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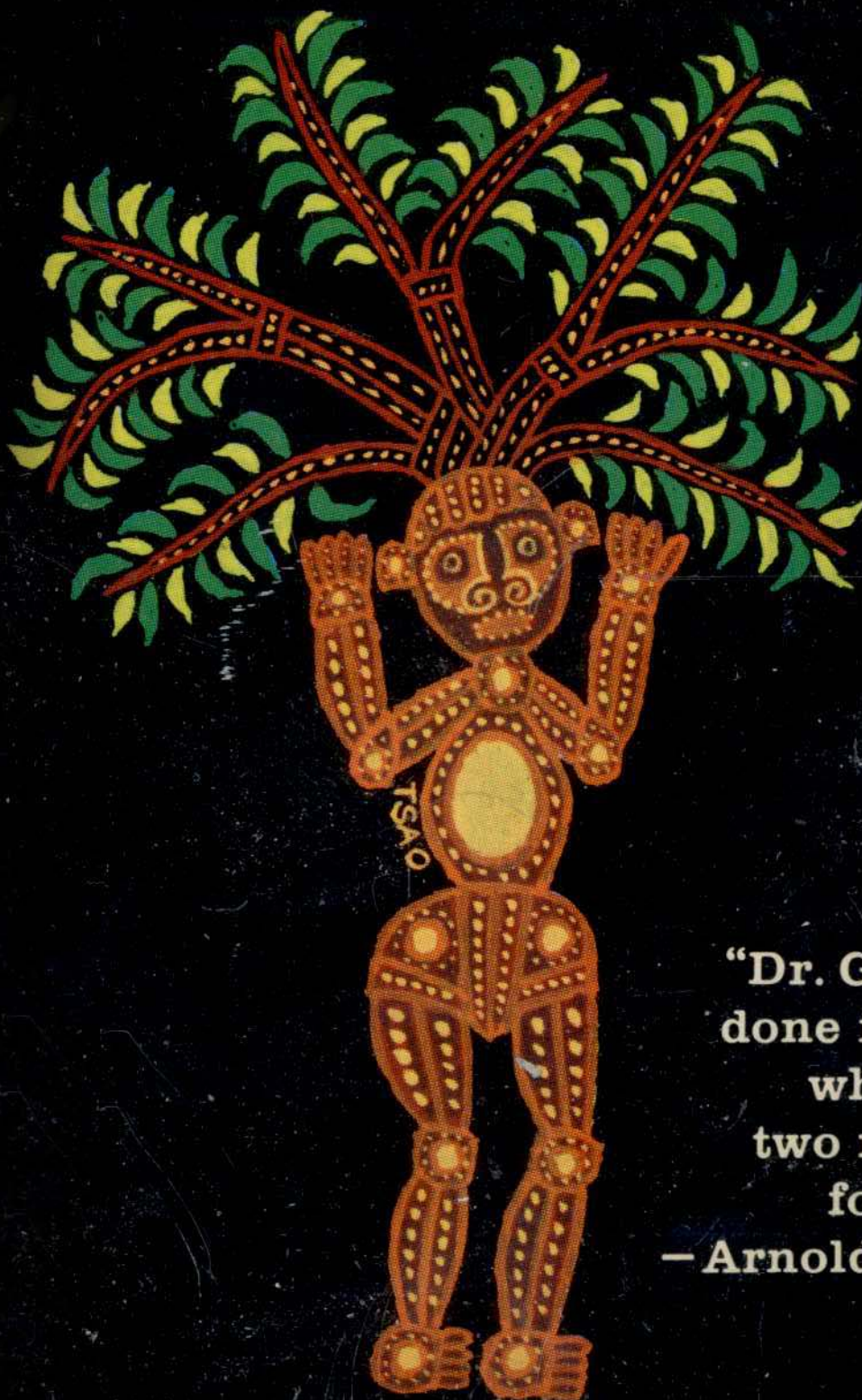
The New Golden Bough

