

countess of Caithness and duchesse de Pomar, founder and president of the French lodge in 1883. This group has been examined by Joscelyn Godwin in *The Theosophical Enlightenment*. Lady Caithness had published on esotericism and Christianity in *Old Truths in a New Light* as early as 1876.

Kingsford and Maitland were finding their way toward an esoteric but Christ-centered faith. Most well-educated Theosophists were aware of a tradition of allegorical interpretations of scripture influenced by Neoplatonism and the Hellenistic approach to myth, of Jewish and Christian writers like Philo, ORIGEN, Gregory of Nyssa, and more recently BOEHME and SWEDENBORG. The first Christian esotericism Kingsford and Maitland had heard of was Swedenborg; Lady Caithness, with whom they had corresponded by 1878, told them of Jacob Boehme and Eliphas LEVI. On the basis of such reading, and of direct mystical visions on the part of Anna Kingsford they called "illumination," they came to interpret the Christian mythos as one form of the popular "solar myth" pattern, allegories of the passage of the Sun through the Zodiac which scholars as distinguished as Max Müller then took to be basic to all religion. But they also claimed that Jesus was a real person; the Christ, however, represented the state of regenerate man, united with the Logos or Divine Spirit. They conceded that the other ancient mysteries and the pagan gods had concealed and revealed the esoteric doctrine as much as did Christ. But now, for obvious historical reasons, that burden lay almost entirely on Christianity in the West. But that faith, though now the main vehicle for the wisdom, had become so corrupt that it was hardly fulfilling its true function.

All this was presented in lectures at the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society in 1881, published anonymously with the help of Lady Caithness in 1882 as *The Perfect Way; or, the Finding of Christ*. This fascinating work, which clearly influenced Annie BESANT deeply, centers on the Gnostic theme of the liberation of spirit from matter, a salvation prefigured, after the mystery drama of the Crucifixion and Death of Christ, in his Resurrection in his "true and immortal form," and finally culminated in his Ascension, which is "that of the whole Man, now regenerate, to his own celestial kingdom within himself" (1924 ed., p. 213.). Between Caithness and Kingsford there was now before the world an esoteric, quasi-theosophical understanding of Christianity, especially Catholic Christianity. (Both Kingsford and Caithness were Roman Catholics; Kingsford, like Annie Besant, the unhappy wife of an Anglican vicar, a convert in 1870.) In 1883 Anna Kingsford