

The Harvest of Human Experience

NO HOLIDAY that calls itself “Thanksgiving” can be purely secular—not if on this day one gives thanks. For thankfulness has an object. It may be only implicit. It may be unrecognized. But it is there. And all objects, save One, mediate that One, Who is immediate God. We may thank our fellows, the earth, the weather, our health, or our good fortune. These are all contingent causes or benefits. There is the uncaused First Cause, pure Beneficence, the Alpha of our life. In thankfulness we point toward our identity with Christ as Omega. And adoration, the sacred heart of thankfulness, is key to attaining that identity.

Not all American holidays are holy days. One of them commemorates the end of a war; two honor American presidents; another pays tribute to a champion of civil rights; yet another celebrates the American worker. Thanksgiving, although arising out of unique historical circumstances, shares a common impulse with most societies that are both agrarian and theistic.

To take one example, the Israelites instituted the Feast of the Tabernacles to commemorate and give thanks for their fall harvest. Also called the Festival of Booths, or Succoth, during this week-long celebration many Jews journeyed to Jerusalem from all regions of the Mediterranean, bringing portions of their finest crops to give to the Temple priests. Here was a material giving. What Jehovah gave, they in part returned. The festival’s name derives from the



Watercolor, Estella Louisa M. Canziani (1887-1964), Leicester Galleries, London, England

Pentecost

The fruit of death in Christ is abundant life, the harvest of Golgotha, whereby the (Holy) Spirit was poured out upon the disciples at Pentecost and is sowed to the Earth’s evolution.

booths (*succoth*) or huts made from tree branches which put the Israelites in mind of their God-protected, forty-year sojourn in the Sinai desert. As Jehovah told Moses, the people “shall live in booths for seven days...that your generation may know that I made the people of Israel live in booths when I brought them out of the land of Egypt” (Lev. 23:42-43).

The Pilgrims initiated America’s day of annual Thanksgiving in 1621. They knew to Whom their thanks were due. They were steeped in religious piety. However Thanksgiving did not become a national festival until the untiring efforts of Sarah Hale, a descendent of the Pilgrim Fathers, persuaded Abraham Lincoln to issue a proclamation for the observance of Thanksgiving Day to acknowledge this Republic’s many blessings.

As the ancient Israelites were pilgrims journeying

toward their land of promise, so present day students of spiritual science are also pilgrims journeying toward a spiritual destination, who have frequent occasion to give thanks. In the modern equivalent to Succoth, the huts or booths are our physical bodies, the fruit or harvest of our previous lives' deeds. For the modern pilgrim the festival of booths is more fluid, more continuous—it is a daily, ideally, a moment-to-moment observance.

Human beings assume physical bodies in order to germinate, nurture, and harvest knowledge, aptitudes, and powers that only existence in earthly bodies can give. When the allotted time for this project is completed the life's harvest is gleaned. There is nothing grim about the reaper with his figurative scythe, the saturnian reaper who cuts the silver cord. He is the hierophant dispatching the whole life's harvest, when we offer up and *are* the harvest of our entire sojourn in the physical world.

Any residual tendency for the spiritual aspirant to devalue earthly experience upon his initial entry into nonphysical worlds will be quickly and compellingly corrected. He realizes that without experience in visible reality he is totally powerless in that other invisible reality—for both the vision of the higher worlds and the ability to function in them are predicated on first having mastered life in the visible worlds. To see in the invisible worlds one must first be able to correctly see in the visible world. For humans the physical world is the seed ground of the supraphysical worlds.

Unless a grain of wheat fall to the earth and die, it cannot be reborn. Whereas, he who at all cost would save his (physical) life will lose much of its spiritual benefit. Dying makes the earth fertile for rebirth, for newness in spirit. Pentecost was made possible by the Crucifixion. The gifts of the Holy Spirit showered upon the Apostles was the harvest of a cosmic sacrifice, the reaping of unmerited suffering for humanity's sins in a holocaust of divine self-giving.