ABRIDGED

SIR JAMES FRAZER'S

classic work on ancient and
primitive myth, magic, religion, ritual,
and taboo. Revised and edited in the
light of recent scholarship by

THEODOR H. GASTER



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done for Frazer
what it took
two men to do
for Gibbon."
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THEODOR H. GASTER is a specialist in comparative religions, a folklorist of international reputation, and a master of 29 languages and dialects. He has been Chief of the Hebraic Section in the Library of Congress, Curator of the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Antiquities in the Wellcome Museum, London, and Fulbright Professor in History of Religions at the University of Rome. His major work, *Thespis*, is a study of the ritual origins of the drama, and he is one of the contributors to *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*.

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The New
GOLDEN BOUGH

A New Abridgment of the Classic Work
by **SIR JAMES GEORGE FRAZER**

Edited, and with Notes and Foreword,
by **DR. THEODOR H. GASTER**



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**SIGNET, SIGNET CLASSICS, MENTOR, PLUME AND MERIDIAN BOOKS
*are published by The New American Library, Inc.,
1301 Avenue of the Americas, New York, New York 10019***

FIRST PRINTING, AUGUST, 1964

4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

A Note to the Reader

First published in England in 1890, *The Golden Bough*, by Sir James George Frazer (1854–1941), a distinguished Scottish classicist and anthropologist, consisted originally of two volumes. Eventually expanded to twelve volumes in all, these were followed in turn by a supplement entitled *Aftermath*.

A pioneer study in magic and religion linking primitive concepts and modes of thought to the many institutions and folk customs they underlie, *The Golden Bough* was a milestone in the interpretation of man's cultural past. It represents a profoundly significant contribution to the history of ideas.

However, since the conception and first publication of *The Golden Bough*, man's knowledge of primitive thought and folklore, religion and society, has been systematized and vastly increased. Some of the elements in the original have been outmoded and superseded; the values of some of its arguments have shifted; the reliability of some of Frazer's sources—many of them the unscientific observations of missionaries and travelers—has been impeached; and some of his premises shaken by the findings of modern scholarship. The completely new, one-volume abridgment presented here, prepared by an outstanding authority, makes available a condensation of Frazer's twelve-volume monumental work (incorporating, also, appropriate selections from the supplementary thirteenth volume), faithful to the original in all basic respects, while eliminating secondary material now obsolete as a result of the vast anthropological and other scientific studies of the intervening years. Holding to the eight major divisions of the original, Dr. Theodor H. Gaster, editor of the new abridgment, has cut away excess verbiage, made a fresh division of subtopics, and numbered paragraphs for easy cross-reference to Frazer's own comprehensive notes (unavailable in earlier one-volume editions) and to his own new Additional Notes. In cases where modification of Frazer's views is required in the light of newer discoveries and of research into primary sources, Dr. Gaster has provided in the Additional Notes suitable supplementary data, as well as de-

tailed references to the newer literature. Notes, a complete index, and the text proper are all carefully co-ordinated, and a synopsis and substantial foreword analyzing Frazer's work and comparing it with this new abridgment are included. Dr. Gaster has prepared, also, a new analytical table of contents, whereby the reader is able to see at a glance the relation of every part of the book to the central theme.

The NEW Golden Bough gives the reader easy, logical access to one of the richest works of the human imagination, and restores it as a living, working classic and an indispensable reference work.

Dr. Gaster, author of many distinguished books and articles on religions and civilizations of the past, is a specialist in comparative religions, especially of the Near East, a folklorist of international reputation, and master of twenty-nine languages and dialects. His major work, *Thespis*, is a study of the ritual origins of the drama; he has also made a distinguished translation and appreciation of the Dead Sea Scrolls. Dr. Gaster has been Chief of the Hebraic Section in the Library of Congress, Curator of the Department of Semitic and Egyptian Antiquities in the Wellcome Museum, London, and Fulbright Professor in History of Religions at the University of Rome. He is also one of the contributors to *The Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*.

