to elect a parliament (called the Duma), but still kept his own government, which held

all the real power. He was determined to remain an absolute ruler, but lacked all the necessary qualities. He was a weakling and a dreamer, who preferred to spend his days in his summer palace with his family rather than getting on with the business of running the country and trying to avert the revolution prophesied by the anarchists and Marxists.

Ouspensky's beloved younger sister (we do not even have a record of her name) was also a dreamer and, like so many idealistic students, she joined the revolutionary movement. She was among those arrested in 1905 and thrown into prison. Her arrest must have been a tragedy for Ouspensky, who would have recalled clearly the fate of another idealistic student, Marie Vietroff, who had been confined in the Peter and Paul fortress in 1896 because a forbidden book had been found in her room, and who had committed suicide by burning herself to death after months of ill treatment, including rape. When, in 1908, Ouspensky's sister died in prison, it must have confirmed his feeling that life is basically futile and tragic.

The truth is that Ouspensky, like the Tsar, was basically an ineffectual dreamer and a weakling. This is something that his later disciples would have found hard to imagine, for they knew him as a hard, stern man who was impatient of all talk of mysticism, and whose squarely-built figure seemed to reflect his pragmatic disposition. But we only have to consider the facts to see that this is not a true picture. After being expelled from school — which he hated with the ardour of a romantic who regards boredom as an affront to his dignity — he failed to keep his promise to take a degree and spent his legacy wandering ineffectually from place to place, vaguely seeking for something he could not define. He later claimed that he was 'never such a fool' as Osokin, but this is hard to believe. In fact, what *Osokin* reveals is a dangerously romantic young man who is immensely susceptible to women — Tanechka, Anna, Loulou, Valerie, Zinaida — and who seems to believe that if only he could find the right one all his problems would disappear . . .

Most young Russians in Ouspensky's position would have found a job in the civil service — which required very little effort — and devoted themselves to the struggle for achievement in other spheres. Ouspensky merely seems to have wasted his legacy (Osokin gambles it away), so that by 1905, when he was 27, he had to start making a living by journalism. In *A New Model of the Universe,* he offers us a glimpse of himself in 1906 or 1907, sitting in the editorial office of the Moscow newspaper *The Morning,* trying to read foreign newspapers in French, German, English and Italian in order to write an article on the forthcoming Hague Conference:

> Phrases, phrases, sympathetic, critical, ironical, blatant, pompous, lying, and, worst of all, utterly automatic phrases . . . But what can I say? It is all so tedious. Diplomats and all kinds of statesmen will gather together and talk, papers will approve or disapprove, sympathise or not sympathise. Then everything will be as it was, or even worse.

And so he pushes aside the newspapers and opens a drawer of his desk 'crammed with books with titles like *The Occult World, Life after Death, Atlantis and Lemuria, Dogme et Rituel de la Haute Magie, Le Temple de Satan* and the like . . . I open one of the books, feeling that my article will not be written today . . . '

This is fundamentally the nostalgic romanticism of the 1890s, of Dowson and Verlaine drinking themselves to death on absinthe, of W.B. Yeats daydreaming of fairyland because he detests the real world. It is also the attitude of Goncharov's Oblomov, unable to arouse himself to get out of bed, and of Gogol's landowner Manilov, whose fantasies of fame and fortune 'grew so lively that eventually he could not even follow them himself'. Amusingly enough, Ouspensky compares the Hague peacemakers to Gogol's Manilov — a classic example of the pot calling the kettle black.

Ouspensky goes on to meditate that he would like to print his

true thoughts about the Hague Conference, but knows that they would only land him in jail. And even if they got into print, nobody would read them. 'What is the use of attempting to expose lies when people like them and live by them? It is their own affair; but I am tired of lying . . .' And so he turns back to his books on magic and Atlantis . . . All of which makes it very clear that even in his late twenties, Ouspensky was still a rather ineffectual romantic who blamed the world for his own shortcomings.

We know little of these years except that Ouspensky attended meetings of the Theosophical Society and travelled widely as a journalist. In his introduction to a translation of Ouspensky's *Talks with a Devil,* J.G. Bennett writes:

> Little is known of this period of his life, and I can report only the episodes I heard from him in the course of conversations. He was a successful journalist working on the leading Russian papers, but more often as a free lance. He travelled in Europe and the United States writing articles for St Petersburg papers between 1908 and 1912.

(St Petersburg may here be a slip for Moscow.)

It was in 1912 that Ouspensky achieved his ambition to go to India with an open commission to write articles for three Russian newspapers. He proceeded via London, and there made an acquaintance who later proved to be extremely valuable — A.R. Orage, a charismatic socialist who was the editor of one of the most widely read magazines of the period, *The New Age.* Promising Orage to send him some contributions, Ouspensky then travelled on to Egypt, where he was deeply fascinated by the Sphinx, then to India, where he met some of the outstanding yogis of his time, including Aurobindo. He was not impressed by any of them. He explained afterwards that he was looking for 'real knowledge' and had found only holy men who may have achieved liberation for themselves but could not transmit their methods to others. He also spent some time at Adhyar in

Madras, the headquarters of the Theosophical Society, of which he had been a member since 1906. In later years he liked to tell the story of the 'caste system' at Adhyar. On the ground floor were all the hangers-on and undistinguished visitors. The second floor was reserved for well-wishers who gave their money and support to the society. The top floor, with a large open roof, was the home of the esoteric group, the real initiates of Theosophy. Ouspensky recalled with relish that he was at once admitted to the esoteric group in spite of his no longer being a member of the Theosophical Society and his open criticism of their founder, Helena Blavatsky. He asserted that he found nothing at Adhyar that made him wish to stay. According to J.G. Bennett:

> He went on to Ceylon, which he found more congenial, and he met several of the more famous *bhikkus,* and satisfied himself that the old techniques of Buddhism were still being used in Ceylon. But once again he felt no urge to cut himself off from the West and become a monk. He wrote later that he was not interested in a way that would isolate him from the Western world, which held the key to the future of mankind. This did not mean that he doubted the existence of 'schools', as he called them, in India and Ceylon, but that these schools no longer had the significance that they used to have in the past. He also added that he found that most of these schools relied upon religious and devotional techniques that he was convinced were insufficient for penetrating into the essential reality for which he was seeking.

No doubt full records of this period of Ouspensky's life exist in the various newspapers he wrote for and will one day be published by some diligent researcher. Yet, while they would provide us with facts, they could hardly help us to a deeper understanding than Ouspensky himself provides in *Osokin* and the slightly later *Talks with a Devil.*

The latter consists of two stories, the first of which, 'The Inventor', utilizes Ouspensky's American experience. The inventor is an American called Hugh B., who finds himself working in a factory, at a job that bores him. One day, as he is copying a design for a new machine, he realizes that it could be improved by a simple change. The designer becomes indignant at the suggestion and shouts at him. But the manager begins to see that Hugh is correct, and makes him senior draughtsman. Hugh is still dissatisfied because he is still underpaid for his inventions. He marries, but he and his wife are soon at loggerheads. All his attempts to achieve recognition as an inventor come to nothing. One day, like Ivan Osokin, he decides to commit suicide . . .

But at this point, fate intervenes to change his life. As he is buying a revolver with which to end his life, he has an idea for an automatic revolver that will fire like a machine gun. By the time he gets back home, his wife has left him, but he is so obsessed by his new invention that he takes it in his stride. (At this point, the devil who is recounting the story to Ouspensky has to admit that he cannot even begin to understand how a man can become enthusiastic about a mere invention . . .)

The prototype revolver is made, but no one seems to be interested. When one day Hugh encounters another inventor whose life has been a total failure, he almost loses courage. But eventually he meets a friend who is about to sell his factory, and the two go into partnership. At last, the new revolver is manufactured — but it sells so badly that Hugh is tempted to dispose of his patent for 1,000 dollars . . .

At this point, though, fate again takes a hand. In Paris, a famous singer is murdered by her lesbian lover with one of Hugh's revolvers. A book about the case becomes a bestseller and Hugh's factory is suddenly inundated with orders. Every time there is a murder or political catastrophe involving the new repeating pistol, they receive still more orders. Soon Hugh is a millionaire and is reunited with his wife . . .

So far, the story seems to be as deeply pessimistic as *Osokin:* despair leads to the decision to commit suicide; fate intervenes and brings success, but the success involves death and misery, and the death and misery bring still more success until the inventor feels that life has become meaningless. But at this point, we become aware that Ouspensky is no longer a pessimist trapped in the idea of Eternal Recurrence. As Hugh stands on the bridge of his yacht on the Amazon, gazing at the stars, he is suddenly imbued with a passion for astronomy. He spends the rest of the cruise reading books about the stars and, when he returns home, builds an observatory. 'Now he worked for the sake of knowledge alone, creative work, winning over and extorting from nature her closest secrets . . .' Hugh has slipped out of the grip of the devil, whose aim is to confine human beings to the narrowness of the material world. And when his wife decides to devote herself to healing the blind, the devil takes his leave, protesting that he is revolted by her sentimentality.

In a footnote in *Talks with a Devil,* Ouspensky acknowledges that he has unconsciously plagiarized an idea from Dostoevsky's scene with the Devil in *The Brothers Karamazov.* In fact, *Talks with a Devil* is altogether closer to the third act of Shaw's *Man and Superman,* the dream episode called 'Don Juan in Hell'. Shaw's Devil is also a materialist, who has designed Hell as a place where human beings can relax and enjoy themselves. He believes that the aim of life is happiness, good fellowship and artistic enjoyment. Understandably, religious people strike him as cranks; so do philosophers and scientists and all human beings driven by an obscure craving to evolve. Shaw argues that the purpose of the 'Life Force' is to create Intelligence, a brain through which Life can become conscious of its own purposes, so that it can pursue these purposes in the full light of consciousness. Nothing can satisfy the highest type of human being except to help life in its struggle to evolve.

In the second of the *Talks with a Devil,* the story called 'The Benevolent Devil', Ouspensky develops ideas that are strikingly similar to Shaw's. He describes a visit to the caves of Ellora, in

Northeast Bombay state, which is followed by a dream in which he meets the Devil (now spelt with a capital D) in the temple of Kailas, and they resume the conversation that was broken off in the previous story.

The Devil begins by explaining that, as far as he is concerned, 'this' world is the only reality, and there is nothing beyond it. 'The kingdom of matter is eternal.' Then he explains that there are two kinds of human beings: one, the descendants of animals, who live entirely on the material plane, and 'whose lives consist of harbouring grudges and trying to get out of difficulties by burdening others with them', and two, the descendants of Adam and Eve, who suffer from 'religious mania', and believe in absurd ideals. He goes on to explain how he seduced Adam and Eve into materialism by giving them large quantities of a delicious fruit which they liked so much that they began to eat it three times a day. They became so obsessed by this fruit that they forgot all their 'imaginary ideals'. Then they began to quarrel, and when Eve left Adam, he found himself three wives from a nearby tribe, while Eve took a lover. And so the Fall began . . .

Unfortunately, the descendants of Adam and Eve have never lost their vision of the imaginary ideal and it takes a whole army of devils to prevent them from backsliding into virtue.

The Devil now tells the story of a young man called Leslie White, to whom Ouspensky has introduced a Sinhalese yogi. After a long talk with the yogi, Leslie decides to forgo his dinner — he is not really hungry anyway — and to spend the evening reading some books that have arrived that morning. Watched anxiously by his personal little demon, Leslie settles down in an armchair with a weak whisky and soda. As soon as he becomes absorbed in the world of the books, the demon loses sight of him; Leslie seems to vanish into thin air. This, Ouspensky realizes, is because 'his whole being was immersed in the world of ideas, and material reality did not exist for him'.

So that is the secret, I thought. To get away from

> reality means to get away from the devil, to become invisible to him. This . . . signifies, in reverse, that people of dull reality, practical, workaday people, in general all ordinary sober people, belong absolutely and completely to the devil . . . To be frank, I was delighted by this discovery.

Love, it seems, is another way in which the demon can 'lose' his prey, for when a person is romantically in love, the feeling surrounds him like a wall, and he becomes invisible . . .

The demon servant now begins trying to seduce Leslie back to laziness and self-indulgence. To dull his senses, he puts him out an unusually large and tasty breakfast. Leslie is unable to resist it and his sense of latent possibilities collapses . . .

Later that day he goes to tea at the house of Lady Gerald, and there he sees, for the second time, a girl called Margaret, to whom he is powerfully attracted. She obviously feels the same. He begins to tell her about the old yogi and she understands him.

> Leslie suddenly understood that if he could take the two steps which separated him from Margaret and then take her by the waist and lead her right down to the sea, walk with her along the waters edge, feel it roll under their feet, further and further on, until the stars began to shine, somewhere where there were no people, but only the two of them, then straightaway everything that the old Indian had spoken about would become a complete reality.

But the moment passes — and as it does so, Leslie has an overwhelming sense that this has all happened before, and that he has lost Margaret before in the same way.

On his way home, he daydreams about her, and again the

demon feels he is losing him. So he sends someone to invite him to dinner, and then makes sure that he overeats. (The demon can even turn himself into particularly delicious-looking dishes.) Finally, although tempted to stay awake and think out his problems, Leslie has a whisky and soda, and falls asleep. The demon looks utterly exhausted.

> 'You see,' said the Devil, 'that is what our life is like. Is that not self-sacrifice? Think of it: the poor little devil must keep watch over every step he takes, not leaving him even for one moment. He allows himself to be eaten up, works himself into such a state, and there is still the risk of losing him because of his various silly fantasies...'

And it seems that Leslie is, in fact, lost to his demon. The words of the yogi have awakened him, and he goes into a Buddhist monastery and begins to practise fasting and meditation. 'But,' says the Devil, 'I have not lost him yet. I still have one trick up my sleeve. The stake is on nobility . . .'

Ouspensky learns what he means when he sees Leslie again in London, two months after the outbreak of the First World War. He is marching alongside his platoon, on his way to fight. 'The stake is on nobility . . .' War, in which the descendants of Adam and Eve fight one another and believe it is all for the sake of the highest ideals, is the Devil's ultimate seduction . . . This time the Devil has won.

Together with *Ivan Osokin,* these two *Talks with a Devil* afford a fundamental insight into Ouspensky's vision of human existence. It is at once romantic and pessimistic. The world is divided into black and white: the children of Adam and the descendants of the beasts, who belong to the Devil. Daydreaming enables us to escape from the Devil. So does falling in love. But the Devil usually has an extra trick up his sleeve, and man's chances of evolving are very slim indeed.

It never seems to strike Ouspensky that daydreaming, and the kind of lassitude and pessimism that can spring from it, are as harmful in their way as the Devil's materialism. They encourage man to sit on the sidelines and sneer at the peacemakers while escaping into a world of romantic imaginings. They encourage him to believe that the answer lies in finding an ideal woman, or in finding a Teacher who can initiate him into the Great Secret. In short, they encourage him to look everywhere for the answer but inside himself . . .

Yet all this is not entirely fair to Ouspensky. For by 1914 — when he was on the eve of meeting his long-awaited Teacher — he had already taken some major steps towards solving the problems that tormented Ivan Osokin. In fact, in some respects he had even gone further than his Teacher.

Two
The Romantic Realist

OUSPENSKY SAILED from London, and arrived back in a St Petersburg whose name had been changed to Petrograd (because in the frenzy of World War One patriotism, St Petersburg sounded too German).

Back in his newspaper office in Moscow, he saw a notice for a ballet called *The Struggle of the Magicians,* which declared that the action took place in India and would give a complete picture of Oriental magic. Ouspensky published it in his column, with the sarcastic comment that it would contain everything that cannot be found in the real India. After that, he went to Petrograd, where he delivered two highly successful lectures about his travels in the East, both of which attracted audiences of more than a thousand.

It was when he repeated the same lectures in Moscow that two new acquaintances — a musician and a sculptor — told him about a teacher called Gurdjieff, a Caucasian Greek who was also the author of the ballet about India. It seemed that Gurdjieff possessed remarkable hypnotic powers. Ouspensky was sceptical: 'People invent miracles for themselves, and invent exactly what is expected from them.' Nevertheless, he eventually agreed to meet Gurdjieff.

> We arrived in a small café in a noisy though not central street. I saw a man of an oriental type, no longer young, with a black moustache and piercing eyes, who astonished me first of all because he seemed to be . . . completely out of keeping with the place and its atmosphere . . . this man, with the face of an Indian rajah or an Arab sheik, whom I at once seemed to see in a

> white burnoose or a gilded turban . . . produced the. . . impression of a man poorly disguised.

Gurdjieff spoke with a strong Caucasian accent, which would have sounded rather provincial to Ouspensky.

And what did Gurdjieff see? Ouspensky was a man of medium height, with closely cropped hair, a prim mouth, and eyes that peered short-sightedly through thick pince-nez glasses. Another disciple of Gurdjieff, the musician Thomas de Hartmann, described him as 'simple, courteous, approachable and intelligent'. In later years he struck people as unapproachable and cold; in March 1915, he would still have been a great deal like the romantic young student who got drunk on vodka and tried to make peace with everybody. But he was also a well-known writer and journalist, whose lectures had attracted widespread attention; so he now had the confidence not to succumb to the charisma of this man with the piercing eyes, but to regard him with a certain scepticism. And although Gurdjieff spoke knowledgeably about yoga, Ouspensky's scepticism seemed to be justified when Gurdjieff declined to name some of the eminent professors whom he claimed were interested in his work. It increased when Gurdjieff took him to a flat to meet his pupils. He had spoken of the enormous expense of the apartments he had taken for his 'Work', but this place was obviously the kind of flat that schoolteachers were given free. One of the pupils read aloud from a manuscript in which someone described a meeting with Gurdjieff; it struck Ouspensky as obscure and lacking in literary skill. When Gurdjieff asked him if it could be published in a newspaper, Ouspensky suspected that this oriental gentleman was simply trying to make use of him. As he left the place — in company with one of the pupils — Ouspensky was tempted to make fun of Gurdjieff, but allowed caution to
prevail.

In fact, as he discovered later, Gurdjieff made a habit of trying to present himself in the worst possible light when he first met

potential pupils. If they assumed he was a charlatan, it proved they lacked penetration. Ouspensky was not put off; he accepted subsequent suggestions to meet Gurdjieff in noisy cafes, and was not even discouraged when Gurdjieff suggested that he should pay 1,000 roubles a year. But when Gurdjieff hinted that he was willing to accept Ouspensky as a pupil, Ouspensky explained that he would be unable to give any undertaking to keep Gurdjieff's teachings secret. Gurdjieff apparently acceded to this. 'There are no conditions of any kind . . . Our starting point is that man does not know himself, that he is *not.*' He went on to state the principle that Ouspensky was to emphasize for the rest of his life: that man has no single 'I', but dozens of 'I's', replacing one another with the bewildering rapidity of a game of musical chairs. And at a later meeting, he stated his basic principle: that human beings are basically *machines,* and that our belief that we possess free will is an illusion. Man *could* develop some degree of free will, but it would cost an immense effort. Moreover, his starting point would need to be the recognition that he is basically a machine, a kind of robot, merely reacting to stimuli like a penny-in-the-slot machine.

Ouspensky was deeply impressed. All this was very close to his own feelings about human beings, the feelings he had expressed in *Osokin* and 'The Inventor'. But in 'The Inventor', he had made the assumption that his hero could escape from 'the trap' by turning his attention to higher intellectual pursuits. If Gurdjieff was correct, that would do him no good whatsoever; an intellectual is as 'robotic' as a peasant.

> 'Take yourself,' said Gurdjieff. 'If you understood everything you had written in your own book, what is it called?' — he made something impossible out of the words 'Tertium Organum' — 'I should come and bow down to you and beg you to teach me. But *you do not understand* either what you read or what you write.'

It was a disturbing picture — even more disturbing than

Ouspensky's own picture of man as a plaything of demons, or a helpless puppet in the grip of Eternal Recurrence. Yet apparently Gurdjieff was certain that there *was* an escape from the trap. Man *could* be galvanized out of his condition of 'sleep' into something like waking consciousness. It was this assurance that led Ouspensky to decide to accept Gurdjieff as his teacher.

This was, of course, inevitable. Ouspensky had spent so many years looking for someone to tell him 'The Answer', how to achieve 'higher states' of awareness, how to hold on to the mystical glimpses of sheer affirmation, that if he had decided to ignore Gurdjieff's offer, he would have spent the rest of his life wondering what he had missed. Yet with the wisdom of hindsight, we can see that his decision involved certain disadvantages that would continue to haunt him for the rest of his life. Gurdjieff was right when he said that if Ouspensky had understood everything he had written in *Tertium Organum,* he would have been a great teacher. In spite of the pessimism of *Osokin* and *Talks with a Devil,* Ouspensky had come very close indeed to finding his own answer. There was a basic sense in which he did not need Gurdjieff. In order to understand this, we need to look more closely at *Tertium Organum* (subtitled 'A Key to the Enigmas of the World'), which had been published in 1912.

Let us begin by looking at an experience that dated from 1908:

> It was in the sea of Marmora, on a rainy day of winter, the far-off high and rocky shores were of a pronounced violet colour of every shade, including the most tender, fading into grey and blending with the grey sky. The sea was the colour of lead mixed with silver. I remember all these colours. The steamer was going north. I remained at the rail, looking at the waves. The white crest of waves were running towards us. A wave would run at the ship, raised as if desiring to hurl its crest upon it, rushing up with a howl. The steamer heeled, shuddered and slowly

straightened back; then from afar a new wave came running, I watched this play of waves with the ship, and felt them draw me to themselves. It was not at all that desire to jump down which one feels in mountains but something infinitely more subtle. The waves were drawing my soul to themselves. And suddenly I felt that it went to them. It lasted an instant, perhaps less than an instant, but I entered into the waves, and with them rushed with a howl at the ship. And in that instant *I became all.* The waves — they were myself; the far violet mountains, the wind, the clouds hurrying from the north, the great steamship, heeling and rushing irresistibly forward — all were myself. I sensed the enormous heavy body — my body — all its motions, shudderings, waverings and vibrations, fire, pressure of steam and weight of engines were *inside* me, the unmerciful and unyielding propelling screw which pushed and pushed me forward, never for a moment releasing me, the rudder which determined all my motion — all this was myself: also two sailors . . . and the black snake of smoke coming in clouds out of the funnel . . . all.

It was an instant of unusual freedom, joy and expansion. A second — and the spell of the charm disappeared. It passed like a dream when one tries to remember it. But the sensation was so powerful, so bright and so unusual that I was afraid to move and waited for it to recur. But it did not return, and a moment later I could not say that it had been — could not say whether it was a reality or merely the *thought* that, looking at the waves, it might be so.

Two years later, the yellowish waves of the

> Finnish gulf and a green sky gave me a taste of the same sensation, but this time it was dissipated almost before it appeared.

Now what has happened to Ouspensky is very clear. The sheer exhilaration of the waves has momentarily lifted his consciousness into an orgasmic sensation of sheer power, enormous health and strength. Our senses normally seem to extend scarcely beyond our bodies; objects seen around us are dim and slightly unreal. But a sudden great effort of will, or a *reflection* of the external forces of nature, can strengthen the 'intentionality' of perception so that our gaze seems to be a spear thrown from behind the eyes. In such moments, our usual vapid, feeble sense of our own identity vanishes for a moment in a sense of sheer joy. Hence the feeling of 'oneness'. It could be compared to the sensation one might experience if, in a crowd cheering with happiness, one flung one's arms around a total stranger and felt as much love as for one's brother or sister.

This is basically the 'secret' Ouspensky was looking for. Since he was personally so withdrawn and shy, it must have seemed beyond his grasp. But the sensation his experience left behind was obviously that *our senses act as jailers,* preventing us from grasping the reality that lies around us.

This leads us to the starting point of *Tertium Organum,* a chapter called (rather unpromisingly) 'Subjective and Objective'. What, Ouspensky asks, do we really know about that world 'outside' us? If he could feel that he had *become* the waves and the ship, how can the usual distinction between subject and object be as 'real' as it seems?

According to Bishop Berkeley, such a distinction *is* quite unreal. Our senses are not 'windows'; they are *interpreters,* and they *translate* the information that bombards them into terms we can understand. Energy of 16 millionths of an inch strikes our eyes, and our eyes translate it into redness. Energy of 32 millionths of an inch strikes us, and we translate it into violet. Energy of a

higher wavelength — ultra-violet, for example — is invisible to us because our senses feel that it is of no use to us. So we do not live in a real world, but in an interpreted world. That tree is 'out there', but for all practical purposes it is inside my head. Berkeley argues that we have no *proof* of the existence of a world 'out there'; it might all be a delusion, like a film show projected on my eyeballs.

Kant did his best to rescue philosophy from this uncomfortable position. We do not *create* the real world, he says, but our senses *establish the conditions* for the world we see. They are rather like a nightclub doorkeeper who will only let in people who are respectably dressed. And their criterion for respectability, says Kant, is that things have to be dressed in *space and time*. Nakedness is not allowed.

But this means that you and I can never know what the clients look like without their clothes on. We can never know the 'things in themselves', as they were before they had to put on dinner jackets and long dresses. So, at any rate, said Kant. And Ouspensky is willing to accept his views on the matter.

But in the last decades of the nineteenth century, a writer called C.H. Hinton caused a sensation by extending Kant's idea in a most fascinating manner. Very well, says Hinton, our senses act like doorkeepers who force the clientele to dress in a respectable manner. But in that case, it is our senses that make the rule that our world has three dimensions — length, breadth and height. Why should it not relax its standards, and permit a world with *four* dimensions — length, breadth, height, and another dimension at right angles to these?

Why make such a supposition in the first place? It seems to have come about as a result of some of the puzzles of the new 'science' of psychical research, which began to come into being in the 1860s. The 'occult revival' began in 1848, with loud banging and rapping noises in the house of a New York farmer named Fox. These later turned into classic 'poltergeist'

phenomena, with objects flying through the air. Soon hundreds of 'mediums' were causing even more spectacular effects — trumpets played themselves as they floated in space, tables rose from the ground, flowers materialized out of the air, and ghostly hands stroked the faces of the 'sitters' at séances. Moreover, poltergeists seemed to have the ability to cause solid objects to fly through walls. The solution, many 'Spiritualists' came to believe, was a fourth dimension. If spirits inhabited a universe with an extra dimension, then a poltergeist would not actually be throwing an object through a wall, but 'over' it, into the fourth dimension — just as a giant could step over a wall that would be an insurmountable obstacle to a beetle.

