

## MYSTIC LIGHT

### *The Way of the Passion— The Foot-washing*



**H**AVING STUDIED the work of Christ Jesus in the Word and the Miracles,\* we must now turn to the sacred, solemn subject of the Way of the Passion. That which was true of the two other stages of Christ's work applies here in a still higher degree: no human being can deal exhaustively with any one of these subjects; that is, no one can comprehend and describe them in their full height, depth and width. This was the conviction underlying, for example, the work of the writer of St. John's Gospel. For when, in the first sentence of his Gospel, he defines the Word as the creative power of the universe and then points to Christ Jesus as the cosmic Word made flesh, he is saying already at the beginning what at the end of the Gospel he expresses in clear words as the result of this: "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written—Amen." In writing this, the Evangelist admits that his work is not exhaustive, and that its subject-matter offers scope to all researchers and seers in the world. This is as true today as it was then.

The conclusion which naturally follows from this conviction is that every truth known concerning the Christ-being and the work of Christ can only be an incentive to strive toward the

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knowledge of a further truth. Hence no one standing in a right relationship to the Christ-impulse will speak out of his knowledge with a view to giving instruction. His feeling about it will be such as finds expression in the question: Where and to what extent can speaking out of knowing be fruitful as a stimulation to the striving of others for knowledge? Can that which I know be of service to anyone else?

In other words, the only sentiment with which we can speak of the influence of Christ's work without bad taste or the striking of a false note is the sentiment which arises from studying the scene of the *Foot-washing*. The subject upon which we are to speak brings with it the spirit in which it must be spoken. As, for instance, we cannot speak of the Sistine Madonna in a political spirit but only from a religious and artistic point of view, so can we only speak of the work of Christ Jesus in a spirit wherein the soul is striving not to grasp the subject, but to be grasped by it. This, however, presupposes a condition which consists essentially in the bowing of the soul before the lofty nature of the subject. When this happens, the soul grows capable of so absorbing the subject into herself that she becomes its mouth-piece. There is no other way of getting to know the Mysteries of Christianity as they are known in Spiritual Science. In the reverently silent soul, they shine out at the hour ordained for them by karma.

It is, however, not only the attitude towards the Passion-mysteries which depends upon karma, but also the knowledge of their *meaning*. For the pictures of the stages of the Passion show the path of the guiltless Christ Jesus through the karmic consequences of the Fall of Man. The stages of the Passion are stages of the karma resulting from the Fall of Man which the Christ took upon Himself as representative of humanity—or, as St. Paul expresses it, as “the new Adam.” The effect of this sacrifice is that the consequences of the universal Fall of Man are annulled for every human being in so far as he wipes out and makes good the consequences of his “individual fall into sin”; that is, his personal karma. *Grace* always begins to operate when strenuous endeavor has determined the individual karma. The passage from Goethe's *Faust*:

“Whoever striving, spares no pains, him can we well redeem,” expresses precisely the fact that the intervention of the Grace which redeems from the consequences of the Fall—that is, the karma of the Mystery of Golgotha—depends on the ordering of the individual karma.

This fact, expressed in *Faust* through the medium of art, is expressed in Rudolf Steiner's *Knowledge of the Higher Worlds and its Attainment*, through the medium of concrete Spiritual Science; for there he describes spiritual evolution as a condition in which, together with the conscious evolution of one half of the currents belonging to the supersensible organs of the astral [desire] body, the other half of the currents belonging to the organs concerned come into action of their own accord. This independent activity of the second half of the currents of the supersensible organs on which all the faculties and knowledge of mankind depend is the effective work of Grace—that is the concrete result of the Mystery of Golgotha—as the deed by means of which the universal karma of the Fall of Man was blotted out.

But the blotting out can only take effect when man has settled his own personal karma—that is, the consequence of his free initiative. Now the settling of the consequences of the individual Fall into sin is, in essence, the same succession of experiences (though in each several case the circumstances will be at a different level and differently disposed) which, enhanced to the sublime, were presented and lived through in the succession of the stages of Christ Jesus' Passion. The steps of the path trodden by the Guiltless must be trodden by Man in his guilt. Christ's undeserved stages of suffering are well-merited stages of suffering for those striving on this path after truth and the life of the Spiritual World in their human existence. Yet when Man consciously strives towards this goal, the stages of karmic balance become at the same time stages of knowledge, for karma is the great occult school of the world, not merely a cosmic instrument of punishment.

Those who knew that the karmic path of mankind consists in experiencing the stages of Christ Jesus' Passion have created from this knowledge spiritual exercises, containing in

condensed and simple form the essentials of this path. By this means it was given to individual men to be able to waken within themselves the forces requisite to undergo the trials of the karmic path. These exercises changed their form—but only their form—according to the requirements of the consciousness-condition of mankind at the time; the moral content of the exercise remained, however—and remains for ever—unchanged, because it is in fact the Christ-impulse upon which all depends throughout the whole evolution of Earth.

