

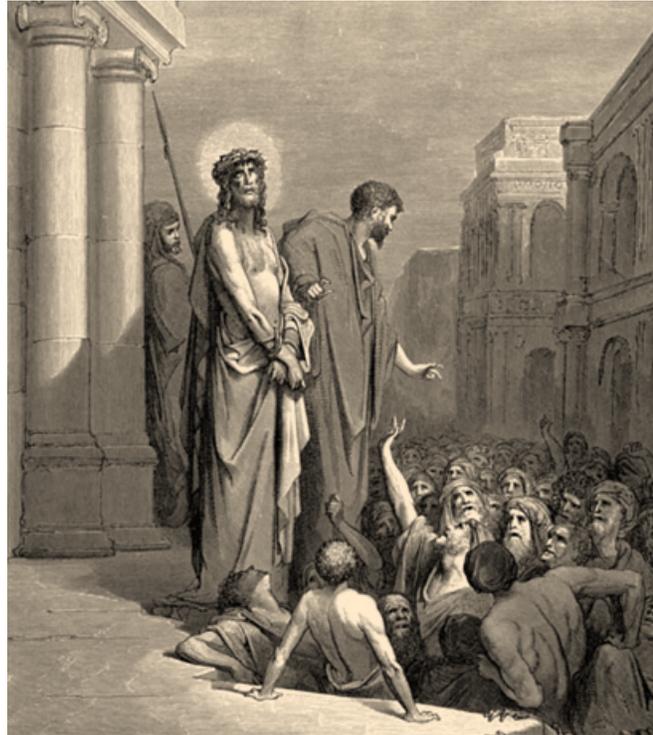
Meditation: The Cross of Christ

WHEN PILATE had spoken the words: “Behold the man!” the priests and their servants answered with the cry: “Crucify Him!” Such a scene, quite apart from its intense human interest, is full of world history.

There were then two ways of initiation, that of the North and that of the South. In the northern initiation—corresponding to the religion of the peoples to which this esoteric initiation belonged—the initiate was led more towards that which is outward, and experienced the meaning of the world. In the southern way of initiation, he was led into the depths of his own inward being and so broke through into the world’s essential being. Of the northern way of initiation we have still got some inkling through that which is told of Persia. To the king of the Saturnalia, the proper festival which is connected with the Persian Sakaeon Festival, two servants were given in later times, who clearly remind us of the thieves crucified on the right and left of Christ.

The southern way of initiation, which found especially in Egypt its classic consummation, led the initiate through death to a resurrection. Often, the person to be initiated was even bound for three days to the Cross....[I]n this scene before the judgment seat of Pilate, the South—naturally quite unconsciously or only little consciously—answers the North, out of the souls of the Jews. One might also say that humanity is saying to itself, “He has

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Engraving, Gustave Doré (1833-1883), The Doré Bible Illustrations

Christ Presented to the People

now reached the end of the northern way of initiation; He must also go the other way to the end,” for the rites of initiation were not arbitrary customs, but corresponded to deep laws of the universe. If the northern way ended with Pilate’s saying “Behold the man!” the southern way must end with the saying “Behold the God!” For he who goes through death to resurrection, passes over beyond humanity into the hosts of the supermen or gods, as the men of old times said. Thus the initiated in Egypt were addressed simply as Osiris. After the death of Christ we hear, for the first time from the mouth of the centurion of the cohort which crucified Him, the confession, “Truly this man was the Son of God.” (Mark 15:39) And after the resurrection, Thomas makes the confession, “My Lord and my God!” (John 20:29)

Today it is necessary that we should reconquer for ourselves, in a new way, the Cross of Christ. Our studies will help to do this. We cannot have

Christ without the Cross. But before we inwardly draw near to the most solemn picture in world history—"Christ on the Cross"—let us first answer some practical questions which arise when we meditate. One repeatedly hears the complaint that people, when they begin to meditate more strongly, feel disturbed by their own *breathing*. This sometimes arises from the fact that a man's breath becomes different when he gives himself up to intensive spiritual study. The breath becomes deeper, slower, healthier, purer. A man need do nothing to bring this about; it comes of itself. One then experiences at first hand how the "sickness of sin" has worked right into the body itself, and how through it, our breath also has become more shallow, more dead. Those who in a high degree have given themselves to worship, have a longer breath than others. One can feel this clearly in the rhythms of Bruckner's music, for example. And the incapacity, which even great conductors show when conducting Bruckner's music, is not seldom connected with their incapacity to experience the deep breathing of reverence which lives in Bruckner's works.