A Professor Johann Carl Friederich Zollner, of the University of Leipzig, seems to have originated this theory that spirits inhabit a four-dimensional world, and he decided to test it by asking a 'medium' if he could get the spirits to tie a knot in a piece of string whose two ends had been joined together in a circle (and also sealed with sealing wax). The experiment took place in 1877, with an American medium called Henry Slade, and Slade — or the spirits — tied the knot in the string at his first attempt. One of the witnesses to the experiment was Zollner's fellow professor Gustav Fechner, who had written an essay on 'Why Space Has Four Dimensions' as early as 1846. Unfortunately, Slade had been tried and convicted of cheating in London in the previous year — Professor Ray Lankester had snatched a slate before the 'spirits' had time to write on it, and found that it was already written on. Slade insisted that he had heard the squeak of the slate pencil moments before Lankester snatched the slate.

Alas, in later life, Slade was often caught cheating, which would seem to dispose of him as a witness for the fourth dimension. But this assumption may be too hasty. The Society for Psychical Research, formed in 1882, reached the conclusion that although mediums *do* cheat, the evidence for the reality of spiritualistic phenomena — including poltergeists — is overwhelming. Their experience also confirmed that many 'genuine' mediums sometimes resorted to cheating. Slade was later caught cheating

before the Seybert Committee in Philadelphia, and he acknowledged to them that Zollner had watched him closely only for the first three or four sittings, then allowed him to do as he liked. But since the knotted string was produced at the first sitting, it seems possible that it was genuine.

To Ouspensky, it seemed obvious that the idea of the fourth dimension is one of the most important that human beings can contemplate. When we are tired, our minds simply accept the material world around us without question; everything is merely 'itself'. But as soon as we experience the sense of happiness and excitement that often comes on spring mornings, or setting out on holiday, the world is seen to be full of infinite possibilities, and nothing is merely 'itself': everything seems to *stand for something* that is more than itself, just as the words on this page stand for something more than themselves. Hinton himself grasped this notion in an essay called 'Many Dimensions', where he speaks of errand boys reading 'penny dreadfuls', and how they could be spending their time more fruitfully 'communing with space' (which for Hinton meant trying to think three-dimensionally). Then he goes on to say:

> And yet, looking at the same printed papers, being curious and looking deeper and deeper into them with a microscope, I have seen that in splodgy ink stroke and dull fibrous texture, each part was definite, exact, absolutely so far and no farther, punctiliously correct; and deeper and deeper lying a wealth of form, a rich variety and amplitude of shapes, that in a moment leapt higher than my wildest dreams could conceive.

What Hinton means is that the paper contains all the mysteries of space itself. But he might have gone farther, and recognized that even the silliest penny dreadful, explored to its depths, would reveal unknown vistas of the human imagination.

This is the aspect of the fourth dimension that fascinates

Ouspensky. And he expands it in some of the most remarkable and profound pages of *Tertium Organum.* Chapter 14 begins:

> It seems to us that we see something and understand something. But in reality all that proceeds around us we sense only very confusedly, just as a snail senses confusedly the sunlight, the darkness and the rain.

Here we note immediately the quality that makes Ouspensky such a good writer: his clarity. He has an enviable ability to say exactly and precisely what he means. But this image of the snail does more than that: it conveys in a few words Ouspensky's feeling that we are surrounded by a vast, unknown universe, and that our *assumptions and presuppositions* cut us off from this world of reality. We may, in fact, reject Kant, and his notion that space and time are merely the clothes that the nightclub doorman forces the customers to wear; we may even assume that that pillar box really is red, and not that our eyes merely interpret its wavelength as redness. But we may nevertheless accept Ouspensky's central point: that our perception is 'prejudiced', and we often see only what we expect to see.

Ouspensky goes on to tell a story that makes the same point. He describes how he and a friend were crossing the River Neva in St Petersburg:

> We had been talking, but both fell silent as we approached the [Peter and Paul] fortress, gazing up at its walls and making probably the same reflection. 'Right there are also factory chimneys', said A. Behind the walls of the fortress indeed appeared some brick chimneys blackened by smoke.
>
> On his saying this, I too sensed the *difference between* the chimneys and the prison walls with *unusual clearness* and like an electric shock. I

> realised *the difference between the very bricks themselves* . . .
>
> Later in conversation with A, I recalled this episode, and he told me that not only then, but *always,* he sensed these differences and was deeply convinced of their reality.

Ouspensky goes on to say that the wood of a gallows, a crucifix and the mast of a ship is, in fact, a *quite different material* in each case. Chemical analysis could not detect it; but then, chemical analysis cannot detect the difference between twins, who are nevertheless quite different personalities.

> They are only the *shadows* of real things, *the substance of which is contained in their function.* The shadow of a sailor, of a hangman and of an ascetic may be quite similar — it is impossible to distinguish them by their shadows, just as it is impossible to find any difference between the wood of a mast, of a gallows and of a cross by chemical analysis.

This realization is an extension of his insight on the Sea of Marmora. In that case, sheer exaltation had somehow amplified the strength of his senses — just as hunger amplifies a man's appetite so he appreciates his food far more. And this appreciation amounts to a sharper perception of the *difference* between roast beef and new potatoes and spring cabbage.

Our problem is to maintain this recognition of 'difference' even when our senses are tired. If we enter a room in total darkness, we do not assume that all the furniture has disappeared merely because we cannot see it. We *know* it is there. We need to impress this conviction of 'difference' upon our minds so deeply that we know it is there even when we cannot see it. What good would that do? It would prevent us from falling into the negativity that devastates our energy and sense of purpose — and which

also happens to be the chief problem of all human beings. On a spring morning, when we can see endless 'difference' around us, and our minds are bubbling with optimism, it seems incredible that human beings can so forget this vision that they collapse into defeat, even into suicide. Yet Ouspensky himself clearly came close to suicide when he lost his Zinaida. So this question of difference is not merely an abstract philosophical issue; it is a matter of life and death

It is this sense of urgency and excitement that makes *Tertium Organum* such a refreshing book. Ouspensky is on to something important — in fact, to *the* most important question, and he knows it. He senses that the experience on the Sea of Marmora, or walking towards the Peter and Paul fortress, could lead to a new way of living, a new kind of freedom. He is like a migratory bird that can smell its home. For more than 10,000 years, increasing knowledge has given man increasing power over his environment; but it has not, apparently, given him increasing power over himself. Yet Ouspensky has glimpsed the answer. Perception is like a spear thrown towards an object. But our innate pessimism and laziness prevent us from putting any force behind the throw. Our negativity means that we allow ourselves to 'leak' energy. Yet the mere recognition of what is wrong should enable us to put it right, to maintain an inner level of drive and optimism that would simply prevent us from being susceptible to such leaks.

Ouspensky asks:

> First of all, what is the new knowledge? The new knowledge is *direct knowledge* by an inner sense. I feel my own pain directly; the new knowledge can give me the power to *sense,* as mine, the pain of another man.

What Ouspensky can feel, intuitively, is that if he can get rid of his tendency to negativity and self-doubt, his Russian melancholy, he can be a quite different kind of person. When we

are asleep, or very tired, we lose even intuitive knowledge of ourselves; consciousness 'blurs'. When we are awake, we suddenly 'know' ourselves. If we were 10 times as awake — if our senses were far more highly energized — would we not 'know' other people with equal certainty? Our senses could be compared to flat batteries. How do we 'charge' them? By sheer 'concentrated attention', which has the same 'recharging' effect on the senses that driving a car has on the car battery. (Example: as you are reading this book, stop 'merely reading'. Concentrate your *full* attention; clench your fists, use the muscles of your face and forehead to focus your energies: *but go on reading*. Even a minute of this kind of effort will bring a curious sense of power and meaning, for your intellect is ceasing to work *in vacuo,* and is entering into active combination with your vital energies.) This is what the yogi strives for as he sits cross-legged, concentrating attention 'at the root of the eyebrows'. Unfortunately, Ouspensky's Western-style romanticism inclined him to discount this aspect of Eastern religion.

Tertium Organum ends with a chapter about mysticism, dealing with the phenomenon that R.M. Bucke called 'cosmic consciousness'. This, Ouspensky recognizes, is what the human race is evolving towards. He quotes the mystic Edward Carpenter:

> Men will not worry about death or a future, about the kingdom of heaven, about what may come with and after the cessation of life of the present body. Each soul will feel and know itself to be immortal, will feel and know that the entire universe with all its good and all its beauty is for it and belongs to it forever. The world peopled by men possessing cosmic consciousness will be as far removed from the world of today as this is from the world before the advent of self-consciousness.

This is a fundamentally Nietzschean view; it springs out of

Zarathustra's recognition that the most basic answer lies in 'great health' — which, in turn, depends on *stopping ourselves from leaking*.

This is why Gurdjieff told Ouspensky that if he understood everything in his own book, he would be a great teacher.

Ouspensky's problem was that he had not yet grasped everything in his own book. He had, without knowing it, solved the basic problem of Ivan Osokin: the weakness, the self-pity, the Tchaikovskian melancholy. The basic solution lay in recognizing that they were analogous to the snail's perception of the sunlight, the darkness and the rain. Once the snail has learned that the limits of its shell are not the limits of the universe, it has also taken the most important step towards perceiving that universe as it really is, rather than as a stifling, trivial, petty, personal illusion.

These insights had thrown Ouspensky's mind into a ferment. He saw threads stretching out from his central idea to all kinds of apparently contradictory notions: Nietzsche's Superman, the message of the New Testament, yoga, the symbolism of the Tarot, dreams and hypnosis, the ideas of Einstein, Eternal Recurrence, mysticism, the importance of sex in the evolutionary scheme . . . The next task was to begin to get this explosion of insights and connections down on paper. And so, even before setting out for his trip to Egypt, India and Ceylon, he had started to write the book that would become *A New Model of the Universe,* a work that would contain the most important essay he ever wrote: the chapter called 'Experimental Mysticism'. He was still engaged upon this book when he met Gurdjieff.

Now we can begin to see why, in a certain sense, the meeting with Gurdjieff was Ouspensky's greatest personal disaster. He had already found his own answer, even if he did not know that he knew it. All he had to do was to pursue it, to think about it repeatedly until he had plumbed it to its depths. And at this point he met the man whose philosophy hurled him back into the

pessimism of 10 years earlier. For Gurdjieff, man is a machine, a helpless puppet in the hands of fate. Eight years later, a young English doctor named Kenneth Walker would attend a talk by Ouspensky in a dreary room in Kensington, and would record Ouspensky's first words: that man likes to believe that he possesses a real and permanent 'I', whereas in fact he possesses dozens of 'I's', all struggling for possession; he is virtually a 'multiple personality'.

> A man also prides himself on being self-conscious, whereas even a short course of self-study will reveal the fact that one is very rarely aware of oneself, and then only for a few fleeting moments. Man believes that he has will, that he can 'do', but this is also untrue. Everything happens in us in the same way that changes in the weather happen. Just as it rains, it snows, it clears up and is fine, so also, within us, it likes or it does not like, it is pleased or it is distressed. We are machines set in motion by external influences, by impressions reaching us from the outside world.

There is a simple objection to this: it is untrue. That is to say, it carries an accurate observation to a point at which it becomes untrue. The real trouble is that we allow our intellect and senses to operate *in vacuo,* and not in association with our vital forces, our sense of 'urgency'.

Now if Ouspensky had been as pessimistic as he sounds, he would not have been giving a lecture. His whole point — and Gurdjieff's — is that recognition of man's lack of freedom is the first step towards *achieving* some kind of freedom. Man must do this by struggle, by 'work on himself', by self-observation. The problem for Ouspensky's listeners, as Walker and a dozen others have made clear, is that his gloomy outlook communicated itself to his audience, producing the opposite effect to that he would have produced if he had spent the

evening talking to them about the ideas of *Tertium Organum*. Walker notes that the room, with its uncomfortable chairs, reminded him of the Presbyterian churches of his Scottish childhood, and of the congregation awaiting the arrival of the minister — who would tell them they were all damned. This, in effect, is what Ouspensky was doing. This is what Gurdjieff did to Ouspensky.

The objection to Ouspensky's view can be stated simply. The basic problem for human beings is to break through to higher levels of energy, to what William James called — in an important essay — 'Vital Reserves'. James started from the recognition that there are certain days on which we feel more alive than on others. Much of the time, 'most of us feel as if a sort of cloud weighed upon us . . . *Compared to what we ought to be we are only half awake.*' James recognized that we are, at least, half awake, not fast asleep:

> In some persons this sense of being cut off from their rightful resources is extreme, and we then get the formidable neurasthenic and psychasthenic conditions, with life grown into one tissue of impossibilities, that so many medical books describe.
>
> Stating the thing broadly, the human individual thus lives usually far within his limits; he possesses powers of various sorts which he habitually fails to use. He energises below his *maximum,* and he behaves below his *optimum*. In elementary faculty, in coordination, in power of *inhibition* and control, in every conceivable way, his life is contracted like the field of vision of an hysteric subject — but with less excuse, for the poor hysteric is diseased, while in the rest of us, it is only an inveterate *habit* — the habit of inferiority to our full self — that is bad.

He goes on to ask how unusual men manage to escape these limitations, and answers — exactly as Gurdjieff answered:

> Either some unusual stimulus fills them with emotional excitement, or some unusual idea of necessity induces them to make an extra effort of will. *Excitements, ideas, and efforts,* in a word, are what carry them over the dam.

He goes on to make an observation that was also the basis of Gurdjieff's 'Work':

> In these 'hyperaesthetic' conditions which chronic invalidism so often brings in its train, the dam has changed its normal place. The slightest functional exercise gives a distress which the patient yields to and stops. In such cases of 'habit-neurosis' a new range of power often comes in consequence of the 'bullying-treatment,' of efforts which the doctor obliges the patient, much against his will, to make. First comes the very extremity of distress, then follows unexpected relief.

Gurdjieff's basic method was to combat 'habit-neurosis' through a version of the 'bullying treatment' — by forcing his followers to make efforts that brought 'the very extremity of distress', followed by a sudden sense of freedom, as if a strait-jacket had been loosened.

William James had arrived at these conclusions through unpleasant personal experience. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* he describes how, at the age of 28, he fell into a state of general pessimism about his prospects:

> I went one evening into a dressing-room in the twilight to procure some article that was there; when suddenly there fell upon me without any warning, just as if it came out of the darkness, a

horrible fear of my own existence. Simultaneously there arose in my mind the image of an epileptic patient whom I had seen in the asylum, a black-haired youth with greenish skin, entirely idiotic, who used to sit all day on one of the benches, or rather shelves against the wall, with his knees drawn up under his chin, and the coarse grey undershirt, which was his only garment, drawn over them inclosing his entire figure. He sat there like a sort of sculptured Egyptian cat or Peruvian mummy, moving nothing but his black eyes and looking absolutely non-human. This image and my fear entered into a species of combination with each other. *That shape am I,* I felt, potentially. Nothing that I possess can defend me against that fate, if the hour should strike for me as it struck for him. There was such a horror of him, and such a perception of my own merely momentary discrepancy from him, that it was as if something hitherto solid within my breast gave way entirely, and I became a mass of quivering fear. After this the universe was changed for me altogether. I awoke morning after morning with a horrible dread at the pit of my stomach, and with a general sense of the insecurity of life that I never knew before, and that I have never felt since. It was like a revelation; and although the immediate feelings passed away, the experience has made me sympathetic with the morbid feelings of others ever since. It gradually faded, but for months I was unable to go into the dark alone.

In general I dreaded to be left alone. I remember wondering how other people could live, how I myself had ever lived, so unconscious of that pit of insecurity beneath the surface of life. My mother in particular, a very cheerful person,

> seemed to me a perfect paradox in her unconsciousness of danger, which you may well believe I was very careful not to disturb by revealing my own state of mind.

James's problem was that he had, like the neurasthenic patients, fallen into a state of gloom in which life had 'grown into one tissue of impossibilities', an endless series of hurdles that he lacked the strength to tackle. This sense of helplessness, of will-lessness, had sapped his 'vital reserves' until, so to speak, his inner-resistance gave way — plunging him into a state in which *nothing seemed worth the effort* — hence the sudden identification with the green-faced patient.

He describes how he succeeded in emerging very slowly from this slough of despond when he came upon a definition of free will by the French philosopher Charles Renouvier: 'the sustaining of a thought *because I choose to* when I might have other thoughts'. Renouvier had commented that we may feel that all our actions are mechanical, an automatic response to stimuli, until we consider the fact that *we can think one thing rather than another*. I can *decide* what to think; I can switch my train of thought from one track to another, and back at will to the first track. I can summon up images of rain, of snow, of July sunshine, of autumn gales, all merely by willing it.

The moment James saw that Renouvier was correct, he began to emerge from his hopeless gloom, and he struggled his way back to the state of intense creative activity in which he wrote his classic *Principles of Psychology*.

It is clear that this *intellectual conviction* that he possessed free will made all the difference between sickness and health. If he had continued to believe himself a machine, he would have continued to be undermined by misery and self-doubt. It follows that if James had met Gurdjieff at that fateful point in his life, and accepted his view that we possess virtually no free will, he might never have made a complete recovery from his neurasthenia.

So it becomes possible to see what went wrong for Ouspensky after his meeting with Gurdjieff. When he had finished *Tertium Organum* in 1911, he had an excited sense of being on the verge of discovering *the* answer. It was obviously very close, and something to do with maintaining a high level of excitement and 'eagerness'. His friend who could see 'difference' all the time was obviously near to it.

And at this crucial point, Gurdjieff explained to him that the first thing he must understand was that *he could do nothing,* plunging him back into something like William James's state of inner paralysis. Ouspensky must have known this was nonsense. By pursuing his goal in his own way, he had achieved a great deal. What he needed now was to maintain that high level of drive and optimism that had inspired *Tertium Organum,* and that was now inspiring *A New Model of the Universe*. But Gurdjieff was an impressive teacher. He seemed to know all the answers.

To begin with, there was self-remembering. This was an exercise that involved looking at an object, and making an effort to be aware of *yourself looking at it*. Anyone can see how difficult this is. Close your eyes and become aware of yourself. Now open them and look at your watch. Instantly, you cease to be aware of yourself and become aware of your watch. 'You' disappear. With a considerable effort you can reawaken awareness of yourself as you look at your watch, but if you are not careful, you then 'forget' your watch and become aware only of yourself. (On the other hand, if you concentrate your attention while reading this book, you will note that you become aware of yourself as well as of the book.)

Ouspensky recognized that all moments of happiness are moments of self-remembering. What happened on the Sea of Marmora was a flash of self-remembering. What happened when he sensed the *difference* between the factory chimneys and the prison walls was self-remembering. We often experience self-remembering when setting out on a journey. But if we think about this for a moment we see the reason why. Because we feel

relaxed, and we are *looking forward* to what is to come, we experience a feeling of *eager expectation,* the feeling that the world is a fascinating and delightful place. The same thing happens if we experience sudden relief when we had been expecting something unpleasant to happen — like a man being reprieved from a firing squad. The answer lies in that surge of optimism.

The American psychologist Abraham Maslow made the same discovery when he studied healthy people, and discovered that all healthy people had frequent 'peak experiences', experiences of sudden overwhelming happiness. Such people were good 'copers'; they tackled problems in an almost competitive spirit enjoying the sensation of overcoming them. Maslow also discovered that when he talked to his students about peak experiences, they began recalling their own past peak experiences — many of which they had half forgotten — and they *began having peak experiences all the time*. Talking about peak experiences made them feel happy and optimistic, and this feeling was the major step towards having another peak experience. This is a matter to which we shall return in the final chapter.

Maslow's 'copers', then, were in a sense the opposite of the young and romantic Ouspensky, with his feeling that life is a trap. They were fundamentally 'realistic', and expected to solve problems with enough effort. The same 'realism' is also to be found — unexpectedly — in the young Albert Camus after he had escaped a 'death sentence' by tuberculosis. Although Camus had concluded that life is meaningless — he called it 'absurd' — he nevertheless found himself experiencing an 'intensity of physical joy' which even produced a kind of pleasure in 'the absurd'. In an essay in a volume called *Nuptials (Noces)* he described standing on the beach at Djemila, in Algeria, and experiencing a sense of living reality. Thinking about death, he reflects:

> I do not want to believe that death opens out on

> to another life. For me it is a closed door . . . All the [religious] solutions which are offered to me try to take away from man the weight of his own life. And, watching the heavy flight of the great birds in the sky at Djemila, it is exactly a certain weight in my life that I ask for and that I receive . . .

This is again a description of self-remembering, and Camus makes the important point that it involves a sense of 'the weight of his own life', like a burden that he is glad to shoulder, a sense of the real. Or it might be compared to a strong and healthy horse that enjoys pulling a cart, enjoys the feeling of the harness pressing into its chest and shoulders as it exerts its strength. Nietzsche said that happiness is the feeling that obstacles are being overcome, and this is again the secret of the peak experience.

Of equal interest in this context is the way that human beings lose their 'sense of the real'. We can see that when William James began to experience anxiety about his future, and a consequent feeling of depression, it was precisely this 'weight of his own life' that he had lost. The harness was hanging loosely around him, producing a sense of purposelessness. Nietzsche experienced the same thing in his teens, particularly after reading Schopenhauer and being convinced that life is 'absurd'. Simone de Beauvoir writes:

> I look at myself in a mirror, tell myself my own story, I can never grasp myself as an entire object. I experience in myself the emptiness that is myself, I feel that I am not.

Thinking too much and having too little purpose usually produces this sense of emptiness, particularly in the young.

Three
The Master

GEORGE IVANOVICH Gurdjieff was born on 28 December, 1877, so he was therefore less than a year older than Ouspensky.(12) He was born in Alexandropol, a Turkish town which had recently fallen to the Russians in the Russo-Turkish war. Gurdjieff's father was Greek, his mother Armenian. His father was a carpenter who was also a 'bard', able to recite thousands of verses from memory. When Gurdjieff saw in a magazine some verses from recently discovered tablets of the *Epic of Gilgamesh* — the world's earliest literature — he was impressed that they were exactly as his father recited them; the oral tradition had remained accurate over 4,000 years. This led Gurdjieff to the speculation that other kinds of ancient knowledge might have survived just as long, and inspired him to embark upon the same quest as Ouspensky.

Unlike Ouspensky, Gurdjieff spent his childhood surrounded by 'miracles'. He witnessed a paralytic crawl to the tomb of a saint and walk away cured. He was present when a drought ended suddenly as a procession carrying a miracle-working icon prayed for rain. He was present at a seance when a table rapped out answers to questions with one of its legs. A half-witted fortune-teller accurately foretold that he would have an accident with a firearm. He saw a Yezidi boy unable to break out of a circle that children had drawn around him, and in later years, it took Gurdjieff and an equally strong friend to drag a Yezidi woman out of such a circle. These were all mysteries to which Gurdjieff's highly active intelligence demanded an answer.

Gurdjieff had a highly developed practical inclination; he could mend almost anything, and at one point made a living weaving carpets. But his earliest inclination was to become a priest. He was always deeply religious; the word 'God' came easily to his

lips. (Ouspensky, on the other hand, discouraged his students from thinking or talking about religion.) In spite of this, he was cheerfully amoral where money was concerned. As a young man he helped to survey the proposed route of a railway, and approached the leading men in town or villages through which the railway was scheduled to pass, offering to 'fix' a station there — for a price.

As a teenager, Gurdjieff set out with a friend called Pogossian looking for the secrets of the 'Sarmoung Brotherhood' which supposedly dated from 2500 BC. He went to Smyrna, then to Egypt, Jerusalem, and India. In the book in which he describes these adventures, *Meetings with Remarkable Men,* he claims to have spent three months in a monastery in the Himalayas, where — he hinted — he had discovered some of the 'secret knowledge' he was looking for.

At some point Gurdjieff learned about hypnosis from a teacher called Ekim Bey, and seems to have become a professional hypnotist even hiring a hall in Tashkent, to put on a 'magical' show. But he did not accept that hypnotism was merely 'suggestion'. He believed that it depends upon accumulating and concentrating a certain 'life force'. In later life, as we shall see, he often demonstrated this hypnotic or 'magical' ability.

Gurdjieff differed from Ouspensky in another basic respect: his attitude to sex was totally unromantic. He boasted to Bennett about the number of his illegitimate children, and spoke of women 'in terms that would have better suited a fanatical Muslim polygamist'. To begin with, Ouspensky seems to have been unaware of this aspect of Gurdjieff; when he found out it seems to have been one of the factors that led to the break that lasted the rest of his life. (Gurdjieff's deliberately 'unreasonable' demands were another.)

In 1909, in Tashkent Gurdjieff embarked on his career as a 'teacher', with a heavy emphasis on 'occultism'. Interest in Spiritualism, Theosophy and Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy

was intense, and Gurdjieff was soon regarded as a master of the occult — although he admits frankly that his reputation was largely the result of his 'skill in producing tricks'. He also became a highly successful businessman, running stores, restaurants and cinemas, and trading in cattle. By 1914, he was ready to realize his ambition of launching an 'institute' in Russia — he chose Russia because it was 'peaceful, rich and quiet'. The 1914 war was to bring these plans to nothing.

This, then, was the man Ouspensky met in March 1915: a hypnotist and 'magician', a Casanova (although he was now married to one of the Tsarina's ladies-in-waiting), something of a charlatan, yet basically a man who had acquired a profound knowledge of human nature.

