

ETRUSCAN PLACES

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1932

London: Martin Secker

Birds fly portentously on the walls of the tombs. The artist must often have seen those priests, the augurs, with their crooked, bird-headed staffs in their hand, out on a high place watching the flight of larks or pigeons across the quarters of the sky. They were reading the signs and the portents, looking for an indication, how they should direct the course of some

serious affair. To us it may seem foolish. To them, hot-blooded birds flew through the living universe as feelings and premonitions fly through the breast of a man, or as thoughts fly through the mind. In their flight the suddenly roused birds, or the steady, far-coming birds, moved wrapped in a deeper consciousness, in the complex destiny of all things. And since all things corresponded in the ancient world, and man's bosom mirrored itself in the bosom of the sky, or *vice versa*, the birds were flying to a portentous goal, in the man's breast who watched, as well as flying their own way in the bosom of the sky. If the augur could see the birds flying *in his heart*, then he would know which way destiny too was flying for him.

The science of augury certainly was no exact science. But it was as exact as our sciences of psychology or political economy. And the augurs were as clever as our politicians, who also must practise divination, if ever they are to do anything worth the name. There is no other way when you are dealing with life. And if you live by the cosmos, you look in the cosmos for your clue. If you live by a personal god, you pray to him. If you are rational, you think things over. But it all amounts to the same thing in the end. Prayer, or thought, or studying the stars, or watching the flight of birds, or studying the entrails of the sacrifice, it is all the same process, ultimately: of divination. All it depends on is the amount of *true*, sincere, religious concentration you can bring to bear on your

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object. An act of pure attention, if you are capable of it, will bring its own answer. And you choose that object to concentrate upon which will best focus your consciousness. Every real discovery made, every serious and significant decision ever reached, was reached and made by divination. Columbus discovered America by a sort of divination. The soul stirs, and makes an act of pure attention, and that is a discovery.

The science of the augur and the haruspex was not so foolish as our modern science of political economy. If the hot liver of the victim cleared the soul of the haruspex, and made him capable of that ultimate inward attention which alone tells us the last thing we need to know, then why quarrel with the haruspex? To him, the universe was alive, and in quivering *rapport*. To him, the blood was conscious; he thought with his heart. To him, the blood was the red and shining stream of consciousness itself. Hence, to him, the liver, that great organ where the blood struggles and "overcomes death," was an object of profound mystery and significance. It stirred his soul and purified his consciousness; for it was also his victim. So he gazed into the hot liver, that was mapped out in fields and regions like the sky of stars, but these fields and regions were those of the red, shining consciousness that runs through the whole animal creation. And therefore it must contain the answer to his own blood's question.

It is the same with the study of stars, or the sky of

PAINTED TOMBS OF TARQUINIA

stars. Whatever object will bring the consciousness into a state of pure attention, in a time of perplexity, will also give back an answer to the perplexity. But it is truly a question of *divination*. As soon as there is any pretence of infallibility, and pure scientific calculation, the whole thing becomes a fraud and a jugglery. But the same is true not only of augury and astrology, but also of prayer and of pure reason, and even of the discoveries of the great laws and principles of science. Men juggle with prayer to-day as once they juggled with augury; and in the same way they are juggling with science. Every great discovery or decision comes by an act of divination. Facts are fitted round afterwards. But all attempt at divination, even prayer and reason and research itself, lapses into jugglery when the heart loses its purity. In the impurity of his heart, Socrates often juggled logic unpleasantly. And no doubt, when scepticism came over the ancient world, the haruspex and the augur became jugglers and pretenders. But for centuries they held real sway. It is amazing to see, in Livy, what a big share they must have had in the building up of the great Rome of the Republic.