For men of to-day it is not right to begin the ascent to a more spiritual life by exercises in breathing....[T]he Indian, as a "man of a rhythmic system," was especially capable of experiencing in his breath the divine, but the European of the present day, being a "man of nerves and senses," has to tread another path. The Western man will never overtake the Indian upon his Indian way. It may, indeed, be said that in higher occult exercises a certain conscious and controlled drawing of the breath is a great help. The breath itself is also full of secrets, for it is much more living and spiritual than we, who are contemporaries of the age of materialism, know. But here it is enough for our purpose to know the following facts: Meditation can also be practiced as a conscious free dreaming. Wide awake and strong, guided by the will of man and illuminated by his consciousness, can that be accomplished which happens in the dream—that we leave the corporeal and live in the spirit alone. Then one can easily come really to dreaming and lose oneself. But the breath—one can here speak only in pictures—may become for him a staff, by

help of which he goes forward step by step. With each breath one fans the flame of complete consciousness, and in order not to pass out of free, conscious meditation into drowsy dreaming, he may even arrange that at every expiration the picture, which he wishes to place before him, represents itself to him actively and afresh, and that, in the same way, at every inspiration he draws the picture into himself, and lets it work strongly upon his whole being, as if he would stamp it into himself, as if it would stamp him. And so he reaches a rhythm of inward experience, which assists him in keeping awake.

Everyone whose breath troubles him may attempt this. Gradually he will come to need this help no longer. He will not need to trouble at all about his breath. Nor will he lose it, as often happens at the beginning. But after the meditation he will notice that he has been breathing beneficially. Then it will occur to him, in a healthy way, suited to the present time, why the men of past ages experienced the divine through breathing: the Jews again, in a quite different way from the Indians. In the New Testament the Holy Ghost too is brought into close connection with the breath of air, the human breath, *pneuma*. Christ breathed upon his disciples, as once God breathed into Adam, and said, "Receive ye the Holy Ghost."

But the following up of these truths would lead us too far away from our immediate goal. One can actually get as far as feeling that one is breathing in *the Holy Ghost*, that one has the impression that each breath one draws is laden with the Holy Ghost. This one can also perform as a meditation for oneself, without exercising the breath too severely. Everyone experiences the beginnings of such holy breathing in meditation.

Others assert that, in really strong meditation, disturbances in one's digestive system occur. In all such cases it is necessary to have calmness, and, if one may use the noble word, wisdom. Little disturbances are not harmful, and right themselves. If anyone thinks he has more serious difficulties, let him relax the strength of his meditation a little, until things are better. But I know concerning many people that, although they meditate as strongly as the body is able to bear, they suffer no

harm from it. When once, at the beginning of strong meditation, I received the impression that the so-called lower man would not cooperate and coldness in the stomach set in...[I was told], "Simply let some warmth flow to the stomach!" I did so and the trouble passed off. A spiritual attitude which unites calmness, good sense and courage is the right attitude for meditation.

In our organism the many thousand years of sinfulness have brought about disorders which will be gradually put right again by meditation. Most people will notice scarcely anything of this. But let him who believes he perceives irregularities ask himself if these irregularities have not in this

sense healthy after-effects. Perhaps he may find himself *so much the fresher* afterwards, although the meditation may have made his body suffer.

Some may find that they require to eat less when they meditate strongly. How much else occurs with regard to eating I have already discussed in connection with the saying "I am the Bread." But now people ask if vegetarianism does not heighten the power to meditate. One can only reply that it is better to put it the other way round; that through right meditation one gradually becomes more of a vegetarian. Some people will never be able to become vegetarians, or, at least, not entirely so, because the bodies they have inherited will not allow them. They would faint if they tried to force them, for, owing to peculiarities in their constitution, they cannot produce the strength their organism would require in order to get from plant food the same nourishment as from meat.

Here, also, one must have calm, sensible courage. Our organism, when we by meditation have acquired a more sensitive feeling for it, tells us exactly what we must do. If it itself refuses meat, then the hour has come when we may and can go over to vegetarianism. No further secret need or longing for meat will come to us. Then we



Opaque watercolor over graphite on gray wove paper. J. James Tissot, 1836-1902, Brooklyn Museum

The Communion of the Apostles

"Thou art the most sweet refectation of the soul; and he that shall eat Thee worthily shall be partaker and heir of everlasting glory."—Thomas à Kempis, Imitation of Christ

need not trouble about medical theories that "the man" of today cannot live long without meat. Here, as in the case of the breath, the man of the present time can find through the spirit the right management of his body, while the man of past centuries rather approached the spirit through the right management of the body. There are men who would like to eat their way into heaven....But it is a good thing when once we reach at least the first experiences of how meditation itself can feed men. As man can draw near in his breath to the Holy Ghost, so in his food he can draw near to *the Divine Son*. It is not by chance that the Lord's Supper is the principal religious worship of Christ.