There was one fundamental difference between Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Gurdjieff, as we have seen, had learned some of the basic tricks of building up his vitality, and of using this vital power to gain influence over others. For example, everyone who met him commented on the penetration of his gaze. He was a man without self-doubt. Ouspensky was an intellectual and a romantic who had looked for his solutions in books: books about the fourth dimension, about Einstein, about yoga, about mysticism and cosmic consciousness, about the Kabbala and the Tarot and psychology. He felt that the question of freedom must be approached scientifically — that is, intellectually. He was fascinated by Gurdjieff because Gurdjieff seemed to be offering a comprehensive *system,* something his intellect could get its teeth into. Like all intellectuals, he was inclined to underestimate the importance of the body and the emotions.

In Moscow, Gurdjieff fascinated Ouspensky by the sheer range of his knowledge. When they talked about art, Gurdjieff explained that most of what we call art is mere fantasy and subjectivity. But he said, there is such a thing as 'objective art', which is a kind of mathematics. There are objective works of art — like the Sphinx — which can be read like books, 'not only with the mind, but with the emotions, if they are sufficiently developed'. He went on to

describe a statue which he had come across in Central Asia, in the desert at the foot of the Hindu Kush.

> At first it produced upon us simply the impression of being a curiosity. But after a while we began to feel that this figure contained many things, a big, complete and complex system of cosmology. And slowly, step by step, we began to decipher this system. It was in the body of the figure, in its legs, in its arms, in its head, in its eyes, in its ears, everywhere. In the whole statue there was nothing accidental, nothing without meaning. And gradually we understood the aim of the people who built this statue. We began to *feel* their thoughts, their feelings. Some of us thought that we saw their faces, heard their voices. At all events, we grasped the meaning of what they wanted to convey to us across thousands of years, and not only the meaning, but all the feelings and the emotions connected with it as well. That indeed was art!

As he travelled back to Petrograd from Moscow on the train, Ouspensky asked himself: is it possible that Gurdjieff actually *knew* what had to be known in order to proceed from words or ideas to deeds, to 'facts'? And although he could not answer the question positively, he 'had an inner conviction that something had already changed for me and that now everything would go differently'.

For readers of *Tertium Organum* and *A New Model of the Universe,* the absurdity is that — as Gurdjieff himself admitted — Ouspensky *already* 'knew' an enormous amount — perhaps almost as much as Gurdjieff could teach him. This is nowhere more apparent than in the chapter of *A New Model of the Universe* called 'Experimental Mysticism'.

Here, Ouspensky describes how, in 1910, he began a series of

experiments whose aim was to explore 'mystical' consciousness. He does not explain how he went about it but a reference to William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* suggests that he simply used nitrous oxide, 'laughing gas', diluted heavily with air. James had already noted that nitrous oxide can produce a state when 'depth beyond depth of truth seemed revealed to the inhaler. This truth fades out, however, or escapes at the moment of coming to.'

Ouspensky also found himself frustrated by a similar problem:

> A change in the state of consciousness as a result of my experiments began to take place very soon, much more quickly and easily than I thought. But the chief difficulty was that the new state of consciousness which was obtained gave at once so much that was new and unexpected, and these new and unexpected experiences came upon me and flashed by so quickly, that I could not find words, could not find forms of speech, could not find concepts, which would enable me to remember what had occurred even for myself, still less to convey it to anyone else.

One of his central insights was that:

> All that we half-consciously construct with regard to the unknown is completely and utterly wrong. The unknown is unlike anything that we can suppose about it. The complete unexpectedness of everything that is met with in these experiences, from great to small, makes the description of them difficult. First of all, everything is unified, everything is linked together, everything is explained by something else and in its turn explains another thing. There is nothing separate, that is, nothing that can be named or described *separately*. In order to describe the first

> impressions, the first sensations, it is necessary to describe *all* at once. The new world with which one comes into contact has no sides, so that it is impossible to describe first one side and then the other. All of it is visible at every point; but how in fact to describe anything in these conditions — that question I could not answer.

William James had arrived at the same conclusions in an essay called 'A Suggestion About Mysticism': that states of mystical intuition may only be very sudden and very great extensions of the ordinary 'field of consciousness'. In other words, the mystic simply 'sees further', as if he has suddenly become a bird and can see into the distance. Naturally, he could not possibly describe all he sees at once; in fact, without a great deal of training, he would find it very difficult to describe anything at all, just as most of us would find it impossible to start putting into words the view from an aeroplane.

James went on to mention three 'mystical glimpses' that he had experienced, and goes on:

> In each of the three like cases, the experience broke in abruptly upon a perfectly commonplace situation and lasted perhaps less than two minutes. In one instance I was engaged in conversation, but I doubt whether the interlocutor noticed my abstraction. What happened each time was that I seemed all at once to be reminded of a past experience; and this reminiscence, ere I could conceive or name it distinctly, developed into something further that belonged with it, this in turn into something further still, and so on, until the process faded out, leaving me amazed at the sudden vision of increasing ranges of distant fact of which I would give no articulate account. The mode of consciousness was perceptual, not conceptual —

> the field expanding so fast that there seemed no time for conception or identification to get in its work. There was a strongly exciting sense that my knowledge of past (or present?) reality was enlarging pulse by pulse, but so rapidly that my intellectual processes could not keep up the pace. The *content* was thus entirely lost to retrospection — it sank into the limbo into which dreams vanish as we gradually awake. The feeling — I wont call it belief — that I had had a sudden *opening,* had seen through a window, as it were, distant realities that incomprehensibly belonged with my own life, was so strong that I cannot shake it off today.

This also makes us aware of Ouspensky's problem as a 'teacher' as well as a learner. The 'vision' expanded 'pulse by pulse' so that his intellect could not keep pace with it. So, clearly, Ouspensky's intellectual approach to the problem of a wider reality would never work; it would be like trying to cross the Atlantic in a rowing boat.

In these 'mystical' states, as on the Sea of Marmora, Ouspensky found that the relation between the 'objective' and the 'subjective' ceased to apply:

> Here I saw that the objective and the subjective could change places. The one could become the other. It is very difficult to express this. The habitual mistrust of the subjective disappeared; every thought, every feeling, every image, was immediately objectified in real, substantial form which differed in no way from the forms of objective phenomena; and at the same time objective phenomena somehow disappeared, lost all reality, appeared entirely subjective, fictitious, invented, having no real existence.

Ouspensky compares this world to 'a world of *very complicated mathematical relations*':

> . . . this means a world in which everything is connected, in which nothing exists separately and in which at the same time the relations between things have a real existence apart from the things themselves; or possibly, 'things' do not exist and only 'relations' exist.

Another writer on mystical experience, R.H. Ward, described (in *A Drug-Taker's Notes)* how, under dental gas,

> I passed, after the first few inhalations . . . directly into *a state of consciousness already far more complete than the fullest degree of ordinary waking consciousness* [my italics], and that I then passed progressively upwards . . . into finer and finer degrees of this heightened awareness . . . This sense of upward movement continued until it seemed to me that I was rapidly passing through what I afterwards told myself was a 'region of ideas'.

This is clearly Ouspensky's region of mathematical relations.

To speak of relations as 'real' sounds paradoxical (after all, relations can change from moment to moment), but a little reflection can make the meaning clearer. In fact, we are so accustomed to things being 'connected' that we take it for granted. When I utter a sentence my 'meaning' is present in my head before I begin it, but I recognize that I can only express this meaning *in time,* by uttering words. I take the 'connectedness' of the words for granted — unless I am feeling very tired, and I 'forget what I was going to say'. In such a moment we catch a glimpse of the consciousness of James's idiot staring blankly at the world, 'seeing' everything yet unable to make the *connections* which would give it meaning. Meaning *is*

'connectedness', but not connectedness in time.

This, in turn, makes us aware that there is something very unsatisfactory and dull about our 'normal' perception. It 'sticks', like someone trying to plod over a very muddy field in heavy gumboots. We take this 'sticking' for granted until we are in moods of happiness and excitement when we have the 'bird's eye view' in which we see things *related to one another,* and realize that our normal perception, in which they are separated from one another like the steps of the man in gumboots, like words in a sentence, is quite misleading.

To put it another way, what Ouspensky and James and Ward experienced was a brief glimpse of what 'normality' *should* be like ('far more complete than the fullest degree of ordinary consciousness') and that our present 'normality' is quite abnormal — or rather, sub-normal.

So, in effect, Ouspensky was in a state of intense *excitement,* in which consciousness seemed to be flowing faster. Normally, it is as slow and as solid as a glacier; in mystical states, the ice melts and it flows like a river.

This also becomes clear from Ouspensky's remark that he found it impossible to complete a sentence, because between every word, so many ideas occurred to him that he was unable to catch up. He began a sentence: 'I said yesterday . . . '

> No sooner had I pronounced the word 'I' than a number of ideas began to turn in my head about the meaning of the word, in a philosophical, in a psychological and in every other sense. This was all so important, so new and profound, that when I pronounced the word 'said', I could not understand in the least what I meant by it. Tearing myself away with difficulty from the first cycle of thoughts about 'I', I passed to the idea 'said', and immediately found in it an infinite

> content. The idea of speech, the possibility of expressing thoughts in words, the past tense of the verb, each of these ideas produced an explosion of thoughts, conjectures, comparisons and associations. Thus, when I pronounced the word 'yesterday' I was already quite unable to understand why I had said it. But it in its turn immediately dragged me into the depths of the problems of time, of past, present and future, and before me such possibilities of approach to these problems began to open up that my breath was taken away.

Again, this is all quite logical. When consciousness is 'unfrozen' it ceases to be 'serial', like the words in a sentence, and becomes 'simultaneous' — that is, turns into a bird's eye view. It is obviously very similar to the state called 'inspiration', in which an author or musician has to write at top speed to keep up with his insights.

This image makes us aware that human beings are trapped in time, carried along by it as if on a river. Meanings flash past, like advertisement billboards on the bank, but it is hard to read them. Yet every time we become 'absorbed', every time we pay total attention to some meaning, we cause time to *slow down*. This is one of the most interesting things about the human condition: that we possess this power to 'slow time down'. It implies that if we wanted to, we could somehow bring time to a halt and be in the presence of meaning. Ordinary men take it for granted that they are the slaves of time, and that like an ever-rolling stream, it will carry them into oblivion. Philosophers and mystics glimpse this possibility that time is not an absolute; if we could learn to use our powers correctly, we could control it.

Ouspensky had practical experience of the'non absoluteness' of space and time. He describes how, after half an hour of intense discipline, 'I could quite clearly see the faces of people at a distance at which normally one would have difficulty in

distinguishing one figure from another.' Space had 'telescoped'. On another occasion, he recalled his intention of making a trip to Moscow when he was in the midst of his 'experiments':

> Suddenly, without any warning, I received the comment that I should not go to Moscow at Easter. Why? In answer to this I saw how, starting from the day of the experiment . . . events began to develop in a definite order and sequence. Nothing new happened. But the causes, which I could see quite well and which were there on the day of my experiment, were evolving, and having come to the results which unavoidably followed from them, they formed just before Easter a whole series of difficulties which in the end prevented me from going to Moscow. The fact in itself . . . had a merely curious character, but the interesting side of it was that I saw what looked like a possibility of calculating the future — the whole future was contained in the present. I saw all that had happened before Easter resulted directly from what had already existed two months earlier.

Ouspensky's insight is a direct contradiction of modern 'Chaos Theory', which asserts that, because of the basic mathematical laws of 'chaos', no physical process (the weather, for example) is predictable for more than a day or two ahead.

In mystical states, the normal *sense* of time, which is 'serial', also vanishes — or rather, Ouspensky says, 'Together with it or within it there appeared as it were another feeling of time, and two moments or ordinary time, like two words of my sentence, could be separated by long periods of another time.' In other words, moments of 'serial time' were separated by flashes of 'bird's eye time', extending 'crosswise' like another dimension.

We can begin to see why mystics find it so difficult to express

what they see. It is not that mystical consciousness is contradictory or illogical. It is simply that 'ordinary consciousness' is based on a set of false suppositions about the absoluteness of time, and that the initial problem is to explain why something that seems 'common sense' and self-evident is full of misconceptions and errors. At one point in his experiments, Ouspensky tried hard to summarize his new insights so he could recall them later, and wrote a sentence on a sheet of paper. When he read what he had written the next day, it was: 'Think in other categories.' In other words, these insights involved a totally different *approach* to what we call reality, a recognition that most of our *premises* are wrong.

Another long passage that describes this sense of immense richness and multiplicity has even wider implications. Ouspensky describes sitting on a settee and looking at a copper ash-tray. Again, it aroused 'a whirlwind of thoughts and images' — where did copper come from, how had it been discovered, how had people learned to work it, how is a modern ash-tray made . . . ? He tried to express this 'whirlwind' of thoughts on paper, and read the next day: *'One could go mad from one ashtray.'*

But what fascinated him in retrospect was the feeling that 'the ash-tray was alive', 'that it thought, understood and told me all about itself'. 'Everything is alive,' I said to myself . . . 'there is nothing dead, it is only we who are dead'.

(Another Gurdjieff disciple, C. Daly King, had experienced a similar vision on a New Jersey railway platform: the bricks of the station 'appeared to be tremendously alive . . . seething almost joyously inside and [giving] the distinct impression that . . . they were living and actively liking it'. People, on the other hand, 'looked dead, really dead'.) (13)

This led Ouspensky to the recognition that:

> Everything was living, everything was conscious of itself. Everything spoke to me and could speak

> to everything. Particularly interesting were the houses and other buildings that I passed, especially the old houses. They were living things, full of thoughts, feelings, moods and memories. The people who lived in them were their *thoughts, feelings, moods.*

(It is interesting to note that Ouspensky later achieved this same sense of the 'personality' of houses from doing Gurdjieff's self-remembering exercises. It should also be clear that Gurdjieff was describing the same sensation when he spoke of the statue at the foot of the Hindu Kush, and gradually began to understand the thoughts and feelings of those who made it until he felt that the statue was able to 'speak' to him.)

Ouspensky goes on:

> I remember once being struck by an ordinary cab-horse in the Nevsky, by its head, its face. It expressed the whole being of the horse. Looking at the horse's face I understood all that could be understood about a horse. All the traits of horse nature, all of which a horse is capable, all of which it is incapable, all that it can do, all that it cannot do; all this was expressed in the lines and features of the horse's face. A dog once gave me a similar sensation. At the same time the horse and the dog were not simply horse and dog; they were 'atoms', conscious, living 'atoms' of great beings — 'the great horse' and 'the great dog.' I understood then that we are also atoms of a 'great being', 'the great man.' A glass is an atom of a 'great glass.' A fork is an atom of a 'great fork'.

In other words, Ouspensky was seeing Plato's world of ideas as a reality, a point also made by R. H. Ward: ' . . . it seems to me very interesting that one should thus, in a dentist's chair and the

twentieth century, receive practical confirmation of the theories of Plato.' All this was experienced in 'an exceedingly intense emotional state':

> My attitude towards this new knowledge was in no way indifferent; I either loved it or was horrified by it, strove towards it or was amazed by it; and it was these very emotions, with a thousand others, which gave me the possibility of understanding the nature of the new world I came to know.

It is important to note that Ouspensky felt that his method of obtaining these insights — through laughing gas — was the wrong way. He says that he felt that there was *'somebody* who watched me all the time and often tried to persuade me to stop my experiments, not to attempt to go along this path, which was wrong and unlawful from the point of view of certain principles which I at that time felt and understood only dimly'. The basic principle is, in fact, self-evident. There is no point whatever in having thousands of insights if you cannot hang on to them in some way.

J.G. Bennett was to describe a similar experience in the forest at Fontainebleau in 1923, when a tremendous bout of 'super-effort' raised him into the 'exceedingly intense emotional state' in which he was able to evoke feelings at will:(14)

> . . . I said to myself: 'I will be astonished.' Instantly I was overwhelmed with amazement . . . Then the thought of fear came to me. At once I was shaking with terror. Unnamed horrors menaced me on every side. I thought of 'joy', and I felt my heart would burst from rapture. The word 'love' came to me, and I was pervaded with such fine shades of tenderness and compassion that I saw that I had not the remotest idea of the depth and the range of love. Love was

> everywhere and in everything. It was infinitely adaptable to every shade of need. *After a time, it became too much for me, it seemed that if I plunged any more deeply into the mysteries of love, I would cease to exist.* [My italics.] I wanted to be free from this power to feel whatever I chose, and at once it left me.

Bennett goes on to quote Blake's lines:

> Grown old in love, from seven to seven times seven
> I oft have wished for hell for change from heaven,

and adds:

> I realised that for Blake this was no mere trick of words, but the expression of a real experience. I knew that the world I had entered was one where there is no loneliness, because all who enter into that Eternal Source meet there as brothers.

Bennett's vision of the infinite varieties of love leaves no doubt that he had entered the same state of 'unfrozen' consciousness as Ouspensky — with a sense of the infinite 'connectedness' of everything — and that he had soon had enough of it. What is the good of being *shown* the answer if it promptly escapes us, due to our inability to capture it in words and concepts? Our *job,* as Ouspensky well knew, is to capture 'visions' in words and concepts, so they become permanently available to all men. The main business of writers is to trap 'meanings' in words — as if someone had invented a camera to take photographs of the advertisement signs as they flash past us —so that other men can examine them at leisure. The main point of this exercise is to fill us with courage and certainty, so we no longer have any doubt about our purpose and direction.

Now in fact, it had precisely the opposite effect on Ouspensky:

> The experiments almost always ended in sleep. During this sleep I passed into the usual state and awoke in the ordinary world, in the world in which we awake every morning. But this world contained something extraordinarily oppressive, it was incredibly empty, colourless and lifeless. It was as though everything in it was wooden, as if it was an enormous wooden machine with creaking wooden wheels, wooden thoughts, wooden moods, wooden sensations; everything was terribly slow, scarcely moved, or moved with a melancholy wooden creaking. Everything was dead, soulless, feelingless.
>
> They were terrible, these moments of awakening in an unreal world after a real one, in a dead world after a living, in a limited world, cut into small pieces, after an infinite and entire world.

But it was Ouspensky's innate romanticism that made this attitude inevitable. He could see no advantage in 'frozen' (or as he calls it 'wooden') consciousness. This is again why Ouspensky felt that it was somehow wrong for him to experiment with nitrous oxide. He was not yet ready for a glimpse of an 'infinite and entire world', and it only filled him with a longing for a 'land of lost content'. He failed to realize that a world 'cut into small pieces' is far more easily *recorded* than an 'infinite and entire world'. So he was unable to *grasp* the meaning of his extraordinary glimpse of the answer to all his questions.

Yet on one level at least, that meaning should have been clear. A 'bird's eye view' raises us above the materiality of everyday life, and enables us to see it from a distance. This is what happens when we study history or philosophy or become absorbed in a work of art. They also enable us to contemplate our world with a new sense of 'connectedness'. And it is the *intellect* that enables us to take this 'bird's eye view'. In a sense, therefore, the author of *Tertium Organum* and *A New Model of*

the Universe was already on the right path before he met Gurdjieff, and his later distrust of the 'way of intellect', of 'mere ideas', was unjustified.

This is something that becomes very clear as we read the rest of *A New Model of the Universe.* The chapter on Experimental Mysticism is followed by a chapter called 'In Search of the Miraculous',(15) in which we can sense that Ouspensky was gradually coming closer to his 'answer'. It is a series of descriptions of various places: Notre Dame, the Pyramids, the Sphinx, the Buddha with sapphire eyes in a temple near Colombo, the Taj Mahal, all of which Ouspensky regards as forms of 'objective art' that can speak directly to human beings. Gurdjieff might have dismissed these descriptions as mere 'poetry'. But because Ouspensky *is* a poet they convey more than his intellectual speculations. He felt that the Buddha with the sapphire eyes was communicating to him:

> All the gloom that rose from the depths of my soul seemed to clear up. It was as if the Buddha's face communicated its calm to me. Everything that up to now had troubled me and appeared so serious and important, now became small, insignificant, unworthy of notice . . .

Ouspensky was beginning to recognize that his problem was that he had never outgrown the pessimistic romanticism that pervades *Ivan Osokin.*

Unfortunately, there is a sense in which his chance to outgrow it ended when he met Gurdjieff. Ouspensky's interpretation of Gurdjieff's teaching was that man possesses very little freedom — so little that even *highly directed* efforts seldom achieve their purpose. 'Man can do nothing: he is a machine controlled by external influences, not by his own will, which is an illusion,' Ouspensky told Bennett a few years later.

There is one basic objection to this, an objection that might be

regarded as the central point of this book: *if it was true, then how is it that Ouspensky was able to achieve so much before he met Gurdjieff?*

Clearly, what Ouspensky needed when he returned to Russia in 1914 was to follow his own creative path, to try to pursue the implications of his vision on the Sea of Marmora, to try to grasp the significance of the 'difference' he had sensed as he looked at the Peter and Paul fortress; above all, to understand of the 'connectivity' of his nitrous oxide visions. *A New Model of the Universe* is still full of that spirit of eagerness and enthusiasm that infuses *Tertium Organum*. This applies particularly to the remarkable chapter on the superman. It is full of statements that seem a flat contradiction
of his view that will is an illusion:

> We have indeed no grounds whatever for denying the possibility of a real, living superman in the past, or in the present, or in the future. At the same time, we must recognise in our inner world the presence of seeds of something higher than that by which we ordinarily live, and we must recognise the possibility of the sprouting of these seeds and their manifestation in forms at present incomprehensible to us.

A few paragraphs later, he expresses an insight that came from his mystical experiences :

> An intellectual approach to the idea of superman is possible only after a very long and persistent training of the mind. Ability to think is the first necessary stage of the initiation . . . What does it mean to be able to think? It means to be able to think differently from the way in which we are accustomed to think, that is to say, to conceive the world in new categories. We have simplified our conception of the world too much, we have

> become accustomed to picture it to ourselves as too uniform, and we must learn anew to understand its complexity.

All this is practically a contradiction of his 'Gurdjieffian approach'. We have 'simplified our conception of the world too much.' Why? Because we see it *robotically* or mechanically, so we have as little idea of reality as a snail has of the sun, the darkness and the rain. We must learn to 'think in different categories', to grasp the *difference* between things which our 'mechanicalness' irons out. Ouspensky is not telling us that free will is an illusion, that we have so many 'I's' that thinking is virtually a waste of time — an attitude that already plants the seeds of doubt that undermines the 'peak experience', the mood of eager expectancy, which is the starting point of achievement. He is telling us that, behind the rather gloomy facade of everyday reality, there are endless reasons for optimism.

This becomes even clearer in the final chapter of *A New Model of the Universe,* entitled 'Sex and Evolution'. Here Ouspensky distinguishes between what he calls 'infra-sex', the low form of sexual consciousness in which sex is both 'dirty' and comic, and what he calls 'normal' sex, which is altogether closer to D.H. Lawrence's vision of sex as a transformative force. What Ouspensky has recognized is that sexual desire, a man's response to a woman and vice versa, is one of the best examples of the consciousness of 'difference', and that this difference is real, not illusory. A man who sees something of the 'eternal feminine' in a woman is seeing her more truly than a man who merely sees her as an instrument of his own pleasure, or a biological organism for continuing the species. Finally there is 'supra-sex', in which we sense that sex is a glimpse of a new consciousness, a higher reality:

> Mystical sensations undoubtedly and incontestably have a taste of sex . . . Of all we know in life, only in love is there a taste of the

> mystical, a taste of ecstasy. Nothing else in our life brings us so near to the limit of human possibilities, beyond which begins the unknown.

Here again, we have that sense of 'new worlds' which makes *Tertium Organum* so exciting.

All this must be qualified by admitting that it would be inaccurate to say that Ouspensky entirely lost this sense of poetry and excitement when he came under the influence of Gurdjieff. In fact, to begin with, he obviously found Gurdjieff's ideas the most exciting he had so far encountered. Yet as we study his exposition of these ideas in *In Search of the Miraculous,* we can also begin to see how the original excitement turned into something much more down to earth, 'scientific', and how this scientific approach slowly gave way to the pessimism of his comment that 'there is only one hope — that we should find the way to find the way to work with the higher emotional centre. And we do not know how this is to be
done.'

Yet when we turn from *A New Model of the Universe* to Ouspensky's account of his meeting with Gurdjieff in *In Search of the Miraculous,* it is possible to understand that original excitement. At one of their earliest meetings, Ouspensky asked Gurdjieff about his ballet *The Struggle of the Magicians.* This is, in fact, a pleasant little love story about a wealthy man who tries to seduce the pupil of a white magician by enlisting the help of a black magician; the white magician foils his plans, but the rich man finally becomes his disciple, and the ballet ends with the suggestion that love will triumph in the end. Gurdjieff explained that the most important part of the ballet was its dances, then went on to compare them to the movements of an orrery — a device simulating the movements of the planets. In the same way, he explained, in 'sacred dances', the movements are intended to remind those who understand them of certain hidden laws of nature. Such mysterious hints were guaranteed to fascinate Ouspensky. It was the same when Gurdjieff began to

talk about what he called 'the ray of creation' — the sun, the planets and the moon — and to explain that they are living beings, and that the moon is a planet in the process of birth, which may evolve to the same level as the earth. Gurdjieff was later to explain that the universe has seven levels of reality, and that the moon is the lowest of these; those who live on that level are subject to 96 laws. Man, who lives on the earth level, is subject to 48 laws. And so on up the 'ray of creation', the planets, the sun, the galaxy, the totality of worlds, the absolute, each being subject to half as many laws as the previous level, until we reach the absolute, which is subject only to its own law . . .' All this seemed to Ouspensky to reveal that Gurdjieff was the repository of the kind of secret knowledge that he had spent his life searching for.

Even so, much of what Gurdjieff had to say only reinforced Ouspensky's romantic pessimism. For example, when they sat in a noisy café speaking about the war (Gurdjieff deliberately chose such places to force Ouspensky to make 'extra effort'), Gurdjieff explained that war was the result of planetary influences. When two planets approached too closely to one another, the result was a kind of tension, such as the tension one might feel when passing too close to someone on a narrow pavement. Ouspensky asked: 'Then is there absolutely nothing that can be done?', and Gurdjieff replied gloomily: 'Absolutely nothing.'