By the time the silver cord breaks, the basis for a new embodiment, a new life's planting, has already been gathered. It will be processed, ordered, elaborated, and spiritually reconstituted in heaven worlds. The harvesting provides the soul food for spiritual metabolism ensuing between death and a new earthly embodiment. Thus the wealth of this life's expe-



Tabernacle in the Wilderness

riences shall be the inheritance we bequeath to our future incarnate being.

The assay of what is reaped takes place during the panoramic retrospection immediately following death. This conscious inventory determines what soul-yield is transmitted to the Desire and Thought Worlds, in turn determining the quality and vigor of the spiritual seeds for the ego's new earthly instruments.

To live esoterically is to transcend, at first in thinking, and eventually in full spirit-consciousness, the restrictions of time and space. The Rosicrucian student practices the activities of soul-planting and soul-harvesting on a daily basis. He plants toward his future being during waking life in the physical body through the intentional deeds of right thinking, right feeling, and right willing. Each night he mentally gathers and stores in the granary of memory the results of the day's activities. Much as a quality control technician on an assembly line, he focuses on the passage of the day's events with an observant inner eye, separating out the defective from the good grain and burning it in the fire of conscience.

A seasoned farmer's general rule of the green thumb is to plant at the new moon and harvest when

the moon is full. So too does the aspirant who farms the soul's fields. This practice was first instituted with the new and full moon observances in the ancient Tabernacle in the Wilderness. The previous fortnight's deeds done while in the body were then brought to the Holy Place and a spiritual extract was made from the daily loaves of processed experiences. This extract was symbolized by the smoke of incense, the quintessence of the shewbread, both of which were thanksgiving offerings to the Lord, Who is the God that is encountered in the candidate's Holy of Holies, expressed by the words, "I and the Father are one."

As the aroma of the shewbread is the only harvest the human spirit takes with it into the heaven worlds, it is clear that much of our earthly experience is *not* spiritually nourishing. An interesting experiment could be devised to measure all the substances (solid, fluid, and gas) taken into and eliminated from the human dense body. The sum of each would be found to be nearly equivalent. That is, most of our ingested daily bread becomes ash; very little is retained by the body. The ability of saints to live on virtually nothing but the "word" of God, on etheric food, prefigures the time when we shall breathe our food, which nutritious breath will be processed by the pituitary gland.

We are planted in this world, rooted in the soil of physical experience so that the flower and fruit of spiritual faculties can here be developed. And only here can this take place. Not in heaven. God cannot give it. Rather do we give it to macrocosmic God and to the God in our individual being.

We remain bound to the world until the world no longer binds us, until we have developed within ourselves everything that can here be gained. We can only be useful collaborators in other worlds by acquiring the requisite faculties in this physical world. Our previous lives and experiences are gleanings whose fruits nourish and fortify our present endeavors, making possible not mere perpetuation, but a qualitative improvement, the spiritualizing of consciousness.

Such is the human view. But what of God and the host of heavenly Beings? Our thanksgiving is food for the gods, their ambrosia. Our experience is nutriment for creative Hierarchies who have rayed sub-

stance of their very being into humanity. So are we constituted. We are condensations of cosmic forces, we are crystallized starlight. Our energies originate in heavenly impulses. What we do with these energies, our broadcasting of these forces in the fields of human endeavor, has a cosmic impact, promoting the evolution of all those Beings who are participating in the "the human experiment."

This human-suprahuman symbiosis explains the occult fact that while the sun-centered Copernican conception of the Cosmos is correct from a material standpoint, the earth-centered Ptolemaic universe is true for those worlds above the physical plane. Humanity's growth in spiritual consciousness advances the evolution of cosmic powers.

While plants grow by virtue of etheric forces, they can only regenerate by being blessed, in a figurative laying on of hands, by the approach of Desire World forces, which initiate the flowering and fruiting process and the resultant seed formation. So it is with humans. We live not by physical bread alone, nor, as *homo sapiens*, by the bread of thought or *manas*. Our spiritual regeneration requires life spirit; specifically, the Christ life described in the Prologue of the Gospel of John as the life of the Word, which is the light of the world.

