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Camelot and the Vision of Albion

Geoffrey Ashe



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When archaeologists dug up the hill of Cadbury in Somerset, the reputed site of King Arthur's Camelot, thousands of visitors came to watch. They never saw anything resembling the Camelot of romance. Yet they kept coming, year after year. Why does Arthur fascinate? In this book, the secretary of the Cad bury project (himself an authority on the legend) looks for an answer. Drawing on varied researches, and on the insight embodied in William Blake's symbol of the shadowy 'Giant Albion' behind Arthur, he plunges into the psychological depths that underlie the tale of the enchanted King, his city Camelot, his mysterious departure to Avalon, his promised return. The enquiry starts from the solid facts of Cadbury. But it opens vistas on a strange world of gods and mortals and immemorial yearnings. The same universal dream that created the legendary Arthur is shown reappearing through many centuries, inspiring many thinkers: Blake himself; Virgil, Confucius, Rousseau, Gandhi; even such supposed rationalists as Robert Owen and Lenin.All the paths converge on a central problem of the human condition, which, the author suggests, must be solved if mankind is to achieve a workable humanist philosophy. It turns out that Arthur remains startlingly relevant: that the prophecy of his return has a serious meaning.

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