Not all Gurdjieff's pronouncements were quite so negative. He explained, for example, that man is in prison, and that it is possible to dig a tunnel to freedom — but that one man alone can do nothing. The tunnel can only be completed by a group working together:

> Furthermore, no one can escape from prison without the help of those *who have escaped before*. Only they can say in what way escape is possible, or can send tools, files or whatever may be necessary. But *one* prisoner alone cannot find

> these people or get into touch with them. An organisation is necessary. Nothing can be achieved without an organisation.

For a loner like Ouspensky, such a notion was a violation of his deepest instinct: the feeling that a man can find his own salvation, but not that of others. At the very end of his life he was to return to this belief.

On another occasion, Gurdjieff told his pupils the grim little parable of the magician and the sheep. A magician gets tired of the wanderings of his sheep, who were aware that they were due to be slaughtered and skinned. So he hypnotizes them and tells them that they are immortal and no harm can come to them. He also tells them that he is a good master who loves his flock. Finally, he suggests that they are not sheep at all; some he convinces that they are lions, others eagles, others men, others even magicians . . . And so the sheep stayed quietly at home until it was time for them to be slaughtered . . . This, explained Gurdjieff, 'is a very good
illustration of man's position.'

As he absorbed such notions, Ouspensky must have felt that all the insights and glimpses of *Tertium Organum* and *A New Model of the Universe* were illusory, and it says a great deal for his stubborn self-belief that he still went on to complete and publish *A New Model of the Universe*.

The real problem, of course, was that Gurdjieff and Ouspensky were completely different types. Ouspensky was the intellectual romantic; Gurdjieff was the man of action. There is a sense in which Ouspensky was totally unsuited to putting Gurdjieff's method into practice. Gurdjieff's fundamental insight was the same as William James's: that it is 'some unusual idea of necessity' that induces people to make the extra efforts of will that 'carry them over the dam'. Most of us are aware that we actually need physical experience to relax and expand consciousness — experience such as travel, exercise, love-

making, socializing, even eating and drinking. So Gurdjieff never lost sight of the importance of physical effort. He treated all his disciples as 'neurasthenics' who needed the 'bullying treatment', or as people suffering from snakebite who need to be forced to walk up and down to keep them awake.

Ouspensky, however, was simply not the type to appreciate the 'bullying treatment'. He had already glimpsed the mystical world of total 'connectivity', William James's 'distant horizons of fact'. His most powerful desire was to establish contact with the higher centres, so he could continue to make forays into these unknown realms, and learn more of their geography. Gurdjieff was able to teach him many interesting techniques — involving complex physical movements, strenuous exercise, and breathing exercises — but these failed to achieve the results Ouspensky hoped for. Yet in abandoning his own work in favour of Gurdjieff's, he had also turned his back upon his own peculiar genius.

Four
Creating 'Man Number Four'

STILL, IT would be grossly unfair to Gurdjieff to imply that Ouspensky was fascinated solely by his hints about hidden knowledge and 'sacred mysteries'. Ouspensky was 'hooked' because he was an intellectual and Gurdjieff's ideas formed a powerful and consistent intellectual system. Let us, before we go any further, look more closely at this system.

Human beings, says Gurdjieff, 'grow up' to a certain point, and then stop. Up to that point they are 'subsidized' by nature. But further growth can only be brought about by immense personal effort. When one of Gurdjieff's later pupils was asked to define the aim of 'the Work', she replied: 'To prevent your past from becoming your future.'

This notion is obviously common to all religious disciplines, whose aim is 'spiritual growth'. So is the notion of strenuous effort to obtain this growth — saints flogging themselves with whips, yogis sleeping on beds of nails or sitting cross-legged in the same position for weeks at a time. Where Gurdjieff differs is in his far more pragmatic approach. In order to obtain a certain result, he says, it is necessary to know precisely what you want to obtain. Saints and ascetics have so far recognized three ways: the way of the fakir, the way of the monk, and the way of the yogi. The way of the fakir is the way of physical control, the attempt to dominate the body by will-power. The way of the monk is the way of faith and religious emotion; by attempting to dominate feelings. The way of the yogi is the way of the mind; aiming to gain total control of the mind. But there is a 'Fourth Way', which Gurdjieff calls the way of the 'sly man', but which might equally well be translated as 'intelligent man'. This is the attempt to approach the problem of personal evolution through intelligent understanding, and it combines all three previous

ways. Ouspensky's experiments with nitrous oxide might be regarded as an example of the Fourth Way: he was trying to take a short cut to a certain kind of knowledge, and his attempt was partially successful.

Closely connected with this notion of the four ways is Gurdjieff's assertion of the four aspects of man, which he compared to a carriage, a horse, a driver and the owner of the carriage. The carriage is the physical body, the horse is the feelings and desires, the driver is the mind, and the owner is the 'higher self' — the part that Gurdjieff was trying to bring into being through the Work. The energies used by these four are in an ascending ladder of refinement, the physical being the coarsest and the 'owner's' the highest. Our task is to *transmute* these various energies into higher levels.

But the heart of Gurdjieff's 'System' lies in his distinction between 'essence' and 'personality'. Personality is the part of us that we develop to enable us to cope with the world — a kind of defence system. The underlying reality, the inner self — the part the Work is designed to develop — is our essence. Typically, Gurdjieff explained that one of the few men of essence he had met was a Corsican brigand, who had developed it by spending days in the hot sun, peering down the sights of his rifle, waiting for travellers to rob.

Personality encloses us like a shell. We like to believe that inside that shell is our 'true self', the 'real me'. In fact, says Gurdjieff, we are full of thousands of little 'I's'. They could be compared to the crystalline fragments that a windscreen shatters into when struck with a hammer. But every time we make some tremendous effort, two of the crystals fuse together. If we could make enough efforts, we would finally obtain one solid block of crystal. If that could happen, man would be virtually a god.

Our aim, then, is to make the kind of effort that will create enough 'friction' to fuse two crystals together. These efforts Gurdjieff calls 'intentional suffering'. This does not mean flogging

ourselves or seeking out misery, but simply making efforts of will instead of drifting along in a robotic or mechanical state.

Self-remembering is a form of 'intentional suffering'. It should be noted that self-remembering does not necessarily entail the strenuous effort of looking at your watch and trying to be aware of yourself looking at it. It merely means maintaining alertness. At the end of *The Struggle of the Magicians,* the white magician prays: 'Lord Creator, and all you, His Assistants, help us to be able to remember ourselves at all times in order that we may avoid involuntary actions, as only through them can evil manifest itself.' This clearly means vigilance and alertness. Thomas de Hartmann tells how self-remembering once saved his life. Gurdjieff's words 'Remember yourself' meant very little to him. But when he was acting as a dispatch rider, and a shell blew him off his horse, he refused to panic, but kept repeating: 'I remember myself.' Keeping his head, he caught his horse and rode off, while shells continued to fall around him. It can be seen that, in this case, self-remembering simply meant maintaining self control. (As an interesting footnote to all this, we may observe that when we succeed in maintaining states of self-remembering, one odd consequence is often the occurrence of what Jung called 'synchronicities', absurd 'coincidences' that seem to be somehow designed to show us that we are on the right track.)

According to Gurdjieff, our central problem is that we are so 'mechanical' that we slip into robotic states without even noticing. Emergencies or crises wake us up. If we could devise some form of 'alarm clock', this would solve the problem — which is undoubtedly why some people seem to cause themselves problems and crises. Gurdjieff's solution was to form groups; then the members could co-operate in keeping one another awake. In general, Gurdjieff's Work consisted in a series of disciplines designed to keep his pupils in a high state of self-awareness.

There is another aspect of the teaching that explains the deep

impression it made on the pupils: Gurdjieff's 'cosmology'. We have already touched upon this in speaking of Gurdjieff's teaching on the 'planets' and the 'ray of creation'. Everything in the universe is subject to two laws: the Law of Three and the Law of Seven. We are inclined to think in terms of two forces: positive and negative, darkness and light. Gurdjieff insisted that there is always a third, a neutralizing or reconciling force (he later spoke of Holy Affirming, Holy Denying, and Holy Reconciling). In the Work, the first force is man's desire to change, the second is his laziness and inertia, the third is the new knowledge that can bring about the change. Even the Absolute is composed of three forces, which is why the next level down from it called the totality of all worlds, is subject to three laws. If human beings live passively, making no attempt to create 'essence', when they die they collapse to the very lowest level — the moon — and become 'food for the moon', subject to 96 laws and almost incapable of freedom.

The Law of Seven concerns the energies of the vibrations of the universe, and is obviously connected with the seven levels of the 'ray of creation' (moon, earth, planet sun, solar system, totality of worlds and Absolute — these, of course, should not be regarded literally as *the* moon, *the* earth, and so on, but as levels of being). Gurdjieff explained that the basic vibrations of the universe can be understood by studying the seven musical notes of the tonic scale. There are, he said, two 'weak points' in the scale, between mi and fa, and between ti and doh, and these are the two points where, in actuality, vibrations slow down. These breaks in the scale mean that when we set out to do something, we quite unconsciously change direction at these two points — without even noticing it — and may even end by doing the opposite of what we set out to do. The solution is to apply 'reinforcements' at these two points, and so keep the energies moving in a straight line, so to speak. So, according to Gurdjieff, all attempts to transform oneself will be wasted without some knowledge of the Law of Seven.

Gurdjieff also laid enormous emphasis on a figure he called the

Enneagram: a circle with a triangle in it and each side of the triangle subdivided into two more points. The Enneagram, he said, was a symbol of his whole cosmology, showing the basic laws of the universe. The nine vertices symbolize the seven notes of the octave and the two 'breaks' (although in the Enneagram the break between ti and doh does not seem to be in the right place).

If man is to progress smoothly up the octave of evolution, he needs 'shocks' to help him over the breaks. It is the teacher's job, said Gurdjieff, to administer such shocks, and this obviously explains why he gave his pupils such a hard time.

We can now at least begin to see why Gurdjieff's teaching left his pupils in such a state of excitement. It all seemed to make practical sense, yet it offered a method of 'salvation' that gave it a religious dimension. This is why Ouspensky, like the rest, felt that he had finally received the 'revelation' he had been searching for all his life. Gurdjieff's System provided a practical method of pursuing the aims that he had always explored in a vague and uncoordinated manner. It offered a way of turning his life into a continuous effort to pursue the insights of his nitrous oxide experiences — a way that he could now feel was entirely 'lawful'.

But with the benefit of hindsight, we can see certain things that were not apparent to Ouspensky. The most important of these is that Gurdjieff deliberately *exaggerated* problems to galvanize his pupils into maximum effort. So, for example, when Ouspensky asked about life after death, Gurdjieff replied that most people are so mechanical that there is nothing in them that can survive death. Only when a man has created some degree of 'essence' is there something that can 'survive'. The 'astral body' is not something everybody possesses; it has to be created by strenuous effort and 'friction'. Yet at another time, Gurdjieff told Ouspensky that objects belonging to a dead person contain 'traces' of that person, which enable those still living to maintain contact. And Bennett tells the strange story of how, after he had

lost his mother, Gurdjieff had remarked: 'She is in need of help because she cannot find her way by herself. My own mother is already free and can help her.' He then taught Bennett strenuous visualization exercises that finally — after agonizing effort — succeeded in 'summoning' the presences of Gurdjieff's mother and his own. Both stories seem to indicate an unqualified acceptance of life after death.

There was also exaggeration in Gurdjieff's assertion that most people are machines who possess no freedom whatever. The title of the third volume of his 'testament', *All and Everything,* is *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am',* and it is clear that we all experience the feeling that 'life is real' in all moments of happiness and excitement. In other words, we all experience the 'I am' feeling a thousand times. It does *not* require strenuous effort. Gurdjieff is again exaggerating to keep his pupils 'up to the mark'.

Let us try to reformulate Gurdjieff's basic insights without the exaggeration.

Human beings *are* largely machines. The heart is a pump, the brain is a computer, the joints are levers. And we have achieved our supremacy as the leading species on earth because of the sheer complexity of our mechanism. We all possess a 'robot' who does things for us. When I learn something new — to drive a car, to speak a foreign language — I have to do it painfully and consciously, step by step; then my 'robot' takes over and does it for me. The human robot has learned to handle a complexity of experience that would drive any other animal to nervous breakdown.

Our problem is that such complexity tends to be self-defeating — like owning a library so huge that even the catalogue is a library in itself.

One might say that human beings are 50 per cent 'robot' and 50 per cent 'real person'. When we are happy and excited, the

proportion changes: we become 49 per cent 'robot' and 51 per cent 'real'. These are the moods of 'holiday consciousness' in which we feel happy and wide awake — the moods of 'I am'. In our ordinary daily activities we are roughly 50/50. But as soon as we become tired, we become 51 per cent 'robot' and 49 per cent 'real person'.

Human beings could be compared to motor cars whose batteries recharge as they drive. If a car is left standing in a garage for months, its batteries get flat. Humans have an additional problem: when they do things 'mechanically', they also fail to recharge their vital batteries. It is only when we are driven by a sense of purpose and optimism that we recharge our batteries. Abraham Maslow described a case of a female patient who was so bored with her job in a factory that she became completely devitalized, even ceasing to menstruate. When Maslow learned that she had hoped to make a career in sociology, but had been forced to take the factory job to support her family, he advised her to study sociology at night school. As soon as she did this, the symptoms disappeared. Her sense of purpose was now recharging her batteries. The 'peak experience' could be regarded as a kind of spontaneous discharge of a highly charged battery, a spark of sheer joy.

Now in recognizing that our main problem is that we are too 'robotic', Gurdjieff could see that the basic necessity is to instil into people a high level of purpose. The robot causes us to go 'slack', so that our response to life becomes sluggish and dull. At best we experience the 50/50 state. At worst, we spend most of our time in a 51 per cent robot-state. And this tends to cause boredom and discouragement, so that problems plunge us into depression — which could be regarded as 52 per cent robot. The more robotic we become, the harder it is to escape, for our low vitality prevents us from making the effort required. Such states are extremely dangerous, for we can fall into a condition of permanent *passivity,* merely 'reacting' to life. In these states we become deeply vulnerable, physically as well as emotionally. A California psychiatrist, Wilson van Dusen, has described how

long-term mental patients can become totally passive, staring at a television set all day, and continuing to stare even when it is turned off. This is an excellent image of what is wrong with human consciousness. And long-term passivity can produce physical as well as mental illness.

This explains why Gurdjieff felt justified in 'exaggerating'. And if a person can be galvanized into a sense of urgency, surely that is all that matters?

But we have seen that one problem of exaggerating man's mechanicalness is that it tends to produce a grim and negative state of mind. Gurdjieff told Ouspensky: 'One need not . . . be afraid of efforts; the danger of dying from them is not all that great. It is much easier to die from inaction, from laziness, and from the fear of making efforts.' But as we shall see, Gurdjieff's critics have accused him of being a bully who drove some of his followers into illness, and even — in one well-known case, the writer Katherine Mansfield — into death.

A year after meeting Gurdjieff, Ouspensky began to feel that he was at last beginning to understand the Work. On first meeting the Moscow pupils, he felt that they were artificial, as if playing a role; by the summer of 1916 he saw that this was because they were maintaining a high level of self-observation. Gurdjieff, he noticed, also observed them closely, and placed them in new situations where they would cease to behave formally — for example, taking them on excursions into the countryside or a trip up the Neva. Later on, in Paris, he would organize large dinner parties for the same reason, and force everyone to drink toast after toast in vodka until they were all drunk. He explained to Ouspensky: 'Later on you will see that everyone in the Work is given his own individual tasks corresponding to his type, and his chief feature or his chief fault, that is, something that will give him the opportunity of struggling more intensively against his chief faults.'

The task he gave Ouspensky was to act as a kind of

propagandist, to lead his acquaintances into conversations about the Work. When the whole group was instructed to talk to their acquaintances about the Work, the results made them aware of how difficult it is to communicate meaningfully, even with intelligent people. (Ouspensky was later to go to the opposite extreme and order his followers not to discuss the Work with anyone outside it.)

At other meetings, Gurdjieff tried the experiment of asking his pupils to talk about themselves and their lives. This was also a failure; it turned into an exercise in anecdote that bored everybody. But Ouspensky realized something interesting: that when he began to speak, there were many things that he had no intention of divulging.

On another occasion, Ouspensky was in a gloomy mood and complained to Gurdjieff that he felt they were getting nowhere. To cheer him up, Gurdjieff offered to answer any question. Ouspensky asked about the truth of 'Eternal Recurrence', and Gurdjieff replied — perhaps predictably — that Eternal Recurrence *is* a reality, but that work on oneself can nevertheless alter a man's possibilities. This was a view that Ouspensky incorporated into a revised version of *Ivan Osokin* (the early version had ended on a totally pessimistic note).

Ouspensky was galvanized to new efforts. He began short but intensive fasts without worrying about their effect on his health, as well as practising breathing and concentration exercises. Gurdjieff invited a small group of his pupils to a house in Finland — not far from Petrograd — and was unusually harsh and sarcastic, as if trying to provoke them. He certainly upset Ouspensky when he repeated in front of everyone something unflattering about one of their number which Ouspensky had told him in the greatest confidence.

Here we encounter the essence of the problem that finally caused the break between the two men. Ouspensky was, of course, fully aware that Gurdjieff was attempting to galvanize

them into effort, like an experienced drill sergeant, and that a man who wishes to become a good soldier does not quarrel with the drill sergeant. Yet he must also have been aware that he possessed his own genius, and that he already knew a great deal even before he met Gurdjieff. So he felt that Gurdjieff was going too far in repeating a confidence. *Was* he correct? The question is of fundamental importance. Was Gurdjieff underestimating Ouspensky's 'freedom'? If so, then Gurdjieff himself was capable of misjudgement, even of a kind of stupidity. Ouspensky himself later decided that the answer to that question was yes. Those who regard Ouspensky as a man of genius in his own right will agree.

Almost as if to apologize for his 'bullying' treatment, Gurdjieff now allowed Ouspensky an experience of his 'magical' powers. One evening in Finland, Gurdjieff called three of his pupils into a room, and proceeded to show them certain postures and physical exercises. Gurdjieff always laid great emphasis on physical movements as training for man's 'moving centre'. Anyone who wishes to try out their effect should make an attempt to pat himself on the head with one hand while rubbing his stomach with the other. Gurdjieff's 'movements' often involved doing something different with both hands, both feet, and the head. On this occasion, Ouspensky was impressed by the precision of Gurdjieff's movements. After this, Gurdjieff began to discuss why they could not tell the story of their lives:

> And with this the miracle began.
>
> I can say with complete assurance that Gurdjieff did not use any kind of external methods, that is, he gave me no narcotics nor did he hypnotise me by any of the known methods.
>
> It all started with my beginning to *hear his thoughts* . . . Suddenly I noticed that among the words which he was saying to us all there were 'thoughts' which were intended for me. I caught

> one of these thoughts and replied to it, by speaking aloud in the ordinary way. Gurdjieff nodded at me and stopped speaking. There was a fairly long pause. He sat still saying nothing. After a while I heard his voice inside me as it were in my chest, near the heart. He put a definite question to me . . . I answered him in the affirmative . . . And he at once put another still more definite question to me in the same way . . . And again I answered in the same way. Z and S [Zaharoff and Stoerneval] were visibly astonished . . . This conversation . . . proceeded in this fashion for not less than half an hour.

Back with the others, Gurdjieff made some remark about Ouspensky that drove Ouspensky to walk out in the woods. Suddenly, he saw that Gurdjieff was right:

> . . . what I had considered to be firm and reliable inside myself . . . did not exist. But I had found something else. I knew that he would not believe me and that he would laugh at me if I showed him this other thing. But for myself it was indubitable, and what happened later showed that I was right.

This is an interesting passage because it reveals something that Ouspensky prefers not say openly: that Gurdjieff taunted him about his weakness and his romanticism. This is something that Ouspensky takes care not to reveal in all his work; yet it remains, as Gurdjieff would have said, his 'chief feature'.

We can also see that, if Ouspensky was right in feeling that he had discovered another source of strength within himself, the implication must be that Gurdjieff himself was *not* infallible; his psychological insight was limited, and there were things about Ouspensky that he discounted and
failed to understand.

Back in his own room, Gurdjieff again began to speak 'inside [Ouspensky's] chest', and they held a conversation while Gurdjieff was out on the veranda with others. Ouspensky is again reticent, but it is clear that Gurdjieff was trying to force him to make some promise, or to leave the Work. He gave Ouspensky a month to make up his mind.

The next morning, at breakfast, Gurdjieff again read Ouspensky's mind, and advised him to stop thinking about a certain question. During the next few days, Ouspensky found himself in a strange emotional state, so that he remarked to Gurdjieff: 'How can this be got rid of? I cannot bear it any more.' Gurdjieff's reply was that this was what Ouspensky had been asking for. He was now awake. Ouspensky comments that he is not certain that this was entirely true.

Back in Petrograd, Ouspensky not only continued to converse with Gurdjieff — who was on the train going to Moscow — but to actually see him.

At this time, he says, he also began seeing 'sleeping people'. As he walked along the street, he would see that people were actually asleep, surrounded by their dreams in the form of clouds. When this impression began to fade, he found he could renew it by efforts of self-remembering.

All this convinced Ouspensky that 'paranormal' powers are a by-product of higher states of awareness, and that therefore they cannot be studied 'objectively', as if in a laboratory. The mind needs to be 'awake' first.

In fact, as we have seen, Ouspensky had already made the same discovery during his nitrous oxide experiments. He had 'heard voices' which were sometimes able to reply accurately to his questions, and had also correctly foreseen the precise events that would cause the trip to Moscow to be cancelled.

Ouspensky adds that this higher state of awareness also made

him see, with great clarity, why violence is always bound to be counter-productive. This recognition, he says, was not 'ethical', but practical.

Soon after this, Gurdjieff announced to the group that they all had to make a choice: now they must decide whether they wanted to wake up, or remain asleep. 'In future I shall work only with those who can be useful to me in attaining my aim.' Two people dropped out of the group. It seems clear that what Gurdjieff was demanding of Ouspensky in Finland was total commitment — perhaps to devote his life to spreading the idea of the Work. Ouspensky seems to have agreed.

It may have been Gurdjieff's recognition of what was happening in Russia that caused him to make these demands. The war was going badly; troops were fighting without weapons and without proper clothing. In an offensive that ran out of steam, the Russians lost a million men. The army was demoralized. Many people believed the Tsarina — who was of German birth — wanted the Germans to win. At the end of 1916, the Tsar's *eminence grise* Rasputin was assassinated by Prince Felix Yussupov; he had foretold that if he was killed by a member of the aristocracy, the Russian monarchy would come to an end. In March 1917, riots and strikes broke out in Petrograd, and there was a general mutiny of troops. The Tsar abdicated, and a provisional government took control while the royal family was placed under arrest. In April, Lenin arrived from Switzerland, sent by the Germans to undermine Russia. In July, the Bolsheviks made their first attempt to seize power.

In February, Gurdjieff had made his last visit to Petrograd; when he took his leave of his followers at the station, Ouspensky felt that something unusual had taken place. On the platform, Gurdjieff had seemed 'an ordinary man, like anyone else'. Moments later, when he came to the window of the train, he seemed quite different, 'a man of a quite different order . . . with a quite exceptional importance and dignity in every look and movement as though he had suddenly become a ruling prince or

statesman of some unknown kingdom . . .'

It is possible of course, that Gurdjieff was 'acting' again; most people who knew him felt that he wore a series of masks. But it seems more probable that Ouspensky and the others had witnessed a genuine transformation. This is what Gurdjieff had meant when he said, 'In future I shall only work with those who can be useful in attaining my aim.' He did not state his aim, but it can have been only one thing: he was using his group, and the consciousness induced by teaching them, to raise himself into a higher state of intensity. Ouspensky later observed that teaching other people had the effect of teaching himself. It seems probable that what they witnessed at Petrograd station was the moment in which Gurdjieff achieved his 'transformation' to a more conscious level of power. A journalist who travelled in the same carriage as Gurdjieff was convinced that he was, at the very least, a millionaire oil magnate.

And now, before we accompany Gurdjieff and Ouspensky on the flight that will take them into exile, it is time to pause to look back over what had happened since their meeting two years earlier.

It seems clear that when Gurdjieff left Tashkent and embarked on his career as a teacher in Moscow and St Petersburg, his teaching was still in an undeveloped form. He had almost certainly learnt his 'cosmology' — the 'ray of creation' — from monks or holy men in Central Asia or the Himalayas, and may have arrived at his conclusion that man is 'asleep' from painful personal experience. In the essay 'Glimpses of Truth', which Ouspensky had heard read aloud when he first met Gurdjieff's Moscow pupils, the emphasis is all on the Law of Three and on Gurdjieff's cosmology.

There seems no doubt that Gurdjieff deliberately set out to 'catch' Ouspensky. He admitted that when Ouspensky left on his trip to India and Ceylon, he instructed his pupils to carefully read his articles to determine what sort of man he was. The detailed care with which he answered questions in their early talks

reveals how far he was determined to interest Ouspensky — who was by then a well-known lecturer and author. Gurdjieff wanted to become known, and the best way was to interest men who were already known — Thomas de Hartmann, who was already famous as a ballet composer, was another example.

But for most of the two years after he met Ouspensky, Gurdjieff simply talked. He also planned to present his ballet *The Struggle of the Magicians,* which was full of 'sacred dances'. But he had not yet developed the 'exercises' and methods that became the basic part of the Work after he left Russia. Ouspensky describes how they were introduced to the famous 'Stop!' exercise at Essentuki in 1917: Gurdjieff would shout 'Stop!', and everyone had to freeze, no matter what he was doing. (One man got his fingers severely blistered on a glass of boiling tea.) Gurdjieff explained that this exercise was considered sacred in 'schools', but it seems equally likely that he had just invented it. If not, why had he not mentioned it during the past seven years, since his teaching career began?

There can also be no doubt that his aim, in part at least, was to become a famous teacher. With new pupils, he insisted on total secrecy — they were not allowed to discuss the Work with anyone who was not part of it. Yet when Ouspensky declined to make such a promise, Gurdjieff gave way. And in later years, when Ouspensky had written down his early experiences with Gurdjieff in 'Fragments of an Unknown Teaching',(16) Gurdjieff read it and approved. He was not a charlatan, a man who wanted fame for its own sake. But he certainly did want fame. So it is important to realize that, although Gurdjieff struck his disciples as a superbeing, he developed, like anyone else, by a slow learning process.