If we humans make harvest of the visible sun for our material livelihood, for our spiritual well-being we make harvest of the Christ Impulse. And that Impulse has inoculated the entire substance of this planet. Over eons of time, since the Fall of man into generation, the field of the earth had become increasingly insupportable for contacting the worlds of Spirit. But through the revivifying blood of the crucified Christ Jesus, the earth sphere has once again been made fertile for attaining to spiritual experience in full waking consciousness.

Many Gospel parables are based on organic metaphors that vividly and powerfully describe human reliance on the Christ life. He said, "I am the vine." He also said, "I am the bread of life." These two sayings identify the world eucharist, by which the body and the spirit of mankind and its earth are continuously rejuvenated. The parallel between a farmer working the earth and Christ cultivating the receptive soul is developed by the English poet John Masefield toward the end of his long poem "The

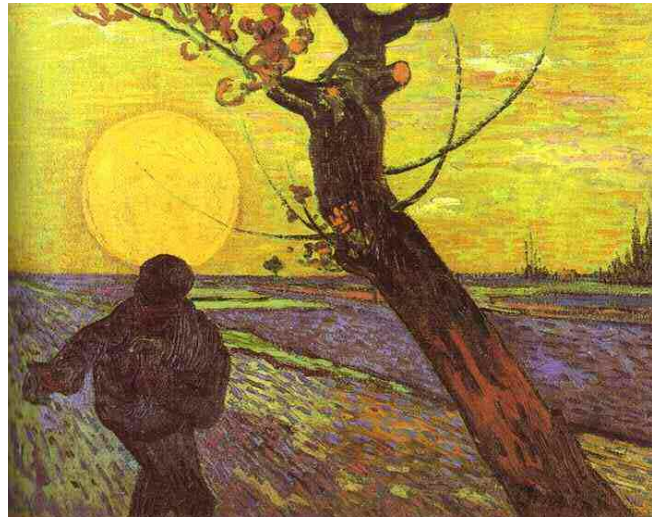
Everlasting Mercy”:

*O patient eyes that watch the goal,
O ploughman of the sinner's soul.
O Jesus, drive the coulter deep
To plough my living man from sleep....
And as I drove the clods apart
Christ would be ploughing in my heart,
Through rest-harrow and bitter roots,
Through all my bad life's rotten fruits....
And we will walk the weeded field,
And tell the golden harvest's yield,
The corn that makes the holy bread
By which the soul of man is fed,
The holy bread, the food unpriced,
Thy everlasting mercy, Christ.*

Biblical Paradise is pictured as a self-sustaining garden in which Adam and Eve had the pleasant assignment of effortlessly gathering its fruits. This describes a passive, if idyllic, existence. Living in uninterrupted etheric consciousness, Edenic humanity was not conscious of death and was in continuous communion with the gods. Goaded to willful and self-centered behavior through the infusion of Luciferic influences, early man harvested an impermissible fruit, resulting in a fortunate fall to material consciousness—a covert blessing, being the opportunity to know freedom through knowledge of good and evil, and to choose one's destiny in fully awake consciousness.

Disease and death express the fact that the original supersensible world of early humanity reached a point beyond which it could not progress by itself. Universal death would have overtaken it had it not received a fresh life-impulse. From the remnants of a dying, rigid world there sprouted the seeds of a new one. The decaying portion of the old world adheres to the new life blossoming from it, even as new life in the physical body is immediately offset by anti-life processes. Thus does evolution slowly progress.

The crucifixion is a figure for the collision of life-giving etheric forces and form-destroying desire impulses, which interaction creates consciousness. The human physical body is gathered from remnants of the old world, but with this sheath the germ of a new being is matured which will live in the future.