Whether we concentrate on the Gospel-pictures,

the soul; whereas, later, men made their start from images which did *not* demand an unconditional belief in the Gospel-tradition, but which, nevertheless, led, as the result of intensive work on them, to the rise of Imaginations and Inspirations which then revealed themselves as the pictures presented in the Gospels with their accompanying word-contents. The mystical Christian path, associated with the condition of belief in the evangelic tradition, led directly from the pictures handed down to the seeing of spiritual facts; the Rosicrucian path of knowledge, on the other hand, led from self-created

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such as the Crucifixion, the Entombment and the Resurrection, or, for instance, on the image of the Rose-cross, the spiritual and moral content is the same, for the Rose-cross is just as surely an expression of death and resurrection as are the Gospel-pictures we have mentioned. The images in which the moral and spiritual contents were expressed had to be altered in the late Middle Ages; they had now to be drawn from the observation of Nature, whereas up to that time men had devoted themselves to pictures drawn from the Gospels.

This change was bound to take place because the progressive consciousness of later humanity could no longer make use of the Gospels as a starting-point. The Gospels became themselves an *object* of knowledge, instead of its source as they had been hitherto. But the purpose of the images used for the newer exercises was the same as that of the old images; namely, to waken in the soul the forces necessary for Foot-washing, Scourging, Crowning with Thorns, Cross-bearing, Death, Entombment and Resurrection. The difference introduced on the path of evolution with respect to the change of form in the exercises consists in this: that formerly men had made the Gospel pictures their starting-point and had lived so intensively in them that they rose as Imaginations before—or Inspirations in—

pictures and images to the seeing of the same spiritual facts.

But seeing the spiritual facts of the path of Christian Initiation is no mere vision of them, nor even a mere comprehension; it also has the significance of a karmic stage on which that which is seen represents a command and an impulse for the inner attitude of the soul in a definite situation of life. Thus, for instance, the inner meeting with the Foot-washing of Spiritual Science is the experience both of a principle and of a basic force in the Spiritual World. And in this case it is the experience of the relationship desired by the Spiritual World between *above* and *below*—a relationship which, at the same time, determines the whole method of the Christian occultism of the West. For there are three pictures, three profoundly symbolic images, which indicate both the moral attitude and also the governing principles of the methods of the three occult streams: “Fleeing upwards,” “Mounting the Throne,” and “Foot-washing.”

Let us study, first, the Indian as its method is practiced today. With what is the Indian yoga essentially concerned? It deals with a definite alteration of the system of currents in the human organism. The so-called “Kundalini-fire,” dormant in the abdomen, is awakened and guided upward

into the head. There it must produce sufficient impact to press through the cranium and free the whole consciousness-life of the man from the spell which confines it within the skull. The point is to feel the body as a prison, and by the help of the practice of yoga, to effect a flight from this prison. The endeavor in yoga is so to regulate the relationship between above and below that the below shall be abandoned by the fleeing consciousness. The latter, driven out by the Snake-fire (kundalini), is to flee upward on wings of thought. The winged serpent with the human head in flight from the realm of enchantment—this is the picture on which the yoga-endeavor is based.

Another picture forms the foundation of another method. There is a very widespread endeavor to acquire power over human nature by the help of occultism. Here also the idea is to regulate the system of currents in the human organism in conformity with the goal to be attained. Here indeed, it is not a question of effecting an emancipation of consciousness, but of handling and governing the condensed and strengthened currents of the lower man. Consciousness makes a firm foundation for itself in the human organism for the purpose of developing its power. It prepares for itself a support in the lower man on which it can depend. And it depends on this support not in the sense of morality, but in the sense of a supply of force for the development of power. The man makes, so to speak, a throne for himself and ascends it without being crowned by other anointing or empowering hands from above. *Ascent of the throne without crowning* is the picture which underlies a method which like Indian yoga, is wide-spread.

Now the picture of the Foot-washing stands in marked contrast to the two indicated above. For Bowing [down] stands in opposition to the upward fleeing of the Winged Snake, and the Washing of the Feet stands in contrast to the Ascent of the Throne. Just as the pictures contradict one another, so the methods of spiritual development, the principles of which are expressed in those pictures, are distinct both as regards their actual contents and also with respect to their moral essence. For Christian schooling depends neither on flight from the prison of the body, nor on the exploiting of the



Engraving, Gustave Doré (1833-1883), for Dante's *Purgatorio*, Canto XII, lines 1-3

### ***The Proudful***

*A prospect for those on the occult path who "ascend to the throne without crowning" is captured in a visual irony: rather than electing the humbling self-abnegation of earthly cross-carrying, they may be consigned to purgatorial stone-carrying.*

body for the purpose of developing power. Its aim is to cause the forces of the higher man to descend into the lower man, even to the feet—shining through and metamorphosing the lower forces.