The next three years were to see this learning process accelerated. As the Revolution began, Gurdjieff recognized that it would no longer be possible to work in Russia. He sent Ouspensky a postcard saying that he was going back home, to Alexandropol. Ouspensky and the Petrograd group had already

decided to leave, so when Gurdjieff invited Ouspensky to join him, he took a train for the Caucasus. In Tiflis (now Tbilisi), the capital of Georgia, drunken soldiers held meetings on the platform all night, and three were shot — one for theft, the second because he was mistaken for the first, and the third because he was mistaken for the second. In Alexandropol, Ouspensky met Gurdjieff's family, and saw a photograph of Gurdjieff that revealed 'with undoubted accuracy what his profession had been at the time it was made' — he adds that, since this was his own discovery, he will keep it to himself. The photograph was the one that showed Gurdjieff as a stage hypnotist. Ouspensky seems to have tried to keep this aspect of Gurdjieff a secret, possibly because he believed Gurdjieff used it for sexual purposes. (Gurdjieff was later to reveal his former profession in his book *Herald of Coming Good,* published in 1933.)

Ouspensky was impressed by Gurdjieff's filial respect for his father and mother — the father was over 80. Gurdjieff listened to his father's conversation for hours on end, stimulating him with questions.

After two weeks they decided to return to Petrograd. But at Tiflis they met a general who had been one of Gurdjieff's pupils and what he told Gurdjieff made the latter change his mind about returning. He left Ouspensky to go on alone. But before that happened, an interesting conversation took place. When Ouspensky asked how he could strengthen his 'I', Gurdjieff told him that he should already be feeling his 'I' differently. Ouspensky had to admit that he felt exactly the same as usual. But two years later he was to experience this sense of a 'controlling ego', the 'owner' of the horse and carriage, and to know that his years with Gurdjieff *had* borne fruit after all. 'Man number four' had come into being.

In Moscow and Petrograd, Ouspensky passed on to Gurdjieff's students the message that they should join him in the Caucasus. When he returned, Gurdjieff had moved to Essentuki — not far

away— and finally a group of 12 foregathered there. It included Ouspensky's wife and step-daughter, Thomas de Hartmann and his wife Olga, and a pupil called Zaharoff.

Here, during the next six weeks, Gurdjieff introduced them to the 'Stop!' exercise, and to the idea of 'super-effort' — deliberately pushing yourself further when tired. It seems to have been at this point in his career that Gurdjieff began to introduce the strenuous physical exercises that became such a central part of his method. A typical one is described by Ouspensky: sitting on the floor with knees bent and palms close together between the feet, the pupil had to lift one leg and count up to ten, saying 'Om' instead of using numbers, then up to nine, then up to eight, and so on, down to one, then start repeating it all backwards, meanwhile 'sensing' his right eye. Then he had to separate the thumb and 'sense' his left ear. And so on. When this exercise was mastered, the pupils had to add breathing exercises to it, and after that, still more 'complications' were introduced. In addition to this, they were all made to fast. And in spite of physical weakness, they were made to run for miles in the heat, stand with extended arms, or mark time at the double. All these, Gurdjieff explained, were merely 'preliminary' exercises.

But it was during these exercises that Ouspensky had his one experience of 'higher consciousness'. In a room alone, he began to mark time at the double while performing breathing exercises. As he was pouring with sweat and his head was spinning, 'suddenly something seemed to crack or move inside me and my breathing went on evenly and properly at the rate I wanted it to.'

> I shut my eyes and continued to mark time, breathing easily and freely, and feeling exactly as though strength was increasing in me and that I was getting lighter and stronger. I thought that if I could continue to run in this way for a certain time I should get still more interesting results because waves of a joyful trembling had already begun to go through my body which, as I knew

> from previous experiments, preceded what I called the opening of the inner consciousness. But at this moment someone came into the room and I stopped.

Ouspensky says that this taught him that an exercise can be transferred from the mind to the 'moving centre'. This clearly has much in common with William James's 'second wind' and with Bennett's experience at Fontainebleau (see page 190), when the 'breakthrough' was again achieved by strenuous and agonizing physical effort.

All at once, just as the pupils were beginning to feel that they were at last achieving something significant, Gurdjieff shocked them all by announcing that he was dropping the Work, and going to Tuapse, on the Black Sea coast. Ouspensky says that this was the moment when his faith in Gurdjieff first began to waver. It all seemed so pointless. He went to Tuapse with Gurdjieff, then decided to return Petrograd. He stayed there until after the Bolshevik takeover, then, feeling that 'something sickly and clammy was drawing near', he left for the Caucasus again. Ouspensky was to hate Communism with a total and virulent hatred all his life.

Meanwhile, Gurdjieff had decided to move a few miles down the coast, near to Sochi. Typically, he decided to make this a test for his followers. In his book *Our Life with Mr Gurdjieff,* Hartmann describes how Gurdjieff bought a cart, and told them they were going to take a short cut to Sochi over the mountains. The Hartmanns were sent on ahead, and found the climb exhausting in the heat, with their city clothing (Olga was wearing high-heeled shoes). They stopped at an inn for tea, hoping to stay the night, but when Gurdjieff arrived, he decided that the night was so fine that they might as well continue. They stumbled on exhaustedly until two in the morning, when Gurdjieff announced they would make a fire. It was raining, and they had to struggle through the undergrowth to find dry wood. Finally they made tea and most of them lay down to sleep on the hard stones. But Hartmann was

told that he had to keep guard. He sat there until dawn, when Gurdjieff announced it was time to set off. Now Hartmann was told he could lie on top of the luggage. In fact this was worse than walking, for if he dozed off, he fell off the luggage.

Finally, at midday, they passed through a village, bought cooked lamb and beans, and Hartmann had a deep sleep. That night, again, they needed a fire because they could hear the howling of wolves and jackals, which might have killed the horses. They took turns on guard. The next day at noon they found a deserted posthouse, and spent two days recovering. When they resumed their journey, Hartmann observed that he was no longer tired. The 'super-effort' had caused a breakthrough to a higher energy level, James's 'vital reserves'. Eventually, when they arrived at a pleasant little villa near Sochi, Hartmann felt he was in heaven. Nevertheless, he fell ill with typhoid and almost died; he attributed his recovery to the fact that Gurdjieff sat by his bed and somehow 'infused' vitality.

Ouspensky joined them there. So did a Petrograd disciple, Leonid Stoerneval. His wife had been deeply unwilling to leave Petrograd, but shortly after they left, the Bolsheviks took over. Hartmann had had a similar escape: the day after he left Petrograd, soldiers had come to his home to arrest him.

Again, Gurdjieff revealed the unpredictable part of his nature. For some reason, he turned against Zaharoff and virtually forced him to leave. Ouspensky was upset; his faith in Gurdjieff the man — as distinguished from the System — was beginning to collapse.

In February 1918, they moved to another village. The danger now was being cut off by the Bolsheviks. Then Gurdjieff decided to go back to Essentuki. Work there became harder still. They were ordered to fast and the men were separated from the women. The 'movements' became more and more complicated and difficult. The aristocratic Hartmann was made to go to Kislovodsk to sell silk wound on to cards — until Gurdjieff relented. The women were ordered to give up their jewellery, and

Olga de Hartmann cried all night, but dutifully handed it over. Gurdjieff then gave it back to her. But another woman who handed over her jewellery, confident that she would receive it back, never saw it again. Gurdjieff seemed to be teaching in harshly practical parables.

While in Essentuki, Gurdjieff's family arrived — nearly 30 of them. Turks had invaded Alexandropol, and his father had been killed. Gurdjieff was forced to look after this crowd of starving relatives. It was as if fate was subjecting him to the same 'testing' that he was inflicting on his pupils.

Meanwhile, Ouspensky was now at last certain that he had to break with Gurdjieff:

> I saw clearly that I had been mistaken about many things that I had ascribed to G, and that by staying with him now I should not be going in the same direction I went at the beginning.

To try to explain his meaning, he says that if Gurdjieff had all the time been leading him into the 'way of the monk', he would have left — not because he did not respect the way of the monk, but because *it was not his way*. And neither, he felt, was the way the Work was now developing.

Ouspensky had at last recognized what, perhaps, he should have realized three years earlier. Yet he had undoubtedly received a great deal from Gurdjieff. In any case, there was now no going back. All he could do was to move to another house and continue work on *A New Model of the Universe,* as if the meeting with Gurdjieff had never happened.

Five
Success

GURDJIEFF AND his followers left Essentuki at the beginning of August 1918, and made their way 100 miles southwest to the Black Sea. Gurdjieff had succeeded in escaping with his usual incredible effrontery. He had asked the Essentuki Soviet for permission to mount an archaeological expedition to the mountains where, he said, he hoped to find gold. He would need large quantities of alcohol for washing the gold. The Soviet provided the alcohol, together with the necessary tents and other equipment.

Ouspensky, who had also meant to go south, was trapped when Cossacks cut the railway line. So he was forced to spend the autumn and winter in Essentuki. He managed to get a job as a porter, then as a schoolteacher, and so was able to support a numerous 'family' — his wife, stepdaughter, and his stepdaughter's two children. He also started a school library with books that had been 'requisitioned' from their owners. When the White army re-took the town he had hurriedly to tear off the word 'Soviet' from the notice outside the Essentuki Public Library.

At the first opportunity, he finally made his way south, to Ekaterinodar (later Krasnodar), an evil-smelling and ugly city that he loathed on sight. There he began to write a series of articles about his experiences of the Revolution, which he sent off to London. They appeared in *The New Age,* the magazine edited by the charismatic Orage, whose acquaintance Ouspensky had made on his way to India in 1912, and renewed on his way back to Russia in 1914. Ouspensky's condemnation of the Bolsheviks was uncompromising; he talked of the 'dictatorship of the criminal element'.

When Ouspensky mentioned, in one of the letters, that he was

'only alive because my boots and my trousers and other articles of clothing . . . are still holding together', Orage hastened to contact F.S. Pinder, the British government representative in Ekaterinodar, who appointed Ouspensky to his staff, and seems to have paid him from his own pocket.

It was also while in Ekaterinodar that Ouspensky finally 'set up on his own'. He formed a small group and began to lecture to them on Gurdjieff's ideas. It was at this point that he suddenly became aware that now, at last, he was aware of a 'new I'. 'Man number four' was beginning to form inside him, and he experienced a curious new confidence. And in fact, in a sense — although there were still difficulties to come — his troubles were basically over.

But the Reds were winning the civil war. Denikin, the White general, was forced to withdraw to Rostov-on-Don, and the British staff — and the Ouspensky family — went with him. In Rostov Ouspensky met once again Andrei Zaharoff, the man Gurdjieff had driven away from Essentuki. Zaharoff had become totally disillusioned, not only with Gurdjieff, but also with his ideas, and Ouspensky found it impossible to convince him that, no matter what they might both think of Gurdjieff as a person, the ideas were still valid. Carl Bechhofer Roberts, a journalist connected with *The New Age,* spent two weeks with Ouspensky and Zaharoff in their lodging — a draughty barn — drinking home-made vodka. (His experiences are amusingly recorded in an appendix to Ouspensky's 1919 *Letters from Russia.)* A month later, Roberts had escaped to Novorossisk, on the Black Sea, Ouspensky was back in Ekaterinodar, and Zaharoff had died of smallpox. Finally, with the aid of the British, Ouspensky and his family were evacuated to a refugee camp on Prinkipo Island, a suburb of Constantinople. There, once again, he encountered Gurdjieff.

Gurdjieff's band of disciples was now greatly reduced. From Essentuki they had travelled to Maikop, escaped from there by the skin of their teeth as the Reds closed in, and returned to

Sochi. There, to everyone's astonishment, Gurdjieff announced that the group would now break up. The likeliest reason is that they had run out of money. A small number remained, including Gurdjieff's wife, the de Hartmanns and the Stoernevals. When the Turks withdrew from Georgia — which they had been occupying — in late 1918, Gurdjieff decided to return to its capital Tiflis. He arrived there in January 1919, and found it an unexpectedly pleasant place to resume his Work. It was full of artists and intellectuals who had fled from the Bolsheviks, and was virtually a second St Petersburg. Olga de Hartmann became a singer at the opera; her husband became a professor at the Conservatoire. Gurdjieff resumed his teaching, and acquired himself two new disciples, the painter Alexander de Salzmann and his wife Jeanne, a teacher of Jacques Dalcroze's system of dancing, called 'eurythmics'. Gurdjieff attended some of Jeanne de Salzmann's classes, and demonstrated some of his own 'movements'. But he was undoubtedly as much influenced by eurythmics as was that other contemporary guru Rudolf Steiner. Gurdjieff also organized a profitable carpet business. It was in Tiflis that he decided to call his future institute the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man; he even drafted a prospectus, declaring (untruthfully) that it was already in operation in Bombay, Alexandria, Kabul, New York, Chicago, Stockholm, Moscow and Essentuki. Ouspensky, who received a copy, was not impressed. And Bechhofer Roberts, who called at the new institute, reported that Gurdjieff was getting tired of his followers and was anxious to get to Europe. The newly independent Georgia was chaotic, and likely to be attacked by the Reds (as, in fact, it was in 1921). This is why, in May 1920, Gurdjieff and a group of about 30 followers started to make their way to Constantinople; they arrived in June. They were all penniless — the carpets Gurdjieff had tried to take with him as working capital had been seized en route by marauding soldiers — and were forced to start looking for ways of making money in a city that was already crowded with poverty-stricken Russians.

Gurdjieff arrived to find that Ouspensky had already started his own group. When his ex-Master arrived, the ever-loyal

Ouspensky handed it over to him. Although he had decided not to work with Gurdjieff again, the two remained on friendly terms. Ouspensky then set up on his own at the White Russian Club in Pera, the European quarter, and his talents as a lecturer soon brought him such large audiences that he had to apply to an English lady for the loan of her drawing-room. Her name was Winifred Beaumont, and her flat was shared by a young English Intelligence officer called John Godolphin Bennett. Bennett had been invalided out of the army after being blown up — he had had an 'out of the body experience' in the hospital — and had gone one better than Ouspensky in concluding that the answer to the riddles of the world lay in the concept of a *fifth* dimension.

Bennett and Mrs Beaumont were intrigued to hear the noisy shouts that came from her drawing-room — they might have suspected a political meeting, but Ouspensky had given his word that politics would not be discussed, and they both felt he could be trusted. When Bennett asked Ouspensky what they were talking about, and Ouspensky replied, 'The transformation of man', Bennett was even more intrigued. In due course, and under separate auspices, he met Gurdjieff — whose name he already knew, since he had received notification from Indian Intelligence that Gurdjieff was a Russian agent.

Inevitably, he was entranced. When he and Mrs Beaumont were invited to watch the 'dances', they were deeply impressed by the 'Stop!' exercise — the more so as the dancers were all rushing towards them at top speed when Gurdjieff shouted the order. But for some reason, Bennett made no attempt to become part of the group.

Meanwhile, fate was arranging a pleasant surprise for Ouspensky. A young Russian named Nicholas Bessarabov had escaped from Russia after the Revolution, taking with him a copy of *Tertium Organum,* which had deeply impressed him. In America, he approached the well-known architect Claude Bragdon, who was the author of a book on the fourth dimension, and who spoke Russian. Bragdon was equally excited by

Tertium Organum, and he and Bessarabov embarked on a translation. In 1920, Bragdon published the book himself (under the imprint Manas Press), and to his delight and astonishment, it sold 7,000 copies in its first year. He obtained Ouspensky's address from *The New Age,* and sent him some copies of the book, together with a cheque. It was probably the happiest day of Ouspensky's life. He lost no time in writing to Bragdon to ask him if he could help him to get to London or New York. Again, fate was working overtime on Ouspensky's behalf. As Bragdon was about to reply in the negative, he received a telegram from Lady Rothermere, the wife of the British newspaper magnate, saying that she was deeply impressed by *Tertium Organum* and would like to meet its publisher. The result of the meeting was a cable for £100 to Ouspensky, and an invitation to come to London with all expenses paid.

Fortune was smiling on Ouspensky. Probably only one person in Constantinople would have been able to obtain him a visa, and that person happened to be head of British Intelligence there — John Bennett. It took three months, but by August, the Ouspenskys were ready to sail.

They arrived to a fairy-tale reception. The beautiful Lady Rothermere, a blue-eyed blonde, threw a magnificent party for them, at which they ate with gold knives and forks from what looked like gold plates. The fairy-tale continued; when Ouspensky gave his first lectures in Lady Rothermere's studio in St John's Wood, they were attended by the cream of London's intelligentsia, including Orage, T.S. Eliot, Aldous Huxley, Gerald Heard, and a long list of doctors, psychologists, editors and other professional men. The British are notoriously impervious to ideas, but Ouspensky's build-up had been impressive: a mysterious foreign philosopher who had been forced to flee from the Bolsheviks, had endured immense hardships, and then, against all the odds, had made his way to London to present his new message. It all made him an irresistible attraction. And when the lectures turned out to be, in fact, startlingly new and strange, the conquest was complete. Ouspensky became the intellectual

flavour of the month.

In retrospect, it is easy to understand why. The First World War had left behind a general feeling of nausea and disillusionment. Ezra Pound had written in *Mauberley:*

> There died a myriad,
> And of the best among them,
> For an old bitch gone in the teeth,
> For a botched civilisation.

It was the poem that, more than any other, inspired Eliot's *Waste Land.* This was the age of *The Waste Land,* of *Ulysses,* of Gertrude Stein's lost generation, of Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* and Scott Fitzgerald's tales of the jazz age. Orage himself had been virtually discovered by Shaw, who had financed *The New Age.* But Shaw was now regarded as outdated. Orage considered himself rather as a disciple of Nietzsche — a 'revaluer of values'. Even before the war, he had announced himself an 'immoralist', one who rejected all the old values. In this he was probably inspired more by the immensely successful novel *Sanine* by Artsybashev, in which the hero is the totally 'natural man', who believes that all the old sexual and religious values are illusions, like the emperor's clothes. Pre-war London had been obsessed by everything Russian, from the works of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky to the Diaghilev ballet, and novels like Andreyev's *Red Laugh* and Artsybashev's *Breaking Point* (in which virtually everyone commits suicide) had brought the notion of total moral negation to London long before *The Waste Land*.

A young man named C.S. Nott, who was to become one of Gurdjieff's most faithful followers, expressed the general malaise when he wrote:

> Although I had had a religious upbringing and . . . been a Sunday-school teacher and lay preacher . . . organised religion now had no content for me, nor could it give me a satisfying answer to the

> questions that arose in me as a consequence of
> the disillusionment resulting from the war.

Disillusionment had become the watchword:

> Unreal city
> Under the brown fog of a winter dawn . . .

In this atmosphere of emptiness and boredom, everything seemed to be disintegrating. In music, tonality was dissolving into the discords of Schönberg and Stravinsky. In art, surrealism and Dadaism seemed to make a mockery of the tradition of centuries. In philosophy, the logical positivists announced that all talk of metaphysics and values was meaningless. In psychology, Freud's sexual theory reduced the unconscious mind to a basement full of decaying rubbish and religion to a communal lie.

And now, into this scene of desolation, came a prophet from Holy Russia, announcing devastating truths that also seemed startlingly original. Here was a complex system of ideas that satisfied the sceptical intellectuals, but which also asserted that salvation could be achieved by effort. None of his audience had ever heard anything remotely like it before. The most up-to-date of them were interested in Freud, Jung and Adler, but this new doctrine seemed to sweep everything before it like an autumn gale. After that first meeting, the stunned Orage told Claude Bragdon that 'Mr Ouspensky is the first teacher I have ever met who has impressed me with the ever-increasing certainty that he knows and can do.'

Yet the first impression Ouspensky made on his audiences was far from impressive. One hostile commentator, John Carswell, has written: 'Ouspensky, though strikingly large and blond almost to the point of albinism, was in some ways unimpressive.' The writer David Garnett thought he looked rather like Woodrow Wilson: 'The same lavish display of false teeth, the same baffled, unseeing eye, the same aura of high thinking and patent medicines.' Another member of his audience, Paul Selver, found

Ouspensky 'quite monumentally boorish. He was one of those exasperating Russians who doggedly refuse to credit any other Slav nation with artistic ability. He sneered when I expressed the view that there were several Czech or Serbian poets of outstanding greatness. I had read them and he had not, but he contemptuously dismissed my remark with a sweeping gesture, as though consigning these unspeakable rhymesters to a garbage heap.'

Roland Kenney, a socialist who became editor of the *Daily Herald,* wrote, 'When sitting in reflection or repose, he hunched himself together and looked like a dejected bird huddling up in a rainstorm.' But he put his finger on the essential when he added: 'He was obviously a man of a dominant if not domineering type of character, with determination — or obstinacy — written over his every feature.' And another writer, Rom Landau, who also became an Ouspensky disciple, speaks of his 'strongly dictatorial manner'.

Ouspensky probably did not have the slightest interest in contradicting Selver's opinion of Czech and Serbian poets, and certainly no interest in exalting Russians at their expense; he was simply not interested in what he considered to be literary small-talk, or in questions he regarded as a waste of time. When one lady in his audience asked if the Buddha had reached the seventh level of consciousness, he replied, 'I don't know' without even looking up. He was there to teach them something he had discovered, and he did not believe in wasting time.

What he had to say was, as we know, somewhat depressing: he informed his audiences that they had virtually no free will, that they were made up of hundreds of little 'I's', and that they were actually asleep. Yet this sweeping and oversimplified doctrine — rather like a non-political Marxism — created an effect of revelation. One member of his audience was a Jungian psychologist named Maurice Nicoll. He rushed home from his first Ouspensky lecture to tell his wife, still recovering from having their first baby: 'You must come and hear Ouspensky. He

is the only man who has ever answered my questions.' Nicoll appeared to be 'irradiated by an inner light', and did not even ask to see the baby. As a result of his contact with Ouspensky, he broke with Jung, who had hoped that Nicoll would be his chief exponent in London.

It was Nicoll who talked to his friend Kenneth Walker, Hunterian Professor at the Royal College of Surgeons, who had just written a children's book about Noah's Ark. Gurdjieff's ideas, he said, represented a kind of Noah's Ark in the modern flood of violence and unbelief. Walker, as we have seen, felt that the atmosphere at Ouspensky's lecture was a little like the Presbyterian churches of his childhood. But he was also impressed by the scientific precision of Ouspensky's mind, and the lack of the usual idealistic waffle about Spirit, Love and so on. (One 'occultist', A.E. Waite, walked out, indignantly saying, 'Mr Ouspensky, there is no love in your system.') By now, Ouspensky's lectures had moved to 38 Warwick Gardens, Lady Rothermere having —inevitably — grown bored with the Work.

Gurdjieff, in the meantime, had failed to find the security he was looking for. He had left Constantinople for Germany, first for Berlin, then for Hellerau, near Dresden, where he hoped to take over the buildings left empty by the original Jacques Dalcroze Institute. They were owned by a man called Harold Dohrn, and parts were already let out to a smaller version of the Dalcroze Institute, to the Progressive schoolmaster A.S. Neill, and to another German headmaster named Karl Baer. But Gurdjieff wanted the whole place, and seems to have persuaded Dohrn to lease it to him. Neill and Baer naturally objected, and since they had signed leases, they had a strong case. Dohrn changed his mind, and when, according to Neill, Gurdjieff took him to court, protested that Gurdjieff had hypnotized him into agreeing to let him lease the whole building. Gurdjieff apparently lost the case. His biographer James Webb thinks it highly probable that he did use his hypnotic powers, in spite of the fact that, according to *Life is Real Only Then, When 'I Am',* he had renounced them some time before 1910 because they retarded his spiritual

progress. This is not to suggest that Gurdjieff stared into Dohrn's eyes like Svengali and ordered him to go to sleep. The 'telepathic' episode in Finland described by Ouspensky makes it clear that he knew how to build up a level of heightened vitality and to use it to establish some kind of direct influence over others.

Gurdjieff acquired some of Dalcroze's best pupils, but he still had no institute. So, in 1922, he went to London and gave a talk to Ouspensky's students. Ouspensky had never made any secret of the fact that the ideas were not his own, but had originated with Gurdjieff. So there was considerable excitement when it was learned that the Master himself was coming to see them. His first talk was on 13 February, 1922. Gurdjieff had now shaven his head, so that he looked stranger and more Asiatic than ever. Ouspensky's English was heavily accented, but more or less accurate; Gurdjieff's was purely functional, and he spoke in a kind of shorthand. When one lady asked what it would be like to be conscious in essence, he replied expressively: 'Everything more vivid.' At this first talk he emphasized the way we all become more 'mechanical' as we get older, and how, consequently, tremendous effort is needed to generate new energy.

At a later lecture he spoke briefly about man's many 'I's' and inability to govern the emotions. Then, after speaking for barely five minutes, he began to take questions. This was, in fact, one of his favourite methods, for he believed that mere talk may simply fail to penetrate, while individual questions revealed what his listeners really wanted to know. (Ouspensky came to adopt the same method.) On this occasion, he made the important comment that the chief cause of our weakness is 'our inability to apply our will to all three of our centres simultaneously'. He gave an example of how the total will might be applied to the moving centre — that a prisoner whose only chance of escape depended upon throwing a note written on a ball of paper through a high and inaccessible window would concentrate his whole being to make sure he succeeded. But the real problem was to apply the

same will to all three centres — physical, intellectual and emotional — at the same time.

Orage, who was present, was even more deeply impressed with Gurdjieff than with Ouspensky. In fact, he now saw that Ouspensky had intellectualized Gurdjieff's teaching, and therefore, in a sense, 'falsified' it.

