

## **LABOR IX: Killing the Stymphalian Birds Sagittarius, November 22 - December 21**

Within the place of peace the Teacher stood, and spoke to Hercules. "O son of God who art also a son of man," the Teacher said, "the time has come to tread another way. At Gate the ninth you stand. Pass through and find the marsh of Stymphalus where dwell the birds that havoc wreak. Discover, then, the way to flush them from their long secure abode."

He paused a moment. "The flame that gleams beyond the mind reveals direction sure." he added. "The task awaits. Through Gate the ninth you now must go."

Forward, then, went Hercules, the son of man who was also the son of God.

For long he searched until he came to Stymphalus. Before him lay the fetid marsh. A multitude of birds cawed raucously, a chorus menacing and dissonant, as he approached.

At nearer view he saw the birds. Large and fierce and hideous they were. Each had an iron beak that was sharpened like a sword. The feathers, too, seemed like steel shafts and, falling, could cleave in twain the pates of weary travellers. Their talons matched their beaks in sharpness and in strength.

Three birds, perceiving Hercules, swooped down upon him. He stood his ground, and warding off attacks with the heavy club he bore. One bird he struck resoundingly upon the back; two feathers plummeted to earth and quivered as they plunged into yielding ground. At length the birds withdrew.

Before the marsh stood Hercules, and pondered how he might achieve the task assigned, how rid the place of these predacious birds.

By many means he sought to find a way. At first he tried to kill them with a quiverful of arrows. The few he slew were but a fraction of the many that remained. They rose in clouds so thick they hid the sun.

He thought of setting traps within the marsh. Nor boat nor human feet could traverse the bog. Hercules paused. The words he then recalled of counsel given. "The flame that gleams beyond the mind reveals direction sure." Reflecting long, a method came to mind.

Two cymbals had he, large and brazen, that gave forth an unearthly screeching sound; a sound so piercing and so harsh it could affright the dead. To Hercules himself the sound was so intolerable, he covered both his ears with pads.

At twilight when the marsh was dense with countless birds, Hercules returned. The cymbals then he sharply clashed, again and yet again. A clangor and a din so strident then ensued that he himself could scarce endure the sound. Such ear-assaulting dissonance had not been heard in Stymphalus before.

Bewildered and disturbed by such a monstrous noise, the predatory birds rose in the air with wildly flapping brazen wings, and screeched in hoarse dismay. Utterly confused, the vast cloud of birds fled in frantic haste, never to return. Silence spread across the marsh. The horrid birds had disappeared. The soft gleam of a westering sun was seen as it flickered on the darkening landscape.

When Hercules returned, the Teacher greeted him: "The birds of slaughter have been driven off. The labor is achieved."

- F. M.

### ***Interpretation of the Labor*** (Edited Lecture by A.A.B., 1937)

Sagittarius is to my mind most interesting because it has such a peculiar application to each one of us answering to the name "aspirant".

There are two words I want to see ruled out of the vocabulary of the occultist, "initiate" and "master". "Initiate" is delightfully separative, it is a pedestal word. "Master" has bred in the consciousness of people the feeling that there exist superhuman men who assume the attitude of directors or masters over their disciples; who tell them what to do and how to do it. No real adept has ever been known to do that.

I like the words "aspirant" and "disciple". Aspirant is a blanket word that covers us at every stage of our development. If you want a more technical word, use disciple; it is a hiding word, because an aspirant

of the lowest degree is a disciple. The Christ himself is also a disciple. It does away with grades and classes and degrees and varied stages of evolution.

Where we stand on the ladder of evolution is our own private affair. The world will know what we are, when we have done the work that is outlined for us in this labor of Sagittarius.

We have already dealt with the stupendous sign Scorpio, in which Hercules demonstrated to himself the fact that he could no longer be taken in by the serpent of illusion. He was free from fear and glamour, from all that could beguile him. The vision could be seen.

Because Sagittarius is such a tremendously important sign I want to give you a brief resumé of what has happened up to the present time; it covers what lies behind us. I am assuming that each one of us is the one-pointed aspirant, the archer on the horse, going straight as an arrow to his goal.

It is interesting that the United States' standard shows the arrows of Sagittarius in the talons of an eagle, because Aquila is interchangeable astrologically with Sagittarius and is the symbol of the spirit manifesting through the soul, which the aspirant on the physical plane is one-pointedly seeking. There is prophecy in the United States standard, of the goal of this race when it is grown up, for it is within this race that there will emerge that group of aspirants, merging in their turn into a group of disciples, who will demonstrate to the planet the fact of the subjective world. That is the destiny of this race. It will be the achievement of all the races gathered together in the United States.