Vincent van Gogh. 1888. Foundation E.G. Bührle collection, Zurich, Switzerland

The Sower

Man's task is precisely to gather the fruits of the mortal for the immortal, or, to use the Apostle Paul's language, from the terrestrial we extract a quintessence for the celestial. The corruptible is the ground for cultivating the incorruptible. Here is the metaphor for spiritual alchemy, for Christian self-transformation. We have in us the elements of a decaying world, but we can break their power by new immortal elements coming to life in us. Indeed, we may thank the mortal, the dying world for the powers it impels us to unfold, just as we may thank our personal pain and suffering which mature into a harvest of wisdom. Yes, suffering is a consequence of past misdeeds and nondoing. But it is also a cause that will have fruitful effects. It gives occasion to insight and ennoblement. It is a purifier, a focuser, an updriver, a spur for Godwardness. Illness itself may be viewed as the efflorescence of dying portions of the past. Bitter fruit, perhaps. But also the means by which spiritual wholeness is restored and transfigured.

Among the many agrarian parables in the Gospels, the parable of the sower is especially relevant to the line we are pursuing. In this extended metaphor we may naturally be inclined to identify ourselves with the good ground that yielded fruit. But few if any of us are not at times so preoccupied with worldly concerns that the ever-sounding creative word cannot take root in our consciousness. Likewise, whenever we take an irrationally entrenched position on a matter, or are prejudiced

by the outward aspect of a person or issue, the seed of creative understanding and a new opportunity for soul growth falls on the rocky soil of a hard heart or a closed mind. In a rush of momentary enthusiasm we may embrace a spiritual truth only to leave it deprived of further attention, and so it withers and perishes. The truths about the kingdom of heaven may be choked out by the vigorous weeds of materialistic thinking or be consumed by the birds that represent scoffing skepticism, or scattered by vagrant gusts of mere curiosity.

The parable of the enemy that sows the tares refers to those spirits who seek to harness human thinking to their own purposes, and are constantly flashing thoughts before our mind's eye to divert and deter our rightful progress. Generally, the less awake and aware we are, the more we leave unprotected the ground of consciousness to receive these tares. That is the significance of the enemy sowing at night, or at those times when we are not vigilant and spiritually informed.

At the final harvest of Earth evolution, what St. Matthew describes as "the end of the world" (13:39), and elsewhere is called the Last Judgment, the lambs will be separated from the goats, the wheat will be separated from the tares. The children of the Kingdom, by having sought and used opportunities for development in the physical realm (the "field" of the world), shall pass on to the Earth's next planetary embodiment, Jupiter, in their etheric bodies. The children of "the wicked one" (Matt. 13:38), the goats and tares, will occupy a lunar satellite of Jupiter as laggards who will still to be able to join their more evolved brethren if they change their ways and make the necessary advances.

As for those egos now ripe for the good news of esoteric Christian teachings, we may cite the view of the religion's Founder Who, two thousand years ago, saw multitudes seeking but not knowing what they sought. To His disciples he said, "The harvest truly is plenteous, but the laborers are few" (Matt. 9:37). So it is today. Those ripe for the knowledge of the science of spirit are numerous but they are not hearing the right word. Rosicrucian Christianity has that word. Max Heindel has something to tell us on this point: "If we hoard the spiritual blessings we



Stained glass, sixteenth century, German. Victoria and Albert Museum, London, England

Last Judgment

When the lambs will be separated from the goats, the wheat from the tares, and the evolved from the laggards.

have received, evil is at our door. So...let us bring forth in the physical world of action the fruits of the spirit sown in our souls." (*Teachings of an Initiate*, p. 102)

The act of thanksgiving is always appropriate in and of itself. It vivifies and elevates the heart, directs it toward the Source of all being and must call down continuous favor from the supersensible worlds, because, as a form of self-emptying, it is an irresistible invitation for spiritual beings to fill that emptiness with divine influences. Thanksgiving cultivates the soil of our soul, making it fertile for new creative impulses emanating from these spiritual beings.

Thanksgiving is ever appropriate; it cuts through the tendency to self-satisfaction; it bursts the bubble of self-esteem which promotes the mortal person and demeans the one God from Whom *all* blessings flow. Thanksgiving clears a path to the Giver of life. More than commemorating the ongoing harvest of experience as wisdom and soul growth, thanksgiving *invokes* this harvest by deepening the communion between the original Giver and the thanksgiver, bringing the sons and daughters of God into increasing attunement with the inner Christ and, through Him, our heavenly Father. □

—C.W.