It was now Gurdjieff's ambition to open his institute in London. But he had reckoned without his reputation as a Russian spy. He was interviewed by the security services, and their verdict on him seems to have been unfavourable. (There is, in fact, some evidence that he had worked for the Russian Secret Service in Tibet.) In spite of the testimony of a committee of doctors — including Nicoll and Walker — before the Home Secretary, Gurdjieff's application to move to London was refused. Even Lady Rothermere's influence failed to do him any good. So he packed his bags — undoubtedly to Ouspensky's relief — and left for Paris. There he quickly found an ideal site for the Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man near Fontainebleau; it was a chateau called the Prieuré des Basses Loges, some 40 miles from Paris. It had formerly been the home of Madame de Maintenon, second wife of Louis XIV. Gurdjieff had no money, but Ouspensky raised it for him, with a large contribution from Lady Rothermere, so that he was able to lease the Priory for a year, with an option to buy. He sent for his pupils — who were still waiting in Berlin — and flung himself into violent activity to make money. Selling carpets would probably be less profitable than in Russia, so Gurdjieff leased two restaurants, went into the oil business, and set up as a psychiatrist specializing in drug addiction and alcoholism. (He seems to have had considerable success in this field although, regrettably, we lack details.)

Ouspensky came to Paris to offer help. While he was away, rumours began to circulate among his London pupils about Gurdjieff's tendency to seduce his female students. With typical loyalty, Ouspensky wrote to Orage to ask him to squash these rumours.

Orage himself had already decided to go and join Gurdjieff. After listening to the Master's talks, he felt as if he had received a religious Call. He was becoming tired of being an editor — since pre-war days the circulation of *The New Age* had slumped — and of the London literary scene. When he called on Ouspensky in the autumn of 1922 to ask his advice, Ouspensky, who had been watching Orage from the window of his flat, replied with typical brevity: 'I can see you have already made up your mind, so why ask me?' And so began the exodus from London which would also include Nicoll and his fellow doctor James Young. John Bennett, back from Constantinople, would also become a regular weekend visitor at the Priory.

Orage must have wondered whether he had jumped out of the frying pan into the fire. In the seven years since he had met Ouspensky, Gurdjieff had ceased to rely on verbal teaching to convey his message; he was looking for some form of 'action'. Even in Petrograd he had recognized that the discipline required by dancing could help his students to unite the three centres. The deliberate hardships and privations — beyond the demands of the situation — that he had imposed upon the disciples who followed him to the Caucasus had strengthened his belief in the efficacy of 'super-effort'. His discovery of Dalcroze's method suggested an extension of the Eastern dances he had presented in Tiflis in *The Struggle of the Magicians*. So had the 'Stop!' exercise. So at last Gurdjieff had a system of physical exercises to offer, as well as a system of ideas. And the starting point was super-effort.

When Orage arrived at the Priory, he was first of all told not to smoke — which 'almost killed him' — then handed a spade and told to dig. The day began around 4 a.m. with a light breakfast of coffee and rolls. Then he was made to dig until evening. Orage did not even have the consolation that it was useful work that would improve the Priory; sometimes Gurdjieff made his followers dig a ditch one day and fill it in the next. Orage, although tall, was an overweight man, and he was soon in such a state of exhaustion that he often found himself in tears. Then

one day at the end of five months, 'in the depths of despair' and feeling he could go on no longer, he decided to make one more extra effort. To his astonishment, he suddenly began enjoying the digging. And Gurdjieff, who had been observing him from a distance, suddenly said: 'Now Orage, I think you dig enough — let us go and drink coffee.' For he had other plans for Orage than growing vegetables. His experience with Ouspensky had shown him the value of 'intellectual' pupils. Orage was to be Ouspensky's replacement as his chief propagandist.

On 13 December, 1923, Gurdjieff's followers gave the first public performance in the West of the 'movements', at the Champs Elysées Theatre, and although reviews were mixed, it made a considerable impact. Orage was not present; together with Dr Stoerneval he was on his way to New York to further Gurdjieff's ambition to conquer the world.

Meanwhile, back in Warwick Gardens, Ouspensky was teaching Gurdjieff's ideas in his own way — intellectually. Inevitably, he laid enormous emphasis on the cosmology — the ray of creation, the Law of Three, the Law of Seven and the Enneagram. With his thick glasses and dry manner, he was not capable of inspiring the same fascination and devotion as the Master in Paris, yet his students gradually found that he was becoming an addiction. In *Venture with Ideas,* Kenneth Walker has recorded how, to begin with, he found Ouspensky interesting and original, but felt no compulsion to go to every meeting. Little by little, as he tested Ouspensky's ideas about lack of self-awareness, he began to feel an increasing compulsion to return; finally, he reached the stage where Ouspensky's lectures were the most important thing in his life. He was particularly impressed by his comments about 'wastage'. We all have a certain amount of energy to carry us through the day; but we waste so much in useless activities and negative emotions that we have no chance of having energy left over for personal evolution. Walker discovered:

> The more I put into practice the psychological principles of the System, the more convinced I

> became of their value. I found, for example, that with their help I was able to overcome certain difficulties in my professional life, difficulties resulting from negative imagination. I no longer lay awake at night, as I formerly did, listening for the telephone to ring and for the night-sister to tell me that the patient on whom I had operated had suddenly collapsed. I ceased to wonder during the small hours of the morning whether it would not have been better for me to have done this rather than that, for by now I had fully realised the futility of such thoughts. And as the wastage of energy through worry and identification lessened I found myself able to do more and with steadily increasing efficiency.

After publication of *A New Model of the Universe* in 1931, the number of Ouspensky's pupils began to increase. Soon there were so many that he had to hold two meetings a week. New faces continued to appear, but many of them dropped out almost immediately. One Spiritualist who asked Ouspensky his views on life 'on the other side' was offended when Ouspensky replied that it was far more important to study life on this side. Another man was upset because Ouspensky brushed aside his attempt to translate the ideas of the System into religious terminology, and also failed to return. Ouspensky did not mind in the least. In fact, he explained that one of the major principles of the Work was 'artificially produced friction', and that this often involved irritating everybody. Gurdjieff himself constantly applied this method at the Priory, even to setting his pupils against one another.

As for Ouspensky, his students noticed that he no longer went to see Gurdjieff in Paris. There had been a total break, no one knew why. Ouspensky's old friend Mouraviev tells a story of how, when asked about this break, Ouspensky replied: 'If someone close to you, your near relative, turned out to be a criminal, what would you do?' This sounds like more than an intellectual disagreement, and the likelihood is that Ouspensky had received

confirmation of the rumours about seduction that he had ordered Orage to suppress.

When Ouspensky visited New York many years later, he was asked again about the break with Gurdjieff, and replied simply that when he had discovered that 'Gurdjieff was wrong', he had to leave him. But since Ouspensky continued to teach a system that was basically Gurdjieff's, it is hard to understand what he meant by the assertion that Gurdjieff was wrong.

The obvious difference between Ouspensky's 'method' and Gurdjieff's is that Ouspensky's was much gentler: it did not consist of trying to bring people to a point of 'second wind' by driving them to near exhaustion. Yet Ouspensky himself came to feel that more actual 'work' was required. In 1933, the group decided to acquire a house, and a suitable property was found at Hayes, on the Great West Road out of London. Here the assorted group of professional men and women did physical work — gardening, woodwork, housework — but the aim was largely self-observation. Walker has a delightful story of two of them being sent out to beat carpets. His approach was simple — raise the carpet off the ground with one hand and beat it with the other. His companion wanted to suspend the carpet from a line, and spent a long time finding a suitable clothesline and stringing it between two trees. It proved to be too low and had to be raised. After a series of vicissitudes that sound like *Three Men in a Boat,* they finally started to beat the carpet, and the rope snapped. It can be seen why Ouspensky's students seem to have enjoyed the process of getting to know themselves through self-observation.

Ouspensky explained that one of the main problems with civilized human beings is their 'false personalities', the front they have built up to meet the world. 'Madame Ouspensky', who seems to have been in many ways a stronger character than her husband, had an eagle eye for weakness, and a deadly gift for mimicry. Walker describes her imitations of 'Mr N.' arriving late for lunch and hoping no one had noticed, 'Miss D.' dusting a

room as if applying powder to her nose, 'Mr M.' grinding coffee beans with as much effort as he would put into raising a heavy bucket from a deep well. She also had a gift of words — most of them in Russian — and had no hesitation in making remarks like 'You are a warning to us all and quite useless' or describing someone's conversation as 'pouring emptiness into a void'. She likened the 'false personality' to a huge hot-air pie which the owner carried about on a tray in order to be admired, but which had to be treated very carefully, or its thin crust would be damaged.

All this, Walker explains, developed in them the ability to laugh at themselves and at one another, and made for a relaxed and happy atmosphere.

Madame Ouspensky differed from her husband in having a strong religious bent, and so spent much time arranging readings from world scriptures — the sayings of the Buddha, the *Bhagavad Gita,* texts of Taoism and Sufism, even the Church Fathers. And Ouspensky, who had always insisted that the Fourth Way should be regarded as a scientific method, seems to have accepted all this without protest. According to his own doctrine of sleep and mechanicalness, religious readings should have been useless, a method of self-deception. The fact that he accepted them seems to indicate that he acknowledged that the world's great religions have fundamentally the same aim as the Work. On the other hand, the mystery may be explained simply by the fact that Madame Ouspensky had preferred to be at the Priory with Gurdjieff rather than in London with her husband, and that Gurdjieff's attitude to religion was quite unlike Ouspensky's. When Gurdjieff finally sent her away, she came to England with the deepest reluctance, and she and Ouspensky continued to live separately. (In *The Harmonious Circle,* James Webb records that Ouspensky had a mistress.)

Within three years, Ouspensky's community had become so successful that they decided they needed a larger place, and moved to a house at Virginia Water, near Ascot. But this had

disadvantages; Lyne Place was so large that the atmosphere of intimacy was lost, and they felt they belonged to an institution. They also saw less of the Ouspenskys. But they moved a step further in the direction of the Priory by felling timber, building a sawmill, and farming on a larger scale. And after a few years, Ouspensky went still further in Gurdjieff's direction by introducing training in 'the movements'. 'Head, body, arms and legs often moved in different rhythms and when it seemed natural to turn in a certain direction the exercise often dictated that one should turn in the opposite direction,' according to Walker. He goes on:

> It was difficult at the end of a hard day's work in London to drive out some twenty odd miles into the country in order to take part in these supremely difficult exercises. At such times the flimsiest excuse seemed to provide a valid reason for not going. A whole conversation would start up inside me; the fog was getting thicker . . . next day would be a heavy day . . . But the strange thing was that however fatigued I might be when I began Gurdjieff's difficult exercises I always drove back to London so full of energy that I had no desire to go to bed.

But Ouspensky now recognized that the sheer success of his enterprise had become his main problem. 'He could either cut down the size of the group and carry on more intensive work with a smaller following, or else he could open the door wider and allow more people to enter.' The latter course, which might seem self-defeating, was the one they chose. Instead of the Warwick Gardens flat (which they had kept on), they would find a larger house in London. One was eventually found in Hammersmith. But with the war approaching, the Ouspenskys apparently decided that they needed some innocent 'cover'. Why this should be so is not clear, and it seems likely that it was a hangover from the old days of 'secrecy', when the notion that they were a secret society formed an additional bond. (In fact, Ouspensky *was* under Home Office surveillance in the late '30s as a potential

Russian agent, but was not even aware of it.) At all events, the group decided to call themselves the Historico-Psychological Society, and claim to be studying Eastern religions. They would even present public lectures on 'appropriate subjects', and impart their real purpose only to members of the audience who seemed suitable . . .

While Ouspensky had been building up his own secure following in England, Gurdjieff's group had been through some strange vicissitudes. Throughout the inter-war years Gurdjieff's main problem was money. Ouspensky built up a following of well-off disciples who could afford to pay for their instruction; Gurdjieff had a large group of Russians who needed to be supported. He drove himself so hard during the early days of the Priory that one night, driving back from Paris, he was unable to stay awake. He pulled his car into the side of the road, and was awakened the next morning when a farm wagon tried to get past. His night in the open led to a chill whose effects were long lasting.

Then malicious gossip was caused by the death of the writer Katherine Mansfield at the Priory in January 1924. She was rumoured to have been worked to death by the demonic 'magician'. In fact, she had arrived there — in October 1923 —already dying of tuberculosis. Gurdjieff had the curious idea of placing her bed over a barn where she could smell the odour of cows, but it did no good; she died after an evening of watching the Gurdjieff dances.

By that time, Orage was in New York preparing the way for Gurdjieff's arrival. He disembarked towards the end of December, and was taken to a bookshop on 44th St, whose part-owner promptly fell in love with him. A few days later, Orage gave his first lecture, explaining to his audience that Gurdjieff had been a member of a group called the Seekers after Truth, who had spent years searching for esoteric knowledge in the East, and had brought back its secrets to the West. There was an element of truth in this, but it seems almost certain that the Seekers after Truth were a product of Gurdjieff's imagination.

In early January 1924, Gurdjieff arrived, together with the Hartmanns and other followers. A first performance of the sacred dances was given in a small hall whose stage had been reconstructed by the group. It was free, and Gurdjieff himself handed out tickets in the foyer, scrutinizing the faces of the people and ignoring some of them. In early February there was a performance at the Neighbourhood Playhouse; it lasted for four hours, and left the audience deeply impressed. In addition to the dances, Gurdjieff's pupils demonstrated certain 'magic' tricks involving telepathy. A pupil in the audience would take some object from a member of the audience, and 'transmit' it to someone on stage, who would accurately describe it. The names of operas were also 'transmitted', and Hartmann would then play extracts from them on the piano. 'Pictures' were 'transmitted' to the artist de Salzmann, who drew them on large sheets of paper. Gurdjieff explained — through Orage — that some of these demonstrations were 'tricks', some were 'half-tricks', and some were genuine psychical phenomena; but he left it to the audience to guess which was which. One young man named Stanley Nott confessed himself totally baffled. The writer Llewellyn Powys said that the pupils were like a hutchful of hypnotized rabbits, while another commentator described Gurdjieff as looking like a riding master.

But in the novelty-hungry America of the jazz age, this search for salvation through self-knowledge made only a temporary impact, and audiences declined. A trip to Chicago — at the invitation of the Diaghilev choreographer Adolf Bolm — was a success, as was a final performance at Carnegie Hall. But financially, the trip was not as successful as Gurdjieff had hoped.

Then, in July 1924, it suddenly looked as if Gurdjieff's interesting career had been prematurely terminated. He was driving back from Paris to the Priory when his car crashed into a tree; he was found lying on his back beside it. Doctors diagnosed serious concussion. (Ouspensky, who visited the Priory during this period, believed that Gurdjieff was being punished by higher powers for his transgressions.) When Gurdjieff finally recovered,

he announced that he had decided to close down the Priory, and most of the Russians left. Gurdjieff himself, apparently determined to transmit his ideas to posterity, began to write the first series of *All and Everything, Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson,* a work that became famed for its impenetrability and for the weirdness of its neologisms.

In *The Harmonious Circle,* James Webb makes the interesting suggestion that Gurdjieff arranged his own accident. He points out that Gurdjieff showed no outward sign of having been in a car crash. He was found lying beside the car with his head on a cushion. When brought back from the hospital, he was unconscious for five days, yet his fist clenched violently when Madame de Hartmann took his pulse. He is also reported to have told his attendants where to massage him.

The accident itself is a mystery. That day, Gurdjieff's car had been in the garage for its steering column to be checked. It seems odd that the steering column should then have failed — although perhaps credible enough for anyone with experience of garages. However, also that day, Gurdjieff's secretary Olga de Hartmann had been given power of attorney, and told to return to the Priory by train, instead of — as usual — in Gurdjieff's car. She was irritated, since it was a hot day, and she would have preferred to travel in the open car. She was also puzzled when Gurdjieff cancelled an appointment at the last moment; he was normally thoughtful when dealing with people outside the Work. At the time of the crash, at about 4.30 in the afternoon, she was awakened from a doze by Gurdjieff's voice calling her name. Since we know Gurdjieff possessed telepathic powers, could this not also have been part of the plan?

If Webb is correct, what could have been the purpose of such a deception? The answer may be that Gurdjieff was sick of being the 'circus master' and guru. His power to fascinate and arouse devotion made him the slave of his own disciples. He had already behaved in a similar manner in Russia when he had abruptly announced the dissolution of the group. Before the

accident, he spent two days a week in Paris, and he may often have wished it could have been more. After all, in London, Ouspensky lived quietly in his flat, and gave lectures once a week. In France, Gurdjieff spent most of his time in the midst of his disciples, or trying to make money to support them.

The accident certainly changed all that. Large numbers of followers left the Priory — particularly the Russians, who were the biggest drain on Gurdjieff's resources. Olga de Hartmann took over the running of the place. Gurdjieff had told them: 'All my life I have lived for others. Now I will live for myself a while.'

How does Webb's theory explain the fact that Gurdjieff's hands *were* lacerated, and that many of his followers were shocked by the change in him? The obvious possibility is that, in faking his accident, Gurdjieff failed to jump out of the car quickly enough.

What shocked the disciples was not so much that Gurdjieff had had an accident as that, according to his own teaching, he should have been 'beyond' the law of accident. He possessed 'essence', and essence is subject to the laws of destiny, not accident.

But whether Gurdjieff's car crash was accident, destiny or play-acting, it undoubtedly freed him from the trap that had closed around him. After 1924, the Priory was suddenly a quieter place.

Six
'There is no System'

ONE OF our main sources for Ouspensky's final years is Stanley Nott, the young Englishman who had been introduced to Gurdjieff's teaching through Orage. In *Journey through this World: The Second Journal of a Pupil,* Nott described a visit to Ouspensky in London in the spring of 1935. He had seen Ouspensky only once before and, on that occasion had, like most people, found him rather cold and detached; now he was surprised to find him a warm and friendly man. But Madame Ouspensky proved to be a dragon, and at one point Nott had to remonstrate: 'I didn't come here to be put through a catechism, but to have a friendly conversation.' Nott lent Ouspensky a copy of the typescript of *Beelzebub's Tales,* about which he was obviously intensely curious. Nott regarded it as a kind of Bible. Ouspensky agreed to allow Nott to attend one of his groups — he told him that he now had more than 1,000 pupils — on condition that he did not talk about *Beelzebub*. But after a few glasses of wine he began to relax and unburden himself on the subject of Gurdjieff:

> You know, when Gurdjieff started his Institute in Paris I did everything I could for him. I raised money for him and sent him pupils, many of them influential people. When he bought the Prieuré I went there myself and Madame stayed for some time. But I found that he had changed from when I knew him in Russia. He was difficult in Essentuki and Constantinople but more so in Fontainebleau. His behaviour had changed. He did many things that I did not like, but it wasn't what he did that upset me, it was the stupid way he did them. He came to London to my group and made things very unpleasant for me. After

this I saw that I must break with him . . .

He went on to say that he was convinced that Gurdjieff had 'lost contact with the source' after Essentuki, and that he had never recovered from his car accident. Nott denied this, but could see that nothing he could say would alter Ouspensky's opinion. 'I began to see traces of the inflexible mental attitude that besets Russians . . . once they have adopted a mental attitude to a given situation they will stick to it, whatever the cost.'

According to Nott, the break had come after a visit from Gurdjieff to Ouspensky's London group in 1922 (when Gurdjieff was accompanied by Pinder). Gurdjieff had told Ouspensky that he was too intellectual, and was working on the wrong lines. If he wished to *understand* he must stop and start to work with Gurdjieff again . . . Understandably, Ouspensky rejected this — after being in the Work for seven years he must have felt that he understood it as well as he ever would. In a sense he was right; and the point is underlined by the fact that he handed Nott the typescript of *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin,* which he had been revising. Ouspensky had already surrendered enough of his individuality to Gurdjieff.

Nott, of course, had no doubt whatever that Gurdjieff's outbursts of rudeness and eccentricity were carefully calculated to bring enlightenment to his pupils, and the memoirs of some of these pupils — like Fritz Peters — make it clear he was fundamentally correct. Yet, as we have seen, it is also clear that he failed to recognize that Ouspensky possessed his own kind of genius, and that he was right to wish to go his own way. An Ouspensky who returned to Gurdjieff as a disciple would have been emasculated.

At the first meeting Nott attended, Ouspensky arrived half an hour or so late, after an advanced pupil had already asked the audience for questions. Then Ouspensky answered the questions one by one. 'As the evening went on,' says Nott, 'I became more and more impressed with the breadth and clarity

of his massive and powerful mind — so far as *knowledge* was concerned.' Nott continued to feel, however, that Ouspensky was missing Gurdjieff's basic point.

Nevertheless, as they shared glasses of red wine, Nott began to feel 'a real affection' for Ouspensky. The problem, he saw, was that Ouspensky wanted to 'come to an understanding' with Gurdjieff — and that was impossible. You either accepted Gurdjieff as a teacher or you didn't. The two attitudes —Ouspensky's and Nott's — were incompatible. Ouspensky felt that knowledge was an objective fact, like a mathematical table; a teacher might be useful as a catalyst, but in the ultimate sense, no teacher is 'necessary'. He obviously felt that Nott's tendency to accept Gurdjieff as an infallible guru was a sign of a feeble intellect.

Yet in spite of his success as a teacher, Ouspensky's dissatisfaction with his own progress was plain. He told Nott one day that it was now necessary to get in touch with 'an esoteric school'. 'There must be schools, either in Europe or the Near East.' In effect, he was back at square one.

Gurdjieff's comment, when Nott told him that he liked Ouspensky, was: 'Ouspensky very nice man to talk to and drink vodka with, but he is weak man.'

Reflecting on this later, Nott concluded that Ouspensky's weakness lay in his emotional centre. Intellectuals — like Shaw and Bertrand Russell — are particularly prone to this: ' . . . one expects them to be adult emotionally, and they are not.'

The point is underlined by Nott's story of Ouspensky's comment when Nott asked him if he had read the typescript of *Beelzebub:* 'No, it sticks in my throat.' *Beelzebub* is, admittedly, an infuriatingly obscure book. Yet Ouspensky's failure to try to get to grips with it reveals that his remarkable intellect was hobbled by pride and touchiness.

In spite of their disagreements, Gurdjieff continued to feel kindly towards the Ouspenskys, and sent them parcels of delicacies every time Nott returned to London from the Prieuré. One day, Madame Ouspensky asked Nott what he got from Gurdjieff. His answer is significant:

> Mr Gurdjieff says things to me about myself which hit me right in my feelings, in my essence, so that I can never forget them; and little by little the effect is to change something in me and give me more understanding of myself and other people; at the same time it is accompanied by a realisation of how little I actually do understand. Mr Ouspensky appeals to my mind and I'm never tired of listening to him. But this doesn't change things in myself. I think I can say that I get more for inner work from one lunch with Mr Gurdjieff than from a year of Mr Ouspensky's groups.

Oddly enough, Madame Ouspensky replied: 'Yes, I think I know what you mean.'

Another story of Nott's makes the point even more powerfully. In the second half of the 1930s he was depressed by the rise of the Nazis, and by setbacks in his personal life — including an accident in which his son lost a leg. He went to see Gurdjieff in Paris, and after lunch, Gurdjieff asked him into his sitting-room. Then Gurdjieff sat at the harmonium and began to play, 'keeping his eyes fixed on me with a look of deep compassion and power'.

> Little by little I became aware that he was conveying something to me both through the music — the combination of the notes —and by the telepathic means which he understood so well. A change began to take place in me; I began to understand something, and a feeling of conscious hope and conscious faith began to displace the dark hopeless depression.

When he left 'a healing of the psychic wounds had begun'.

Back in London, Ouspensky was lecturing to crowded audiences in Hammersmith. But Madame Ouspensky had become seriously ill. To Nott's astonishment, Ouspensky decided that Gurdjieff was the only one who could do anything for her. And in spite of Ouspensky's comment that he felt Gurdjieff had now lost touch with the 'source', Nott agreed to try to persuade Gurdjieff to come to England — Madame Ouspensky being too ill to go to Paris.

With typical generosity, Gurdjieff instantly agreed to come to London. But two days before he was due to arrive, war broke out. Fortunately, Madame Ouspensky seems to have made some kind of recovery without his help.

As soon as the air raids began, it became difficult to carry on with meetings in London, and petrol rationing and the black-out made Virginia Water inaccessible. On 4 January, 1941, Madame Ouspensky sailed for America with a small group of 'the faithful', and two weeks later, Ouspensky followed her. It had been almost 21 years since he had received the letter from Claude Bragdon with the royalty cheque for *Tertium Organum,* and the two decades since then had been a period of peace and prosperity. Now, just as it began to look as if his work was entering a new phase of success, he was once again being condemned to exile.

The voyage took more than six weeks — the *Georgic* had to go far out of its way to dodge U-boats — and they arrived in early March. Madame Ouspensky had taken a house at Rumson, on the coast of New Jersey. Stanley Nott, who had been in America a year, was glad to see that she now looked much better, and was also friendlier and less forbidding. Nott soon went to have lunch with Ouspensky in a New York hotel, and suggested that he should come and address the 'Orage group', of which he had become a member.

Orage himself had been dead since November 1934. Unlike

Ouspensky, he never renounced Gurdjieff: Gurdjieff renounced him. While Orage was on a trip to England in 1930, Gurdjieff had taken over his New York group and made the members sign a letter in which they renounced Orage. Typically, Orage lost no time in signing it too. Exactly why Gurdjieff turned against Orage is unclear. He may have felt that, like Ouspensky, Orage was carrying the Work in the wrong direction. Or he may simply have decided that everybody needed a 'shock'. The shock seems to have done Orage no harm; he returned to England and devoted himself to the curious ideas of Major Clifford Douglas on 'Social Credit' — a system designed to replace money with a kind of barter. And in spite of Gurdjieff's prohibition, Orage's group continued to regard him with reverence.

Ouspensky attended a meeting of the group at a house in Madison Avenue, and was oddly unimpressive. 'No authority,' said one of Orage's pupils. They knew Gurdjieff and felt that Ouspensky had neither Gurdjieff's fire nor Orage's warmth and brilliance. The Ouspensky group that subsequently formed had only about 50 members, and by the end of two years, only half a dozen remained. On the other hand, many of Ouspensky's former pupils from England decided to join him in America, and for this group, Ouspensky, not Gurdjieff, was the Master.