Let us narrow the story down to Hercules, the aspirant, and what he has done in each sign.

In **Aries**, Hercules began on the plane of the mind in his endeavor to capture the man-eating mares, and met with failure because he dealt with them in a personality way. He dealt with thought from the standpoint of personality; he did not work with his problem from the standpoint of the soul. In Sagittarius he slaughtered the man-eating birds. He was back again to the same problem on the plane of the mind where he demonstrated complete control of that which is the first thing the aspirant to initiation has to do. We control our thoughts and consequently control our words. There is no initiation for us until we do. In Aries he began to control thought.

In **Taurus** he worked down to the astral plane and came up against the problem of sex, the demonstration of the great law of attraction in the universe in its lowest aspect. He had fairly good success. He did control the bull and drove it into the city of the Cyclops.

In **Gemini** it began to dawn upon him that he was dual; he was engrossed with the problem of soul and body and how to coordinate them. That is why Gemini fluctuates in the early stages.

In **Cancer** he passed on to a certain amount of mass consciousness; he took form. That is a stage of human incarnation. With many, the fact that they are human beings with relationship to other human beings just does not enter into their consciousness at all. In Cancer, Hercules began to get that viewpoint. The moment you get that, you capture the timid doe of the intuition, and you begin to be intuitive, not psychic.

Then Hercules passed into that difficult sign **Leo**, where so many now are, and became a very forceful individual. He was sure he could do everything, he stood alone: a stage of power. At this stage you are going to rule men, and you begin by ruling them wrongly. You assert yourself too forcefully, and you think you are more important than you are. You have to get rid of the sense of "I am". That is the whole story of the life of the aspirant. You must become so identified with the real spiritual entity that lies back of all forms that you are not occupied with your own form, or mental or emotional reactions, or your own usefulness.

In **Virgo**, Hercules became conscious, not of soul and body placed in juxtaposition to each other, but of the fact that latent within himself was the infinite Christ; that the personality, the form side, was nurturing a beautiful hidden something, and his eyes were opened.

In **Libra** he went through a difficult stage of achieving equilibrium, a very abstruse sign in many ways because the man is neither the soul nor the body. Libra is the balancing on the physical plane of the pairs of opposites. He has balanced them so much that he does not feel that he is getting anywhere.

In **Scorpio**, on the astral plane, he takes up again the work begun in Taurus, completes it and clears away the great mire, the great illusion and stands free with the goal clear in front of him.

Gemini is the opposite of Sagittarius; **Gemini duality; Sagittarius unity**, the one-pointed going forward, the unified personality, conscious of the soul, determined to enter the sign Capricorn where the great transition is made out of the fourth into the fifth or spiritual kingdom.

Sagittarius is the archer on the white horse, sometimes pictured as the centaur with the bow and arrows. In these two modes of picturing - the centaur half human and half animal, the archer on the white horse, half human and half divine - you have the whole story. **A white horse is always the symbol of divinity**. Christ came forth riding on a white horse. There you have Sagittarius in the *Book of Revelation*. It is a double sign, and whenever you have a double sign you have a problem.

In Sagittarius, just as in Scorpio Hercules took up and completed the work started in Taurus, he took up and completed the work started in Aries. In Aries he was dealing with thought at its source. In this sign he demonstrates complete control of thought and speech.

Sagittarius has sometimes been called "the sign of the effect of Scorpio". The moment we have freed ourselves from illusion, that moment we enter into Sagittarius and we see the goal. We have never really seen it before, because between us and the goal there is always to be found that cloud of thought forms that prevents us from seeing it.

We talk about spiritual love, devotion to the Christ, devotion to the elder brothers of the race, to the soul; and as we are occupied with these thoughts we build clouds of thought forms because we are thinking, and as we think we build. **Therefore we have built around ourselves such a cloud of thought forms about our aspirations, that we do not see the goal.** I am not cutting away the ground under your feet, *but stop thinking so much about what to do and learn more simply "to be."*

### **Silence**

Sagittarius is the sign preparatory to Capricorn and it is called in some ancient books "the sign of silence". In ancient mysteries the newly admitted brother had to sit in silence, he was not allowed to walk or speak; he had to be, to work and to watch, because one cannot enter the fifth kingdom in nature, the spiritual kingdom, or climb the mountain of Capricorn, until there has been restraint of speech and control of thought. *That is the lesson of Sagittarius: restraint of speech through control of thought.* That will keep us busy, because after you have given up using the ordinary forms of speech, such as gossip, then you have to learn restraint of speech about things spiritual. You have to learn what **not** to say about the life of the soul, very copious talking about things for which people may not as yet be ready.