Thus the process of Meditation practiced according to the acceptance of the Christian Rosicrucian school is that the light of consciousness shining out in the head is made so intensive and forceful that it will reach from the head to the larynx, from the larynx to the heart, and finally from there to the feet, with purifying and transforming effect. Here also the aim is a purposeful regulating of the system of currents in the human organism, but the regulating takes place in such a way that consciousness guides its currents downward in order to bring about a gradual, inner transformation of the lower man in the direction of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful. The relationship of above and below are so regulated here that the

higher bows before the lower, in order to serve the lower—as is shown in the scene of the Foot-washing.

In Meditation, the principle of Foot-washing is the criterion of the spiritual happenings within the human organism. In it there is a real Washing of the Feet by the higher man stooping to the lower. In actual reality, the higher man generally *wishes* this to be so and makes an effort to achieve it; nevertheless, the stream of spiritual force which flows from the higher to the lower as an active influence from the Spiritual World is sent down as *Grace*. Usually it is the Guardian Angel, or some other exalted being of the Spiritual World, who stoops to the man in Meditation, and “washes his feet”; that is, sends down the strength of the Spirit even to his feet. For Foot-washing is the fundamental attitude of the beings



From *Die Bibel in Bildern*, Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld (1789-1853)

### **The Foot-washing**

*As a gestural emblem, the Foot-washing is at the heart of the Christian path: “For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.” Judas looks upon this humbling deed with evident disapproval, if not disdain, preferring that the Messiah should ascend to the throne of Israel and rule with overt power.*

of the Spiritual World. There the higher serve the lower: Archai serve Archangels, for instance; Archangels, Angels; and Angels, Men.

Thus the real process of Meditation does not mean only an attitude of the higher man to the lower, which is in accordance with the Foot-washing; it means at the same time a concrete act of Foot-washing on the part of the beings of the Spiritual World towards the man who is meditating. Hence it is a matter of overwhelming importance that the whole man should produce the conditions whereby he may become the object of the Foot-washing accomplished by the Spiritual World. But these inner processes are only preparations for another, for Man has to learn to give proof of the Foot-washing not only within himself, but also outwardly through his deeds. It is his task not only to be the *object* of Foot-washing, but gradually to become the *subject* of it; that is, to do for others, on his own initiative, what has been done for him.

When a man has recognized this duty, he will endeavor to do for humanity something more than

is required merely by the external conditions of life, something which he will resolve to do as freely, for instance, as he resolved on the work of Meditation. He will then devote himself to some undertaking suitable for contributing to the penetration of the Good, the True, and the Beautiful into a sphere of human existence in which the Good, the True, and the Beautiful are not indigenous. Then, when men who have resolved on service for mankind find one another, they may form communities which exist not for their own sake, but for the benefit of humanity. Thus the smaller and larger communities which embody the stream of Christian occultism in the world have arisen. They carry on work in the world which is almost as little known and recognized as the work done among men by the Angels. This work, in so far as it is of importance, is based on the Foot-washing principle, which is the principle not only of the Christian Rosicrucian method of spiritual training, but also the foundation of the whole of its work in the world.

Other occult currents work, on the contrary, on other principles corresponding to their particular training methods; for the nature of the work is the fruit of the training. As figs are the fruit of the fig tree, so the influence of a spiritual school is the image of its method of training.

Now Foot-washing is certainly the fundamental principle of Christian spiritual activity; but as to the actual effect of this activity, in so far as it is purely human, Foot-washing can, in the present age, be regarded only as an ideal of the future. For the activity proceeding from Man himself reaches in the present age no further than to the "feet" of the higher man; that is, to the "feet" of the *head*-man. The "feet" of the head-man are situated, however, in the organization of the ears where they touch upon the drums of the ears. And to this degree of Footwashing only; that is, to the cleansing of the "feet" situated in the ears, does the effect of human "Foot-washing" reach, as a rule, today. In rare cases it may reach to the "feet" of the *thorax*-man in the middle of the body; but the cleansing of the hands of this second man is still, really, an ideal

to be striven for today. The feet of the *lower* man, however, that is, the real feet, will only feel the effect in the Sixth Culture-epoch after the Maitreya [new Buddha] incarnation has established the white magic of the individual human being.

In the present age, the task of objective Footwashing is bounded by the injunction: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear." It can only be fulfilled for the "feet" which are hidden in the ears. This, therefore, gives a special importance to the spoken word, to the proclamation, in the present age. The "herald" has to "bow" to the ear of the listener; that is, to his power of comprehension. But the possibilities of Foot-washing in the future will grow ever greater and greater, until at last the sublime example of Foot-washing given by Christ Jesus himself will be attained. Then it will be possible to transmit not only the purifying thought, but also the moral life of will from man to man. The *power* of Good, not merely the understanding of it, will then be carried over from one man to another. This is the meaning of the Foot-washing as it is described in St. John's Gospel. (Continued) □

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