Yet Nott, who saw something of Ouspensky in New York, felt that he had lost the old drive. Nott attributes this to the infirmities of age, but in fact Ouspensky was only 63. The real problem was almost certainly that he had been uprooted once too often. He was drinking too much — Nott says that he was imbibing strong concoctions that required a stomach of iron — and obviously felt that he had simply not achieved the inner freedom he had set out to attain. By nature, he was a gentle romantic, whose attempts to turn himself into a kind of scientific guru were an affront to his fundamental nature. He told Nott that his strong potations were 'the only thing that relieves the boredom and depression that comes over me at times'.

In fact, Ouspensky's alcoholism provides us with a vital clue. The

immediate effect of alcohol — particularly spirits — is 'uplift', an increase of 'inner pressure'. It is as if one has closed certain inner valves and ceased to 'leak'. 'Depression' means, literally, low pressure. Now any form of purposeful activity has the effect of closing the leaks and raising our inner pressure. For romantic intellectuals of Ouspensky's type, the best possible remedy for depression is creative thinking or writing. But Ouspensky had ceased to do any original thinking many years ago. *Tertium Organum* and *A New Model of the Universe* lay decades behind him. He had learned to achieve his 'intellectual feedback' through other people; he was at his best lecturing to an audience. It brought out the 'iron man', the scientist, the psychologist. But when he was alone, he had a sense of anticlimax. There was 'nothing to do'. These were the times when he enjoyed relaxing with friends like Nott, or his new disciple Rodney Collin (who had travelled over on the same boat), and reminiscing nostalgically about St Petersburg. But if there was no one to talk to, he seems to have become subject to depression. It was at about this time — in 1942 — that he wrote to Bennett that man's only hope is to work with the higher emotional centres, and added gloomily: 'And we do not know how this is to be done.'

Ouspensky had now turned his back completely on Gurdjieff. When Nott told him that Gurdjieff might be moving to New York, he replied that in that case he would go to California. Nott was asked to take an active part in Ouspensky's New York group, but felt unable to do so because he would not have been allowed to mention Gurdjieff or *Beelzebub's Tales*.

In the autumn of 1942, the Ouspenskys acquired a new 'headquarters' — a vast house called Franklin Farms in Mendham, New Jersey. It had 300 acres of land, and when the Notts paid a visit, it struck them as a re-creation of Lyne Place — in fact, many of the people *were* the same. There was also something of the same air of regimentation — pupils were not allowed to address one another by their Christian names, and Nott was again forbidden to mention Gurdjieff. He and his wife taught Gurdjieff's dances there, but he was not even allowed to

reply to questions about their creator. When, on 7 December, 1941, the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbour and America entered the war, Ouspensky was probably relieved that Gurdjieff would not now be returning to torment him.

At Franklin Farms, Madame Ouspensky became increasingly the dominant force; Ouspensky often sat apart, silently drinking wine. Madame had become more despotic than ever, and the tap of her stick made the pupils look at one another nervously. One of them compared her to Gurdjieff — but she seems to have lacked the Master's kindness. Nott was one of the few who had the courage to stand up to her: before leaving Mendham to teach at a progressive school in Vermont, he shocked her by telling her that trying to teach 'the System' without mentioning Gurdjieff was like trying to teach Christianity without mentioning Jesus Christ.

Ouspensky's depression was making him increasingly bad tempered. When a new edition of *A New Model of the Universe* appeared with a blurb stating that Ouspensky was working in a group with Gurdjieff near London, he flew into a rage and proposed to call a press conference. Nott tried to persuade New York editors to send representatives and discovered — not surprisingly — that no one was remotely interested. And when Ouspensky heard that Bennett was teaching the System in England, he wrote him an angry letter pointing out that he had been sworn to secrecy. Visitors to Mendham heard Bennett described as a plagiarist and a thief.

When Nott returned to Mendham after a year in Vermont, he found conditions relatively unchanged. Madame Ouspensky as bossy as ever, and as paranoid about Gurdjieff. It was this that led to his decision to leave. He had been invited to dinner by a couple he had known for years, pupils of Ouspensky. They began to ask him about *Beelzebub's Tales,* and since they were dining at the couple's home, Nott felt free to talk about it, telling them that it was 'the Bible of the Work'. When they asked where they could get hold of it, he referred them to Madame Ouspensky.

The next day he was summoned by Madame, who accused him of breaking his promise. Nott replied that he had kept his promise not to discuss Gurdjieff at Franklin Farms, but when he was elsewhere he felt free to do as he liked. She described this as mere quibbling. Nott then pointed out firmly that she was teaching Gurdjieff's System at Mendham. Madame Ouspensky became angry, and Nott ended by telling her that her pupils were all stuck at the 'mi' level, and that if they were to progress to 'fa', they would need a shock — the kind of shock that could be provided by Gurdjieff and his book. This was the end. Nott announced he was leaving and they shook hands; he never saw her or Ouspensky again. In his second *Journal of a Pupil,* Nott states his considered opinion that after Ouspensky cut himself off from Gurdjieff, his work began to lose its value.

He was probably right. Yet it is equally clear that Ouspensky could not have remained with Gurdjieff. Gurdjieff needed disciples, and Ouspensky, for all his weakness, was too big a man to be anyone's disciple forever. The dilemma was insoluble.

What seems very clear is that Ouspensky had lost his mainspring. He felt he had reached a dead end. He had caught his glimpses of freedom, of the higher emotional centres; now he felt stuck in everyday reality, too old for further mental effort. Towards the end of the war, he seems to have thought constantly about returning to England. One reason was probably the increasing dominance of Madame Ouspensky at Mendham. She was suffering from Parkinson's Disease, and it seems to have made her even more domineering. Nevertheless, Ouspensky was not ignored — on the contrary, some of his pupils were inclined to worship him. One woman who fell on her knees before him was sternly told to get up at once and never do it again. Even his habit of sitting silent as he boozed was interpreted as a teaching gambit. It must have struck him as ironic to be regarded with so much reverence when he felt that he had lost all the answers. When his step-daughter asked him for advice on how to combat her depression, he could only snap: 'Pray, Lenotchka, pray!'

In spite, however, of his indignation with Bennett, Ouspensky himself was now thinking of publishing something about the Work — a series of lectures he had given in England in the late 1930s. But he seems to have had difficulty finding a publisher, and the book, *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution,* was not issued until in 1950, after his death. During the war, Ouspensky was also engaged on the lengthy account of his years with Gurdjieff, 'Fragments of an Unknown Teaching', which, as already mentioned, was later published under the title *In Search of the Miraculous*.

Towards the end of the war, two English followers, who had been in charge of Lyne Place, made their way to Mendham. James Webb quotes them as saying that they found Ouspensky disabled 'as if by a stroke', and that he was virtually a prisoner. He asked them to try and get the Hammersmith house back from the Navy (who had requisitioned it) and prepare it for his return.

Yet by the end of the war Ouspensky's health was so poor that there seemed doubt whether he would be able to cross the Atlantic. (He was suffering from a serious kidney complaint, exacerbated by his heavy drinking.) But he finally arrived — without his wife — in January 1947, and was driven straight to Lyne Place. Kenneth Walker comments that they hardly recognized him; he was 'a man on whom Death had already set its mark'. Ouspensky was deeply preoccupied, as if 'his mind was deeply engaged on some problem'. That problem, Walker thinks, was probably that of 'Eternal Recurrence', and the notion that he would have to return to live his life all over again — and try and do better next time.

A few weeks later, on 24 February, 1947, the 'Historico-Psychological Society' met at the hall in Colet Gardens. Ouspensky's English follower Dr Francis Roles had organized a large audience, but they were dismayed by Ouspensky's appearance and manner. He was hobbling on a cane, and looked old, bent and sick; his English seemed less comprehensible than ever. He used a kind of private secretary

called Miss Quinn — from Mendham — to take questions, but he seemed impatient of most of them, and kept snapping: 'Be simpler' or 'Start from what you know.' When Kenneth Walker asked if he had abandoned the System, he shocked everyone by answering: 'There is no System.'

Walker gathered that Ouspensky had evolved some new plan for the Work in London, but could also see that he was too weak to carry it out. It seems possible that it was based on his idea that everyone should spend time remembering his life in detail, to fix it in memory for the next incarnation.

At the next two meetings, on 5 and 12 March, it became even clearer that Ouspensky had somehow lost his belief in the System. When people talked about being mechanical, he asked them who had told them so. He even dismissed self-remembering. When someone asked him how to find harmony, he replied: 'This is your question? This is my question now, and I have no answer.' He no longer believed in the possibility of change. To a lady who asked why he would not help them, he replied that he had no help to give.

But, interestingly enough, he told his pupils that they must have a straightforward, everyday aim, and that only by working alone could one make progress. This was a flat contradiction of Gurdjieff's teaching that nothing could be achieved by working alone. Was this a sign of Ouspensky's disillusionment, or was it, in fact, a new insight? There were three more meetings, and at the last — on 18 June —Ouspensky again emphasized the importance of the individual finding out what he or she wanted and then pursuing it. It was as if he recognized that 'enlightenment' should not be pursued for its own sake, but as a by-product of some other work. His own problem was that he *had* pursued it for its own sake, and now had no 'work' to do.

Clear evidence of his loss of direction and purpose is provided by the fact that he decided to return to America — an obviously retrogressive step. Then, at the last minute, when his pupils were

all on board, ready to leave, he arrived in his wheelchair and announced that he had changed his mind. He was now behaving with the same lack of consideration of which he had accused Gurdjieff, although it is not clear whether this was intentional — to administer a 'shock' — or merely the result of illness.

Ouspensky spent much of his last months in England revisiting places associated with his past — evidently in an attempt to fix them in his mind for his next existence. On one occasion he decided not to get out of the car at Lyne, but sat in it all night, surrounded by cats. (He believed that cats are the only animals that possess astral bodies and that this is why witches use them as familiars.) One lady stood by the car, her arm raised in solemn salute.

But the end, after all, was not to be pathetic and anticlimactic. James Webb's researches into Ouspensky's last days reveal that his pupils were convinced that something strange had happened. Ouspensky seemed to become telepathic, to such an extent that people in attendance on him became worried, and asked him to use words to communicate. Lyne seemed 'full of presences', and when one day a powerful presence seemed to manifest itself, Ouspensky asked: 'You notice?' His pupils became convinced that he had achieved 'Cosmic Consciousness', and one of them described him as 'an angel'. Another witness said that 'what was going on was God's business', apparently meaning that supernatural forces were now intervening. Rodney Collin was to declare that he felt that a Christlike being was presiding over Ouspensky's death.

Collin seems to have taken it upon himself to try to make Ouspensky 'die consciously', and to make sure that he did not 'go gentle into that good night'. Others state that Ouspensky needed no encouragement, and spent his last days making 'super-efforts', even waking his pupils up in the middle of the night. It was, according to Collin, in his arms that Ouspensky finally died at dawn on 2 October, 1947, after dressing himself and summoning the household for a 'final briefing'. Not long

before his death he had repeated: 'I abandon the System. Start again for yourselves.' He was buried in Lyne churchyard.

Collin retreated to the dressing-room next to Ouspensky's bedroom, and locked himself in for six days. When someone tried to climb up a ladder to look into the room, the window opened and Collin pushed the ladder to the ground. Finally, Collin rang the bell that Ouspensky rang when he needed attention. He was found sitting cross-legged on Ouspensky's bed, dirty and unshaven, and he asked his wife Janet to bring him lime juice. He later told her — and his sister-in-law, Joyce Collin-Smith — that he had been in communication with Ouspensky during all this period, and that the disclosures were so important that he was determined not to be disturbed. The result of this communication led him to formulate a theory of 'four worlds', each on different vibrational rates, and to write a book called *The Theory of Celestial Influence*. (17) He was to die, under mysterious circumstances, on 3 May, 1956, after falling from a tower in Mexico.

Now Ouspensky was dead, the faithful asked Madame Ouspensky what they were to do. To their amazement, she answered that they were to contact Gurdjieff in Paris. Gurdjieff himself wrote to Lyne: 'You are sheep without a shepherd; come to me.'

This caused consternation. Ouspensky's pupils had long ago accepted his assertion that Gurdjieff had lost his sense of direction after Essentuki and virtually gone mad — or, at least, gone bad. Contact with American pupils must have confirmed that impression: from the time Orage had formed his group there, Gurdjieff's demands for money had been unremitting; it looked as if he thought of his American disciples as sheep who were there to be fleeced. In fact, he seemed to be doing his best to alienate his pupils — in the book *Herald of Coming Good,* he claimed he had founded his Institute for 'purely personal ends'. Pupils deserted in droves — which may have been what he

wanted.

The Priory had been sold in 1933, and Gurdjieff had retired to the Grand Hotel in Paris. From 1933 to mid-1935 he had lived in America, where he was hoping to re-establish an institute. But fate seemed against him. D.H. Lawrence's ex-disciple Mabel Dodge Luhan changed her mind about allowing him to set it up at Taos, in New Mexico. Then another disciple, Jean Toomer, tried to arrange a meeting with an American senator, but the senator's plane exploded in mid-air. Gurdjieff even tried to return to Russia, but was turned down by the Soviet authorities. He returned to Paris — via Germany — in the late summer of 1935, and soon had another enthusiastic group around him. In 1936, he moved into 6 rue des Colonels Renard, in the Russian quarter, north of the Etoile. At this period, the old, formidable Gurdjieff, who had reminded an American critic of a riding master or a circus ringmaster, and whom de Salzmann had called a demon, gave way to a gentler and more kindly person. When the war came, Gurdjieff stayed on in Paris, and the occupying Germans seem to have regarded him as a mild and harmless old man.(18)

About half the Lyne group decided to follow Madame Ouspensky's advice, and exactly a year after Ouspensky's death, on 2 October, 1948, Kenneth Walker and his wife Mary arrived in Paris. They arrived at a typically Parisian block of flats with half a dozen other people, including a member of the Lyne group. Gurdjieff's flat reminded Walker of a junk shop, with a remarkable mixture of furniture and a cozy haphazardness. 'Everything seemed to have happened by accident, and nothing by design.' It smelt of Eastern spices. Together with a large crowd, Walker and his wife entered a 'reading room' as oddly furnished as the hall, and for an hour listened to a pupil reading from a typescript of *Beelzebub*. Then Gurdjieff slipped quietly into the room — a short, stout man with a sweeping — and greying — moustache and piercing eyes. When Walker looked more closely, he saw that the eyes were friendly. Gurdjieff

reminded him of old Chinese paintings of 'the Rogue'. After another hour of reading, Gurdjieff spoke. Rubbing his stomach, he announced that 'le patron' required feeding. They were all invited to lunch.

The huge crowd squeezed into the dining-room, where Gurdjieff was already seated on a divan with one foot tucked under the opposite knee. He proceeded to make a salad for his guests, with cucumber, pickles, red peppers, onions and sour cream. Then glasses were filled with Armagnac or vodka, and a pupil who had been appointed director proposed a toast. Walker (who was basically teetotal) had to take a great swig of vodka.

Gurdjieff he found impressive, with his vast, clean-shaven head and olive complexion. He claimed to be over 80 (although he was, in fact, 71), and he made Walker think of Haroun Al Raschid. Gurdjieff had been involved in another serious car accident earlier that year, but he showed no sign of it. The guests went on to eat pigeons stewed in vine leaves, pilaff, wild strawberries with cream, avocados, Turkish delight and melons. Meanwhile they had to drink endless toasts until Walker found the room expanding and contracting. This was Gurdjieff's method of getting to know people quickly and discovering their 'essence' — if they had any. When it was all over, he invited them all to dinner that evening.

Outside, Walker asked Mary what she thought of Gurdjieff. 'He's the most astonishing man I ever met. The chief impression he gave me was of immense vigour and of concentrated strength. I had the feeling that he was not really a man but a magician.' The Walkers went back to the hotel to sleep off the vodka. The evening meal was to be just as lavish, and would go on until after midnight.

Walker reached the interesting conclusion that Gurdjieff was trying to 'loosen up' the London disciples. Too much conscious self-discipline had made them rigid and grim. After Ouspensky, Gurdjieff must have seemed a salutary shock. The more Walker

saw of Gurdjieff, the more he experienced a sense of freedom. Gurdjieff seemed to demonstrate by personal example that man's business is to be god-like.

Beelzebub struck Walker as badly written. But no sooner had he reached the conclusion that Gurdjieff was an unskilled writer than *Meetings with Remarkable Men* forced him to revise his opinion. His attempts to resolve these — and other — contradictions led him to conclude that Gurdjieff *intended* to create conflict and confusion. It was his way of teaching.

The lunches and dinners continued daily until Walker left. When he went to say goodbye, Gurdjieff told him to henceforth regard this flat as his own home, and offered to send him a regular supply of vodka to England. Walker was surprised by the rush of affection he felt as he shook hands.

That year Gurdjieff returned to America once more, and took over Ouspensky's New York group. There he made much the same kind of impact that he made on Walker in Paris — it is described by Irmis B. Popoff in her book *Gurdjieff* — and gave the same kind of vast and interminable meals.

But when Walker saw Gurdjieff in Paris again the following spring, he could see that his health was failing — undoubtedly under the burden of vast quantities of rich food and strong liquor. His breathing was laboured and his lips had a blue tinge. Walker diagnosed fluid in the abdomen and advised an operation to get rid of it. Gurdjieff thanked him, but said he Was awaiting the arrival of a new drug from America.

Bennett, who now ran his own teaching group at Combe Springs in Surrey, also spent much time with Gurdjieff in Paris. Gurdjieff's telepathic powers seemed to be unimpaired, and one morning, in a café, he dictated to Bennett an advertisement for the forthcoming edition of *Beelzebub* without opening his mouth. On Saturday 22 October, Bennett found him sitting in a café looking ill and tired, but Gurdjieff nevertheless made comments that indicated that he expected to live for at least another five years.

When the American doctor arrived four days later, however, he immediately ordered Gurdjieff to be removed to the American Hospital. His blood pressure was so high that it was impossible to inject serum. The liquid was finally drained from his stomach, but it had been left too late. On 29 October, 1949, Gurdjieff died. The autopsy revealed that he had been keeping himself alive by sheer will-power and vitality; the state of his inner organs was so bad that he should have died years earlier. Gurdjieff was an excellent advertisement for his own belief that a man lives by his powers of concentration.

Seven
What Went Wrong?

CLEARLY, SOMETHING went wrong — both for Ouspensky and Gurdjieff. Ouspensky drank himself to death; Gurdjieff ate and drank himself to death. And although Gurdjieff's end was less anticlimactic than Ouspensky's, photographs taken during his last years confirm the impression of visitors who came to see him from England and America: that there was a touch of sadness about him.

In the case of Ouspensky, the question of what went wrong is easier to answer. Mystical experiences like the one on the Sea of Marmora confirmed his feeling that man could achieve a higher level of consciousness — that there is something essentially *false* about our everyday consciousness. As a man with training in science and mathematics, he shared the feeling of his contemporaries that man can rise 'on stepping stones of his dead selves to higher things'. His experiments with nitrous oxide seemed to support this. They confirmed beyond all doubt that 'higher consciousness' existed, and could, to some extent, be summoned at will. But Ouspensky's travels in the East were a disappointment; he failed to find what he was looking for.

Then he met Gurdjieff and became convinced that he was a man who 'knew'. And what Gurdjieff had to teach struck Ouspensky as appallingly true. The so-called 'individual' is not one self, but hundreds. His state of consciousness is actually a state of hypnotic sleep. He is virtually a machine. If he wishes to escape these limitations, it must be done by constant self-observation, by self-remembering, and by 'super-effort' or 'intentional suffering'.

It sounds as if all this is an excellent foundation on which to build a deliberate assault on the bastions of higher consciousness.

Then what went wrong?

In order to grasp this, we must glance briefly at the history of the quest for 'higher consciousness' in the past two and a half centuries. From the point of view of man's intellectual evolution, the invention of the novel in the mid-eighteenth century is of inestimable importance. Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740), a novel about the attempted seduction of a servant girl, taught men to daydream. Within a year or so, Europe had become 'a nation of readers'. Novels were a magic carpet that carried you away into other people's lives. Vast numbers of men and women — particularly women — who had accepted the boredom of their everyday lives and devoted their spare time to sewing cushion covers, now plunged into the exciting worlds of Rousseau, Goethe, Horace Walpole, 'Monk' Lewis, Mrs Radcliffe — worlds of romance, adultery, seduction and rape.

Goethe, whose novel *The Sorrows of Young Werther* (1774) had been immensely influential (even causing an epidemic of suicides), was also aware of something that earlier writers had scarcely noticed: the beauties of nature. Mountains and forests and lakes became part of the new 'romantic' consciousness. In England, Wordsworth and Coleridge — and then Byron and Shelley — followed his example. Wordsworth had been experiencing 'mystical' states since childhood. So had William Blake. It is in Blake that we can see most clearly the danger of this new romantic consciousness. In 'The Land of Dreams' the child asks his widowed father:

> 'Father, O Father! what do we here
> 'In this land of unbelief and fear?
> The Land of Dreams is better far,
> 'Above the light of the Morning Star.'

This rejection of the 'real world' and preference for the Land of Dreams is a highly dangerous state of mind, which leads to defeat and despair. And this was the major problem for all those

poets, novelists and musicians who wanted their work to reflect the 'higher reality' of the Land of Dreams. They found reality too much for them, and died in droves.

By the end of the century — when Ouspensky was a young man — so many of these 'Outsider' artists had died young or committed suicide or gone mad that it became part of the romantic mythology that if you were a 'sensitive plant' you were virtually inviting an early death. Thomas Mann wrote novels in which death and intellectuality are always linked together, while Hermann Hesse's heroes go in search of 'higher consciousness', only to end by recognizing that it is not to be found in this 'land of unbelief and fear'.

In spite of his scientific temperament, Ouspensky was cast in the mould of a Hesse hero. He made the 'journey to the East' and returned empty-handed. He tried 'experimental mysticism' with the aid of dental gas, but found himself overwhelmed by romantic agony as he had to return to this 'wooden world', grinding on like some creaking mill. Then Gurdjieff held out new hope. Sheer *effort* could keep at bay the moods of romantic despair or the 'triviality of everydayness'. Practising self-remembering, Ouspensky found that he could wander around St Petersburg at night and sense the history of the houses as if they were living beings. He was able to induce moods of self-remembering in which he actually saw other people as sleepwalkers surrounded by their dreams. And on one occasion, he seemed on the point of breaking through to a new level of freedom before someone walked into the room and interrupted him. Gurdjieff's ability to communicate with him telepathically demonstrated that Gurdjieff had achieved certain 'magical' powers. This was also Ouspensky's aim.

What was self-evident was that the human mind has the power to 'hold' far higher levels of vital energy than are called upon in our everyday lives. If we could actually reach a high enough level of vitality and optimism, it would be so powerful that it would effect a kind of alchemical transformation of our inner being, a

process of 'fusing'. But every time we begin to approach this level, we 'leak' and allow the energy to escape. Ouspensky could see that if he could learn to close those inner 'valves' that permit the energy to leak away, he could raise himself permanently to a higher level.

But he needed peace and security. Instead, he was uprooted and forced to become a wanderer in foreign lands. It was a traumatic experience for a gentle romantic. Fortunately, fate came to his rescue by making the West aware of *Tertium Organum*. He was welcomed in London; he became a celebrity. The story should now have had a happy ending. Unfortunately, Ouspensky's own temperament was the major obstacle to this. He had drunk deeply of the pessimistic aspects of Gurdjieff's doctrine: human beings are hopelessly self-divided; they are hypnotized sheep waiting for the butcher's knife. There can be no doubt that Ouspensky would have been a happier man if, instead of meeting Gurdjieff, he had met Rudolf Steiner, the Austrian mystic. Steiner would have taught him that the 'spirit world' lies inside us, and that we are all capable of 'access to higher worlds'. In fact, Gurdjieff had on Ouspensky much the same effect that the gloomy Schopenhauer had on Nietzsche: he gave his thinking an overwhelmingly pessimistic tinge. In *The Psychology of Man's Possible Evolution,* the first book in which Ouspensky tried to express what he had learned from Gurdjieff, all the emphasis is on human weakness and on man's inability to 'do'.

Gurdjieff himself was slightly better off, but not much. He had, in fact, seen the true solution to the problem that had killed off so many romantic Outsiders. The more we feel that the world is a 'land of unbelief and fear' or a 'dim vast vale of tears' or a 'misty dream', the more we are predisposed to run away from it. And this attitude puts us into a state of 'negative feedback': that is, our negative expectations cause us to 'leak', and the leakage confirms our pessimism by making it seem self-evident that life is a bore.

Gurdjieff had discovered that willed effort can close our inner leaks and raise our inner pressure. But in order to truly reverse the negative feedback process, a man would need to be driven by a certain optimism, a sense of what G.K. Chesterton called 'absurd good news'; in other words, he would need to feel that such an effort is worthwhile. But here Gurdjieff's position was closer to that of Ouspensky. He was basically concerned — one might say obsessed — by what is *wrong* with people. His notion of the organ Kundabuffer, implanted in human beings to make them see illusion as reality, was a form of the legend of Original Sin. In his earliest piece of writing, *Herald of Coming Good,* he defines his original purpose as an attempt to prevent in himself the manifestations of 'Tzvarnoharno', something caused by the evil actions of common people, which leads to the destruction of those who would benefit humanity. And *Beelzebub's Tales to his Grandson* is an attempt to make people see what is wrong with them. The aim, according to Bennett, is to arouse feeling rather than thought, to create inner conflict that will carry readers beyond their intellectual processes.

Stanley Nott was convinced that this was what was wrong with Ouspensky. He wanted to turn Gurdjieff's teaching into an intellectual system. But Gurdjieff is saying — rather like Bergson — that intellect always misses the point, and that real understanding involves somehow 'shaking the mind awake'.

This is true — as far as it goes. But in trying to shake people out of old habits through inner conflict and 'intentional suffering', Gurdjieff was also missing the point.