Right use of thought, restraint of speech, and consequent harmlessness on the physical plane, result in liberation; for we are held in the human unit, we are imprisoned to the planet not by some outside force that holds us there, but **by what we ourselves have said and done**. The moment we no longer set up wrong relations with people by the things we say that should not have been said, the moment we stop thinking things about people that we should not think, little by little those ties that hold us to planetary existence are severed, we are freed and we climb the mountain like the goat in Capricorn.

It has been asked: "Must we never make karma for ourselves or do anything that would tie us to any human being, because as long as we tie ourselves to any human being, we have got to go on reincarnating?" Well, I am going to tie myself to humanity by service, by love, by disinterested thought. That means something. But I am not going to tie myself by critical thought, self-pitying thoughts, by gossip, by words that I should not say. I am not going to have for my motive my own liberation.

A caution: don't be good, don't be harmless, don't serve merely in order to get away from it all, which is what a lot of people do. Stay with humanity as Christ does, or like that great Life whom we are told will stay in His appointed place until the last pilgrim has found his way home.

### **Two Gates, Three Constellations**

Sagittarius is the little gate to Capricorn. There are two cosmic gates: Cancer, the gate into incarnation; Capricorn, the gate into the spiritual kingdom. Prior to Capricorn is Sagittarius, spoken of as "a lesser gate". I like to think of it as the little gate at the foot of the hill through which we pass before climbing the mountain and in passing through that little gate, we demonstrate our ability to rightly use the arrows of thought. That is the great test.

There are two birds to be seen in the heavens close to Sagittarius. One, **Aquila**, the eagle flying straight into the face of the sun, the bird out of time and space, the symbol of immortality, the symbol of that secret hidden thing that lies back of our souls even; for we are told that matter or form is the vehicle for the manifestation of soul, and soul on a higher turn of the spiral is the vehicle for the manifestation of spirit, and these three are a trinity unified by life that pervades them all.

The other constellation is **Cygnus**, symbol of soul. Sagittarius, the aspirant, looking to the left and to the right: to the right seeing Aquila and saying to himself, "I am spirit flying straight for my home"; looking the other side and seeing Cygnus, the swan, with its four stars in the form of a cross and saying, "I am the soul crucified in matter from which I shall release myself."

Remember, the day is coming when we shall talk about the soul as we now talk about the personality, as something from which we have eventually to be released. That is the problem, if I may use that word, of the man who has taken the third initiation, to release himself from soul.

Will you take those three constellations as your symbol: Cygnus, Aquila and Sagittarius? Aquila, the eagle in the U.S. standard; the arrows of Sagittarius. And have you ever thought that wherever you go you see the cross of Cygnus, the Red Cross? That is what the United States stands for. You have it right in the heavens.

Sagittarius is the ninth sign. Think about this sequence of thought. In Virgo, the sixth sign, we have the indication of life; in Sagittarius, the ninth sign, the completion of the prenatal period before the birth of the Christ in Capricorn in December. It is amazing how your correspondences, your analogies work out. That is why we are told to study the human being. It is through the symbolism of the human being that we arrive at understanding of the great Life which includes us all in its existence.

### **The Chrysalis Symbol**

Sagittarius, curiously enough, has been called the chrysalis stage; the man is neither one thing nor the other. In the chrysalis you have the strange triplicity of the caterpillar, the chrysalis and the butterfly. The caterpillar, we are told, reincarnates five times; it sloughs its skin five times, five is the number of man. Then there comes that curious happening in the life of the caterpillar where there is a complete change, and from a thing crawling about prompted by desire, eating all the time, there comes the stage of the chrysalis. What goes on in that chrysalis stage is a most mysterious happening. We are told that inside the hard shell of chrysalis which the caterpillar has constructed, there is nothing but a fluid. Every single thing has broken down and in that fluid are what are called three centers of life, and because of the interplay between those three local points of energy, a change goes on, a rebuilding, until there emerges out of the period of silence, a wonderful butterfly. It is almost as though in the chrysalis there were three aspects of divinity symbolized and working to a pattern, the Christ pattern.