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Editor's Foreword

The Golden Bough is a classic; but classics in the field of scholarship occupy a peculiar position. For while as literature they may remain immortal and as cultural landmarks imperishable, the particular views which they expound and the particular theses which they advance tend in time to be superseded, so that they come to survive like ancient castles, venerable and imposing features of the landscape, but unsuited to habitation without extensive "changes." Or, to take a closer analogy, they suffer the fate of Frazer's own *King of the Wood* and are obliged in due course to yield their authority to those who pluck the golden bough from the sacred tree. All of which places the modern editor of such a classic in a singularly uncomfortable dilemma. For he is never quite sure where judicious "renovation" ends and sheer vandalism begins. On the one hand he is supremely conscious of what Milton said about every good book being the precious life-blood, etc., and he will not wish to mutilate another man's work or to obliterate features which, however grotesque, have become familiar. On the other, he will feel it a disservice both to author and reader to compromise the permanent value and continued usefulness of a scientific product by mere pious conservation of its outmoded elements. A good fruit tree not only needs, but also deserves, periodic pruning.

The present abridgment of Frazer's masterpiece seeks to steer an even course in these treacherous waters. It offers, within reasonable compass, such a condensation of the original work as will, it is hoped, faithfully preserve its essential thesis, structure, and documentation, while at the same time omitting such subsidiary and incidental elements as more recent research has rendered obsolete or untenable. It eliminates, for example, Frazer's lengthy discussion of the relation between Magic and Religion, because the view which is there expressed that the two things stand in genealogical succession—that is, that Religion is due to a refinement of the more primitive "magical" mentality—has now been shown to be a mere product of late nineteenth-century evolutionism, without adequate basis. It likewise eliminates Frazer's identifica-

tion of the sacred tree at Nemi as an *oak*—a very doubtful theory indeed, and one about which he himself was later to express misgivings.

Furthermore, this abridgment attempts, by means of extensive additional notes, to put into the hands of the readers a fairly comprehensive (though, of course, not exhaustive) guide to more recent literature on the various topics with which the work deals, and thus at the same time to orientate them towards alternative views or material (e.g., from the civilizations of the ancient Near East) which were not available when Frazer wrote, but which possess a significant bearing on his thesis.

In the several cases where Frazer's views now require to be modified in the light of subsequent research, but where mere omission or radical alteration would destroy the whole sequence of his argument, short paragraphs have been inserted in the Additional Notes, alerting the reader to the principal difficulties or objections and sometimes suggesting a different construction of the data. It may be useful here to summarize the main points on which such modification would now appear to be necessary:

(1) Frazer's interpretation of the priesthood of Aricia and of the rites which governed succession to it has been almost unanimously rejected by classical scholars. The sanctuary at that place was probably no more than an asylum for runaway slaves; and the golden bough, far from being a vessel of divine power or identical with that carried by Aeneas on his journey to the nether world, was in all likelihood simply the branch characteristically borne in antiquity by suppliants at a shrine. Accordingly, Frazer's elaborate exposition of primitive customs and their modern survivals must now be read as a treatise in its own right, and not as an illustrative commentary on the ancient Latin institutions. (Since, however, it is impossible to eliminate all reference to the latter without destroying the whole structure of the book, it has seemed best to retain it with this express warning that it must now be regarded only as an artistic and fanciful *leitmotif*, not as a factual scaffolding, and that the title, *The Golden Bough*, is in truth a misnomer.)

(2) The basic contention that in primitive cultures the king is primarily the bringer of life overlooks the fact that he is just as much the representative and epitome of those who receive it. Accordingly, the things that he does and suffers in ritual procedures are not always, as Frazer supposes, acts performed vicariously on behalf of his people; as often as not they merely dramatize and typify what the people as a whole