The basic point is fairly simple. In those positive moods that Wordsworth describes in the 'Intimations of Immortality' ode, moods when the earth seems 'apparelled in celestial light', we experience an extremely clear and powerful sense that the world is a wonderful and fascinating place, and that we should be extremely grateful to be alive. We can *see* that it is marvellously rich and complex. But in order to perceive this, we need to be in a state of bubbling vitality. And our main problem is that our

vitality leaks away too easily, leaving us too tired to appreciate this fascinating complexity — just as it is hard to read philosophy when you are tired.

Abraham Maslow tells a story of a marine who had been in the Pacific without seeing a woman, and, when he returned to base, saw a nurse and instantly had a 'peak experience' — because he suddenly realized with tremendous force that *women are different from men*. This is 'newness' (Browning captures it in his phrase: 'How strange it seems, and new', and Ezra Pound meant the same thing when he called one of his books *Make It New)*. Newness is the *recognition of difference:* that what you thought was 'the same' is not the same at all. What a poet sees on a spring morning is 'difference'. But as we grow tired — or discouraged — our senses smooth out the difference into sameness.

In fact this is really the basic problem of human existence. Habit causes us to 'silt up' like a river, until what was once narrow and fast becomes meandering and slow. This is what Wordsworth means when he complains that 'shades of the prison house' begin to close on us as we get older. Wordsworth's early poems — for example, the sonnet on Westminster Bridge — are full of 'newness', while the later poems are somehow 'tired'.

But we have already noted Maslow's important discovery that when he talked to his students about 'peak experiences', they began remembering peak experiences they had previously forgotten about. And as they began talking to one another about peak experiences, *they began having peak experiences all the time*.

The reason is obvious. The peak experience is a perception of difference. You look at some 'familiar' object and see it as new and strange. And you know that this perception is genuine, not some illusion. In fact, Ouspensky had grasped this vital insight in the passage about the factory chimneys in *Tertium Organum* (see page 164).

This is the 'spring morning' feeling. You *see* that everything is much stranger and more complex than your normal perception reveals. And you see that this *is* so. Like Maslow's marine, you are perceiving a real 'difference'. This is why people who have had peak experiences can go on repeating them: because it is simply a matter of *reminding yourself* of something you have already seen and which you know to be real. In this sense, it is like any other 'recognition' that suddenly dawns on you — for example, the recognition of the greatness of some composer or artist whom you had formerly found difficult or incomprehensible; or the recognition of how to solve a certain problem. Once such a recognition 'dawns', it is easy to re-establish contact with it, because it is there, like some possession, waiting for you to return to it.

Unfortunately, Ouspensky was not in a position to take advantage of this simple 'law of consciousness', because his basic assumptions were negative. So all his emphasis on self-remembering, self-observation, super-effort, was no more effective than his wife's altogether vaguer notions about the importance of religious insights. Whenever he felt tired, he was back to square one. And years of going back to square one finally convinced him that all his insights into human mechanicalness were useless, and that 'the System' had failed him.

He had failed to grasp a simple truth. If you feel tired but optimistic, a short rest will refresh you and re-charge your batteries. If you feel tired and pessimistic, even a sleep may leave you feeling as tired as ever.

Again, consider what happens when something goes wrong, and you put it right. 'Putting it right' has the effect of making you feel delighted that things are 'back to normal', and that 'normality' is a highly desirable state. Yet when things *are* normal, and have been normal for a long time, we take normality for granted; in fact, we may even find it boring. The act of 'putting something right' has the interesting effect of making you see 'normality' as

delightful. In fact, it momentarily lifts you into a perception of 'newness', of 'difference', and once again raises you to the perception that reality is infinitely fascinating.

To recognize this is to recognize that our 'normal' perception has a strong pessimistic component, a kind of 'free-floating anxiety', making us aware of the truth of William James's observation that, for much of the time, we 'feel as if a sort of cloud weighed upon us, keeping us below our highest notch in clearness in discernment, sureness in reasoning, or firmness in deciding'.

Now this observation occurs in the essay called 'The Energies of Man', which has been discussed earlier in this book, and which makes clear the point that Gurdjieff and James are talking about the same thing: 'second wind' or 'vital reserves'. It is also plain that we can break through to 'second wind' by a deliberate effort of will. James appears to be saying the same thing as Gurdjieff: that we *are* diseased, and that the disease is called Original Sin (or Kundabuffer). But there is an important difference. James recognizes that our negativity is a kind of 'cloud' weighing upon us. James was an optimistic kind of person and, like G.K. Chesterton, he recognized that the basis of reality is 'absurd good news'.

What all this amounts to is the recognition that both Gurdjieff and Ouspensky were inclined to make the same mistake: they over-emphasized the idea of super-effort or intentional suffering. Beyond a certain point, super-effort tends to be counterproductive: it produces fatigue and pessimism.

Consider what happens when you receive some good news, or some anticipated crisis evaporates. There is a sudden perception that the world is delightful. And this *transfers itself to your subconscious mind,* so that even an hour or so later, when you have forgotten about the crisis, you remain in a state of bubbling vitality, as if a kind of 'underfloor lighting' had been switched on. If we could train ourselves to keep the underfloor lighting switched on, our lives would become immensely satisfying and

productive.

The odd thing is that every time we experience 'absurd good news', we see that it *is* an objective fact, and that consequently, there is no earthly reason why, with a little effort, it should not become a permanent state.

Does this mean that no effort is necessary? Clearly not. Our real problem is our inbuilt tendency to 'leak', to allow our inner pressure to sink unnoticed. In *The War Against Sleep* I expressed the problem in the sentence: 'Human beings are like grandfather clocks driven by watch springs.' But the real trouble is lack of inner pressure — 'leakage'.

What prevents leakage? *Focusing the attention*. The Zen master Ikkyu was once asked by a workman to write something on his slate; Ikkyu wrote the word 'Attention.' The workman looked disappointed. 'Couldn't you write something else?' Ikkyu wrote: 'Attention, attention.' The workman asked: 'What does attention mean?', and Ikkyu replied: 'Attention means attention.'

He could have replied: 'Attention means focusing your energies and closing your leaks, so you are in a higher energy state.'

Leakage keeps us in a constant state of low inner pressure. But in order to do anything well, you require high inner pressure.

Some personal remarks on my own experience of 'the method' may clarify the point. I came upon Ouspensky's *In Search of the Miraculous* and Kenneth Walker's *Venture with Ideas* in 1951, when I was 20. They filled me with excitement. But at that time, I had already discovered the basic method for the control of consciousness. Like many teenagers, I had suffered a great deal from 'life failure', the feeling that life is meaningless and pointless, and that the efforts it demands of us are a waste of time. For a great deal of the time, my everyday life seemed grey and dull. I craved 'satisfaction', a higher quality of life, yet felt that this was a purely biological craving that did nothing to redeem life

from meaninglessness. In fact, life seemed so meaningless that it seemed a waste of time even to kill myself. Eliot's *Hollow Men* seemed to me to express the basic truth about human existence. So did Auden's lines:

> Put the car away; when life fails
> What's the good of going to Wales?

But in an essay of T.S. Eliot I came upon a reference to the *Bhagavad Gita,* and when I came upon a new translation of it —by Isherwood — in the local bookshop, I bought it.

The *Gita* brought about a total change of attitude. To begin with, it persuaded me to sit cross-legged on the floor, focusing my attention. There were times when I concentrated so hard that I went red in the face. But I suddenly discovered, to my astonishment, that the sense of futility and greyness had vanished. The world suddenly became so interesting that I would often pause to look at a privet leaf, or at a cracked windowsill.

What had happened is obvious. Teenage depression had led to constant 'leakage' and negative feedback. Perception is 'intentional'; in order to perceive anything, you have to throw your attention at it like a javelin. The strength of my throwing arm had become so enfeebled that the javelin was falling at my feet, instead of impaling its object. Reading poetry and listening to music had alleviated the problem, but even if I achieved a state of total affirmation, it had vanished by the following day. Sitting cross-legged and concentrating taught me that it did not have to vanish.

At this point, life suddenly became more complicated. I married and became a father, and that meant I had no time for sitting cross-legged. By the time I came home from the factory, I was exhausted. So I ceased to 'meditate'.

Fortunately, this was the period when I came upon Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. *In Search of the Miraculous* was a tremendous

mental stimulus. Reading it required less effort than concentrating, but it could restore that sense of high inner pressure, and restore my sense of purpose. And when, three years later, I wrote my first book, *The Outsider,* it was inevitable that Gurdjieff and Ouspensky should figure prominently.

I had no doubt then — and still have no doubt — that Gurdjieff was perhaps the greatest man of the twentieth century. I became a friend of Kenneth Walker, and what he told me confirmed that impression. Yet I never felt that Walker himself had achieved any high degree of self-discipline. And I continued to feel this in subsequent years when I met followers of Gurdjieff and Ouspensky. Bennett struck me as altogether more disciplined, yet oddly narrow. And I found it totally incomprehensible that he had turned from Gurdjieff to Pakh Subuh, and then became a Catholic convert. That seemed to demonstrate once and for all that, in spite of having read *Beelzebub* a dozen times, he still had no idea of what Gurdjieff was talking about. In retrospect, I am inclined to wonder whether, like Ouspensky, Bennett felt that the System had failed him.

Another Ouspensky disciple whom I came to like and admire — and who shall remain nameless — was not even sure of the difference between 'essence' and 'personality'; he thought personality was the 'true self' and essence the 'false self'.

Clearly, then, Gurdjieff had not succeeded in stamping his genius on any of his followers — with the exception of Ouspensky, who already possessed his own genius.

When I came to write *The War Against Sleep* — in 1979 — I tried hard to put my finger on what had gone wrong, particularly in the last chapter, 'Gurdjieff versus Ouspensky?' I saw Ouspensky's problem as his pessimism, and his failure to grasp the 'absurd good news' experience. And I accurately characterized Gurdjieff's problem as his overemphasis on super-effort. Yet although it seems to me that I have clearly stated 'what went wrong', I have not tried hard enough to state how it could have

been put right.

Let me try again.

'Peak experiences' involve the sense of 'difference' and 'newness'. Most serious modern literature seems to be based on what I have called the 'fallacy of insignificance', the feeling that intelligent people are bound to be weak and neurotic, and that, as Yeats said, 'We have not begun to live until we have conceived of life as tragedy.' That, in short, 'you can't win'. The peak experience is a sudden overwhelming certainty that you *can* win.

In a book called *Beyond the Occult,* I have suggested that it is helpful to distinguish seven basic levels of human consciousness.

If we regard deep sleep as Level 0, then Level 1 would be dreaming. Level 2 is the level you experience when you wake up in the middle of the night from a deep sleep: a kind of passive, disoriented consciousness. We also experience this when we are very tired, and we look at things without actually 'seeing' them. You could say there is no 'I' present.

Level 3 is the level at which 'I' emerges, but at which you still feel low and dull. I spent much of my teens in Level 3. Shaw called it 'life failure', and Camus 'the absurd'; it is the feeling that reality is quite meaningless in itself, and that *we* impose meanings on it.

Level 4 is our normal, everyday consciousness. And in the lower end of Level 4, life still seems appallingly hard work. Emily Brontë captures it in the poem that begins:

> Does the road wind uphill all the way?
> Right to the very end.

But about halfway up Level 4, we begin to experience an odd sense of strength and optimism, a feeling that obstacles *can* be overcome and that life can be delightful after all. At the top end of 'everyday consciousness', we feel oddly certain that 'you *can* win'.

Maslow's 'peak experience' — that sudden bubbling feeling of total happiness — might be regarded as a kind of spark that leaps the gap between Levels 4 and 5. Level 5 is what I have called 'spring morning consciousness', the perception of 'newness' and 'difference', the feeling that the world is infinitely fascinating after all.

Such feelings seldom last long. But when they do, they constitute virtually a new level of consciousness — what J.B. Priestley calls 'magic'. A child on Christmas Day may experience 'magic'; so may a couple on honeymoon. According to Yeats, it is the feeling Paris experienced in Helen's arms for the first time: 'What were all the world's alarms?' — a feeling that there is *no* problem that cannot be overcome.

Level 7 is what I have called 'Faculty X', that curious ability we experience in certain moments to grasp the reality of other times and places. Proust experienced it (and described it in *Swann's Way)* when he tasted a small cake dipped in herb tea and suddenly recalled, with tremendous clarity, his childhood in a French village. Arnold Toynbee described the feeling many times in his *Study of History.* In Faculty X, we seem to transcend time. If human beings could achieve Faculty X, their whole lives would become as accessible to them as the past hour.

There is, in fact, a Level 8; Ouspensky experienced it with nitrous oxide. This is 'mystical' consciousness in which we become aware that everything in the universe is connected together.

If we ignore Level 8, and concentrate on the seven levels of ordinary consciousness, we see that our everyday consciousness, Level 4, is precisely halfway up the scale.

Moreover, the level at which we begin to feel 'you *can* win' is precisely halfway up Level 4, at 3.5. Of course, we may regard the seven levels as completely arbitrary — for example, if we included the so-called hypnogogic states on the verge of sleeping and waking, there could easily be eight levels — yet it is still of practical significance to consider Level 3.5 as the 'halfway mark'. For we see that the lower levels are the levels in which we feel that life is futile and meaningless, or tragically difficult. When Sartre says: 'Man is a useless passion' he is merely stating the typical outlook of Level 3.

Up to Level 3.5, life is uphill work. But beyond that, it becomes immensely exciting: the peak experience, spring morning consciousness, magic consciousness, Faculty X, mystical consciousness . . . And if we become clearly aware that what keeps us below Level 3.5 is simply 'leakage', and the pessimism that comes from negative feedback — the tendency to feel gloomy because we *see* life as gloomy, so that disaster becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy — we can also glimpse a magnificent possibility: that there is no good reason why a few human beings should not 'close their inner valves', maintain a higher level of inner pressure, and remain *permanently* above Level 3.5. I have succeeded in doing it for days at a time, and only regret the number of years I have wasted because I was unaware that it could be done.

Now interestingly enough, it is clear that Ouspensky finally became disillusioned with the System because he suddenly recognized this same possibility. When, during his last period at Lyne, he told his pupils that they should have a straightforward, everyday aim, and that only by working alone can one make progress, he was recognizing that a life devoted to the System tends to become as narrow as a life devoted to daily attendance at church. As Walker observed, the London followers had become too rigid and grim. Maslow had also recognized that the people he called 'self-actualizers' have straightforward, everyday aims like other people, but they pour their heart and soul into these everyday aims. A self-actualizer does not have to be a

Beethoven or a Michelangelo. It may be a man who takes enormous pleasure in putting ships in bottles or collecting stamps. Maslow cites a woman who was a marvellous mother and who, when she was too old to have more children, adopted children so she could do 'what she was good at'. To do *anything* with this kind of enthusiasm and conviction recharges our vital batteries. Hermann Hesse makes his narrator remark, in *Journey to the East,* 'I, whose calling was only that of a violinist and storyteller, was responsible for the provision of music for our group, and I then discovered how *a long time devoted to small details exalts us and increases our strength'* (my italics). It causes us to make contact with what Granville Barker calls 'the Secret Life', the wellsprings of vitality deep inside us. As we have seen, Maslow even cured a girl suffering from exhaustion and life failure by advising her to go to night school to study a subject that really interested her. As soon as we do anything with enthusiasm, with conviction, with total attention, life takes on a 'real' quality. Our greatest human mistake is to feel that certain things do not *deserve* enthusiastic attention. We have to learn that *anything* done with enthusiastic attention exalts us and increases our strength.

Now in fact, it is relatively easy to recharge our vital batteries. Let me suggest, for example, that if you have been sitting still for some time, reading this book, you bend your arms and tense your shoulder muscles, or simply yawn and stretch. Note the way that this causes a feeling of pleasure to ripple through your muscles. Next, try shutting your eyes very tight as you do it, and twisting up your face into a grimace. Again, you notice that odd 'ripple' of energy and pleasure. In fact, the face muscles play an important part in the control of energy, and this is one of the easiest methods of summoning a minor peak experience.

There are other methods — for example, concentrating intently on a pen help up against the ceiling, making a tremendous effort, then relaxing until you become aware of the whole wall, then concentrating again . . .

Gurdjieff once remarked that there is a vast reservoir of universal energy which is accessible to us, and that with the right kind of effort, we can place ourselves in touch with this energy. Anton Mesmer also believed that there are 'tides' of universal energy that sweep through our bodies, keeping us healthy. (Wilhelm Reich called it 'orgone energy'.) If we become 'blocked', we become unhealthy. But if you concentrate hard, using your face muscles, and bracing your arms, you can experience a sensation of *driving* the energies down through your body. If you continue to do this for a quarter of an hour or so — for example, on a train journey when you have nothing better to do — you begin to experience a curiously 'wide-awake' feeling, and everything you look at seems 'more interesting'.(19) It should be emphasized, in passing, that these exercises can be quite unobtrusive, so that fellow passengers would not even notice.

The most useful time of all, I have found, is the middle of the night, if I happen to be lying awake. It is important to recognize that our usual 'passive' consciousness is not a particularly desirable state, and that counting sheep is not necessarily the best way to utilize the mind. I find that, in the middle of the night, five minutes of 'concentration exercises' begin to produce active pleasure, as I feel the energy being driven down through my body. Sometimes the pleasure is so great that I want to stay awake. But half an hour or so of 'concentration' brings a pleasant tiredness, and I find that I then drift into sleep with a curious sense of happiness. Moreover, once I have achieved this odd sense of control over myself, it becomes possible to 'navigate' one's way into dreams — the phrase is obscure, but it is the best I can do — so that plunging into sleep has a controlled quality, like diving into a pool; there are occasions when the sensation is so pleasant that I enjoy drifting in and out of sleep like someone being swept through the waves on a surfboard. I also observe that, after a night of this kind of sleep, I experience a high level of mental energy, and as I write, am aware that an act of sudden 'attention' can produce a flash of pure delight.

This seems to me to be one of the basic secrets. This deliberate

control of energy makes me aware that consciousness was never intended to be passive, and that the solving of problems, which most of us regard as one of the more alarming aspects of life, can and should be a thoroughly enjoyable activity. But we are too passive. We fail to realize that when we experience a 'sinking feeling' of boredom or depression, this has nothing to do with external reality; it is a kind of confidence trick played on us by our 'robot'. It is due, quite simply, to lack of inner pressure, lack of energy. The water has been allowed to sink too low in the well, and it takes a great many strokes on the pump to bring it to the surface. But the act of concentrating, of driving the energies through the body, brings these energies to the surface, and life is suddenly fascinating and meaningful again.

In short, we allow the robot to get away with far too much. That is the essence of Gurdjieff's message.

What seems absurd is that Ouspensky failed to grasp that he was applying his remarkable will-power *in the wrong direction*. He was like a man trying to push open a door that opens the other way. 'Experimental Mysticism' is the fullest description of Level 8 on record. And Ouspensky's central recognition in this state is that *everything in the universe* is *connected* — which, in turn, is Chesterton's 'absurd good news'. Our 'normal' consciousness divides things. It is like a narrow flashlight beam that plays over objects in a darkened room, but can never illuminate the room as a whole. This means that human beings suffer from a kind of permanent 'tunnel vision', a 'certain blindness'. The most extreme form of this tunnel vision is when we are very tired and depressed (it might be a good idea to substitute the word 'depressurized', for this makes the nature of the problem more obvious), and things around us look somehow meaningless, 'merely themselves'. This is Level 3, what Sartre called 'nausea', and it makes an extraordinary impression of truth and authenticity. Yet it is rather like believing that a picture gallery in the dark has no pictures in it. The moment our inner pressure carries us up to Level 3.5, we become aware that we

can *choose* between these two views: 'nausea' and meaning.

Our problem is that as soon as we allow ourselves to become 'depressurized', the meaning vanishes and 'nausea' seems to be the only reality. When children experience such states, they are defenceless. Adults, fortunately, have a line of defence: the intellect. Many Victorians had a remarkable grasp of this insight, and Matthew Arnold expressed it in a poem called 'Morality':

> We cannot kindle when we will
> The fire which in the heart resides.
> The spirit bloweth and is still;
> In mystery our soul abides;
> But tasks in hours of insight willed
> Can be through hours of gloom fulfilled.

Once a poet has actually *seen* this meaning he can, with a certain amount of stubbornness and intellectual toughness, hang on to it. It could be compared to navigating in a fog with a compass rather than by the stars.

The man who stands the best chance of fighting his way back into the state of insight is the one who has the best memory for the stars. And a man who has seen the stars a dozen times will obviously have a better memory for them than a man who has only seen them once or twice. And a man who has seen them hundreds of times can never forget them or doubt their existence. This is why we attach such immense importance to these states of 'wider consciousness', and will purchase them at high cost to our health, or even to our lives. The artist or poet who chooses poverty and 'outsiderism' to comfort and security is an example. So is the monk and the yogi. So, unfortunately, is the alcoholic and drug addict and rapist.

Ouspensky's repeated experience of Level 8 — described in 'Experimental Mysticism' — should have provided him with a very good working knowledge of the stars. The recognition that 'everything is connected' is a recognition that there is an 'overall

meaning', and that it should therefore be possible for man to achieve it. Ouspensky had an obscure sense that it was somehow wrong to use nitrous oxide to obtain this knowledge, and he was correct. You could say that he had used a balloon to get to heaven when he should have been building a ladder — a ladder of words and concepts — that others could have used after him. Moreover, he had not sufficiently strengthened his sense of reality to be able to cope with the 'landing'. Instead of feeling that everyday reality *contains* all these hidden meanings, these immense vistas of 'connectedness', he could only groan with anguish, like a child who wants Christmas to go on forever. This was the price that he paid for his 'short cut'.

When Ouspensky discovered Gurdjieff, though, it seemed that now, at last, he had his 'ladder', a means of achieving higher states of consciousness through ordinary conscious effort. His certainty that he had stumbled upon a completely new approach to the problem of higher consciousness was increased by some of Gurdjieff's odder and more paradoxical ideas — such as that knowledge is 'material', and therefore cannot be shared out indefinitely, or that human beings are 'food of the moon'. After his 'short cut' with nitrous oxide, he now went to the opposite extreme, and became entrenched in a kind of gleeful pragmatism. His total refusal to countenance anything that sounded like 'mysticism' has something in common with Marx's view that religion is the opium of the people. In effect, Ouspensky had become a kind of 'spiritual Marxist'. This attitude certainly made an immense impact on his followers in London, and later in America, producing the impression that he had *the* answer. In effect, he ordered everyone to toe the party line or else . . . Yet this attitude was the reverse of what he had stood for in *Tertium Organum* and *A New Model of the Universe*. It seems incredible that this 'Marxist' Ouspensky could have allowed himself to publish the chapter on Notre Dame, the Pyramids and the Sphinx, which sound as if they have been written by some disciple of Madame Blavatsky.

Significantly, of course, Gurdjieff himself was anything but a

'spiritual Marxist'. His approach remained fundamentally religious. This was the basic reason why Ouspensky had to renounce him. Ouspensky felt that he had taken Gurdjieff's System and discarded the nonsense. Religion and mysticism were traps for the woolly-minded. He had no time for such 'opium'.

Yet by the time he went to America, it had become clear to Ouspensky that his own 'Marxianized' version of the System was getting him nowhere. It left him trapped in 'tunnel vision' and only strong alcohol could enable him to 'open up'. Gurdjieff never made the same mistake: he ate, drank, fornicated and prayed, and remained a well-rounded human being. If we are to believe *Beelzebub,* the only thing he lacked was that deep, Chestertonian conviction of 'absurd good news'.

When Madame Ouspensky began to encourage the study of religious texts, Ouspensky allowed her to do so, for he was now aware of the shortcomings of his own approach. Yet this was a total reversal of what he had believed when he came to England in 1921, when such dilution of the System would have been harshly treated. And finally, as Nott has recorded, he felt like abandoning the System altogether and going off once more in search of 'secret doctrines' and hidden knowledge. His attempt to 'Marxianize' the System had left him intellectually bankrupt.

According to disciples who were with him in the last months of his life, Ouspensky achieved peace at the end. The 'tunnel vision' disappeared as death approached, and he probably felt that his attempt to intellectualize the System had not been such a waste of time after all. At least it had produced a masterpiece, in his record of his years with Gurdjieff, a book in which all his early clarity, brilliance and honesty combined to produce the perfect introduction to Gurdjieff's ideas. Without *In Search of the Miraculous,* 'the war against sleep' would certainly have made very little headway in the twentieth century, which has no time to get to grips with a work like *Beelzebub's Tales.* Half a century later, Ouspensky's book remains by far the best introduction to Gurdjieff.

It is a pity that Ouspensky never produced such an excellent introduction to Ouspensky. *Tertium Organum* and *A New Model of the Universe* both strike us as an odd mixture of brilliance and confusion. But if he had never written anything else, they would make us aware that Ouspensky was a powerful and original mind, comparable to Soloviev, Rozanov, Berdyaev and other major Russian thinkers. Instead posterity will continue to regard him as another man's interpreter.

Still, if the accounts of the serenity of his final days are accurate, it may be that this is how he would have preferred to be remembered.

Endnotes for
The Strange Life of P.D. Ouspensky

12. J.G. Bennett obtained this date from Gurdjieff's passport. Other sources give his date of birth as 1873, a date I have accepted in other accounts of Gurdjieff (for example, in *The Occult).*

13. Daly King's mystical experiences are cited more fully in the penultimate chapter of my *Beyond the Occult*.

14. A fuller version of this story — from Bennett's autobiography *Witness* (Chapter 10) — is quoted in the opening chapter of my book on Gurdjieff in this series.

15. This is also the title given by his editors to Ouspensky's last book, describing his years with Gurdjieff, to which Ouspensky himself gave the title 'Fragments of an Unknown Teaching'.

16. Published as *In Search of the Miraculous.*

17. I have discussed this, and Collin's other ideas, at some length in *Mysteries.*

18. My book on Gurdjieff, *The War Against Sleep,* contains a fuller account of his final years.

19. I have described two such occasions at length in *Beyond the Occult,* Chapter 2.

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