Consider what goes on in the life of the individual aspirant in Sagittarius. There has been a complete breaking down of everything in Scorpio; everything has been reduced to fluid, for Scorpio is an astral sign and water is the symbol. In the life of the aspirant of today, I need not enlarge upon it, there has been a complete breaking down of everything. As one person said to me, there is nothing left to live for, there is nothing interesting enough to pull one through existence. Why? Because you are an aspirant, a disciple; it is the best indication you can have of your status on the ladder of evolution. Everything has broken down and you know it. But the three aspects of divinity are still there in the fluid; and they will work and the pattern is there. The chrysalis stage is Sagittarius. It is interesting to carry the sequence of thought or achievement from Scorpio into the power and success developed in Sagittarius, for it is a sign of power.

The true Sagittarian is a very potent person; potent because it is the sign of silence; potent because it is the sign of one-pointedness and the goal is seen for the first time clearly; potent because it is the period immediately preceding the birth of the Christ.

### **The Spirit of Truth**

Sagittarius, we are told, is the spirit of truth; *it is the sum of all Truth growing out of individual revelation.*

Now the usual happening when there is an individual revelation is sectarianism; an illustration of Sagittarius misused. I had a revelation; God has revealed this, that and the other to me. I immediately impose upon my fellow men my personal interpretation of truth. I see no truth but my truth. I am an aspirant, but all aspirants must interpret truth as I see it; if not, they are not aspirants. You must believe in reincarnation because it is the truth; you must believe in the Masters of Wisdom because they exist; you must believe this, that and the other.

One-pointed, yes. But a little bit of the truth. Just so much of the truth as your poor little brain can grasp, and yet such a tremendous revelation to you that you think it is all of the truth.

In Sagittarius, the first of the great universal signs, we see truth as the whole when we are using arrows of thought rightly. I will say, this is for me, my formulation of the truth, because it helps me to live. Other groups use other terminologies and only as I can grasp my brother's way of looking at the truth is it possible for me to have the vision.

All the various truths form one Truth; that is what is realized in Sagittarius, and you cannot go through the gate at the foot of the mountain until you have seen where your little bit of truth forms part of the group mosaic. That is all.

### **The Spirit of Right**

Sagittarius has been called the sign of the spirit of right, growing out of the contentions of the previous eight signs. When I am really functioning in Sagittarius, I will have learned to discriminate between right and wrong. I will know what is right for myself, but I will also have learned this lesson: that my right may be my brother's wrong, and my brother's wrong may be my right; that it is impossible for me to say what is right for you because we all have a different equipment, different heredity, different tradition and background, different racial tendencies. We are all so diverse, and carrying that thought on, we all come along different rays. We have different egoic rays and different personality rays, and the more you know about these things the less you can talk about them.

I know what is right for me and I will endeavor to live by my right, my idea of right. I do not know what is right for you, but I will give you the credit for doing the best you know. If we could assume that attitude towards each other, the spirit of harmlessness, control of thought and restraint of speech would emerge in the world and we would escape from our world problems. The world will never be put right by fighting, but by right thought, and it will be a soul process. Someone has said that in Scorpio we have conviction of sin; in Sagittarius we have conviction of right.

### **Three Gifts**

We are told in some books on astrology that there are three signs of beneficent outpouring in the zodiac. One is Aries from which there is pouring out upon us the gift of existence. A quotation from a Hindu scripture tells us that there are three things which by the grace of God we have: the gift of being a human being, the longing for liberation, and coming under the guidance of a perfect sage, in your own heart.

The gift of existence in **Aries** is the wonder of being a human being. If you can think of yourself as a mineral, from such limitations you will arrive at the wonder of being, because it means freedom from the standpoint of the mineral. Complete freedom.

In **Leo**, the gift of opportunity. I am an individual. I shall use life for myself, if I am a little Leo; or I shall use the opportunity to open the gates for other people.

In **Sagittarius**, the gift of power. Do you feel able to have power? One definition of an occultist is a human being who works in the world of powers and forces. I do not know anyone who can safely be trusted to wield power. Why? Because Sagittarius has not done its work. Restraint of speech has not yet been learned. Control of thought has not been mastered, and the soul is not potent enough. When we love enough we may have power. When we love enough and are harmless enough then the gates of heaven and hell will be put into our hands, but not before.

Let us begin to love, not sentimentally, but through beginning really to understand human beings, to identify ourselves with them and love them. You can know what a human being is, with all his faults, and

you can love him; not from a superior standpoint of saving "poor thing, some day he will be where I am", but from the standpoint of saying, "I have been just like that", or "I am just like that".

The gift of existence, the gift of opportunity, and the gift of power; the three great gifts of the zodiac.

### Three Constellations

There are three constellations connected with this sign, the three most beautiful.

*Lyra*, the seven-stringed harp. The aspirant learns to play upon the harp and he makes music with his life.

*Ara*, the altar, because the aspirant places all upon the altar, not in the spirit of sad renunciation, bracing himself to be perfectly miserable, but in the spirit of "there is nothing else to do. I am detaching myself from these things in order that I may more perfectly and fully serve".

*Draco*, the serpent. We met the hydra, the serpent, in Gemini; now we meet Draco, the serpent of wisdom.

Music in the life of harmony, sacrifices in the personality reactions and desires, and wisdom.

And hovering over two other constellations: **Aquila**, spirit; and **Cygnus**, the soul.

Do you see why I am so thrilled over Sagittarius? It is such a beautiful sign and there is so much to say about it. I have omitted so much.

### Details of the Story

We read that the marshes of Acadia were filled with man-eating birds, pictured in ancient books as ferocious storks, the birds of Stymphalus. They were three in number; three major birds, but there were many small ones. They were wasting the land, but they could not be seen; they were hidden in the brush, in the undergrowth, doing damage, but they could not be located.

As usual, Hercules rushes to the land of Acadia and determines to rid the land of these man-eating birds. We are told he was very clever in the way he did it. He had freed himself from illusion and Athena had given him some cymbals which he clashed so loudly that the birds arose out of the marsh into the air and tried to fly away; then he mounted on his winged horse and shot them with his arrows. It is a wonderful story.

Marshes are a symbol of the mind plus emotion, Hercules discovers that although he may be an aspirant and he may have triumphed in Scorpio, **he still possesses an emotional nature**, and he finds that the birds of Stymphalus, especially three of them, are of a man-eating kind and that he must do something about it.

Picture his reaction, the conqueror discovering that he is a devastating force; that by his words and thoughts he is doing harm. Remember this, the further on you go along the path of return, and the more you function as a spiritual entity, the more potent you become and the more harm you can do. You are forceful, you are wielding power, you are probably the center of your group. If you are an aspirant, if you are a disciple, the thought and speech activity is your main enterprise. You weigh your thoughts because there is potency back of your thought, and when you think wrongly the harm you do is much more potent than the harm that a less evolved person does.

We must get the birds out of the marshes and into the clear air where we can see them and conquer them. The birds that did the most harm were three in number. In one book they are enumerated: cruel gossip; talk of the self, selfish talk; and casting of pearls before swine. What does that mean?

It has been said that gossip is "spiritual murder". Do I need to discuss cruel gossip, how lives have been wrecked by it? There is an unbroken law, if you gossip you will be gossiped about. We get what we give. If you give service you will get service; kindness, kindness; love, love. If humanity is mistreating you, search yourself and find out where you are at fault. An ancient scripture says, to him who is harmless all enmity ceases. I know that when I achieve harmlessness in thought, word and deed, then I will have no problems. The fact that we have problems presupposes our harmfulness.

Talking about oneself, we are always occupied with our own problems, our own affairs. Casting pearls before swine: talking about the occult troubles for which the hearers are not ready. If you are a disciple you will know to what I refer.

The problem is clear: I am a Sagittarian and so are you. We are living with the emblem of Sagittarius in front of us all the time. We are trying to bring harmony into our lives, trying to lead the "altar" life, seeking to contact the serpent of wisdom. Begin with thought and speech, and begin today.

- *The Labours of Hercules* An Astrological Interpretation, Alice A. Bailey p. 155–168

|                      |   |
|----------------------|---|
| <b>Sagittarius:</b>  | <b>the Archer</b>   |
| Element:             | Fire sign (as are Aries and Leo)  |
| Quality:             | Focused direction. One-pointed activity. In the early stages, satisfaction of desire; in later stages aspiration for the goal of initiation.  |
| Polar Opposite:      | Gemini, an air sign (eventual control of fluidity and pairs of opposites; fusion, synthesis, at-one-ment).  |
| Rulers:              | Exoteric, Jupiter; Esoteric, Earth.   |
| <b>Keywords:</b>     |   |
| From the form angle: | Let food be sought.   |
| From the soul angle: | I reach that goal and then I see another.   |
| <b>The Lesson:</b>   | Hercules demonstrates his one-pointedness, where we have the consummation of the task begun in Aries, which was the right use and control of thought. In Aries he captured the Man-Eating Mares and bent them to his use. Now he slays the Man-Eating Birds of Stymphalos and puts an end to all tendencies to use thought destructively. |