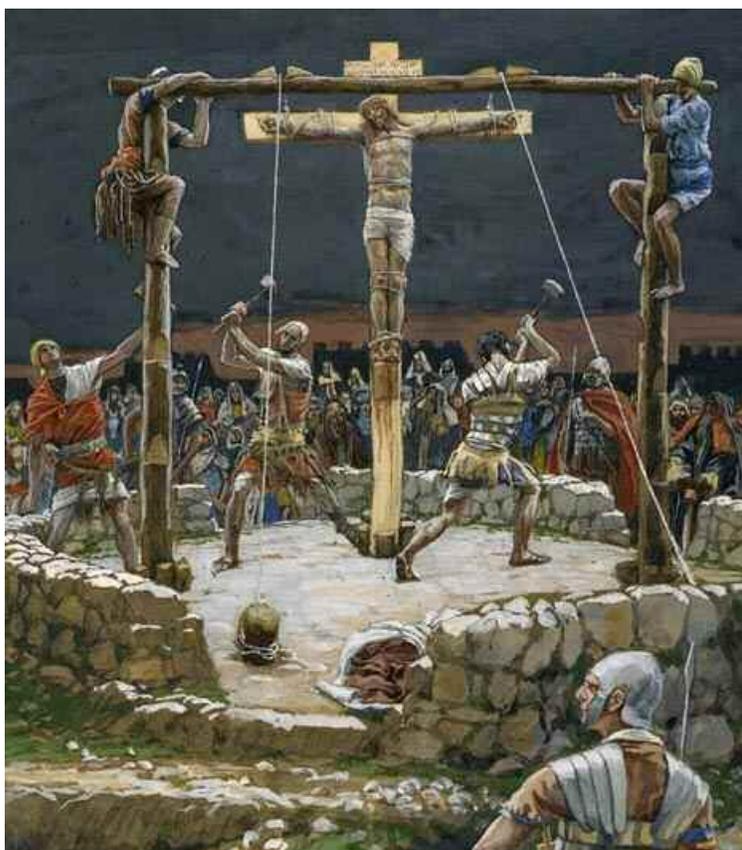
In a third sphere, upon which we can merely touch here, man draws near to *the Father*. Not without deep meaning is the figure for the highest God, "the Father," taken from the human life-process itself. In regard to the sexual life, we can in this connection only say that here again one should train it through the spirit. Our studies in meditation would neglect an important duty and service if they did not tell young people that through strong, spiritual meditation, held with power in the soul, can help first come in a sphere, which, among people of the present day, is in a

terribly bad condition. Right meditation brings to it successively order, purification, a calming influence and spiritualization. It leads men, even if over a long period, on the way to becoming spirit. Where temptations occur, a quiet guiding away to the spirit is better and surer than violence.

Our way is not that of unbridled asceticism. By this we do not mean that the helps often recommended, such as plain food, bodily exercise, moderate sleep, should be despised—not at all; we are thinking of other things. The wife need not be cold to her husband, as one often finds in women who, in a selfish way, wish to further their own “higher development,” and who thus throw their husbands into bitterness against the spirit, or off the straight path. The earthly human faculties of love can be gradually raised to sharing in the divine creative will itself, without the commission of such errors. This creative will is indeed a divine will. The more naturally everything comes from the spirit itself and the less harshness that is necessary to ourselves and others, so much the better it is. Only the direct struggle for the pure, divine spirit cannot be sufficiently severe or earnest.

Christ on the Cross—that is the strongest picture on earth for meditation. If we would experience it anew today it is good first to look into the history of Christianity. There have been aberrations in two directions, and they will occur again and again. The first aberration is this, that one entered in thought into the sufferings of Christ in a way that was more personal and sentimental. The other aberration consisted in this, that one did indeed look at the outward event, but pushed it back into the past. The first error reached its climax in the mysticism of the Middle Ages. The second error came through the religiousness of the Protestants. In the first case we have, to use the language of spiritual science, a deflection towards the Luciferic side, towards the side of self-seeking. In the other case we have a deflection towards the side of Ahriman, towards the side of mental obscurity.

Certainly one ought at some time to represent to



Watercolor, James J. Tissot (1836-1902), Brooklyn Museum of Art
The Five Wedges

oneself the Crucifixion of Christ in all its terrible details, so that one may know the truth about how it happened. The throwing to the ground, the stretching out, the nailing of the hands and feet, the painful erecting of the Cross, the hanging by the wounds and their inflammation, the continuous dislocation of the body, the exposure to sun and insects, the torturing thirst, the bodily agony resulting from the painful position and the interrupted flagging circulation of the blood which resulted from it.

One has the impression that Christians have been very little conscious of the dreadful reality, and that almost without exception their pictures of the Cross, with the beautifully-carved wooden beams, and their hymns of the Cross, with their sentimental effusiveness in the face of that reality, do not in any case reveal that sincerity, compassion and reverence which we owe to the occurrence. He who has once let the Cross in its historical reality act upon him feels he could never again in the future live as he has lived till now, as if an absolutely decisive happening had come to him, as

if he were barred out, as it were, from his old life. A feeling comes over him which may be expressed in this way: "Upon the earth, where such a thing happened to Christ, I can never again seek artless joys. Towards humanity, which in its midst gave to Christ such a fate, I can only take up a standpoint on His side. In the world, in which such a sin against God is possible, I can only work with all my strength for a new world." This feeling about life, if we have once looked at Christ's death upon the Cross sincerely, is revived again as often as we think of the Cross. The Son of God—tortured fearfully to death by men—from the day when we have seen this, the world becomes different.

Some may think that in this experience everything is contained and that nothing more is necessary but to let it work itself out strongly. But that would be an experience which remained in the sphere of the soul and which would be no complete spiritual appropriation or penetration of that which happened then. And therefore it would appeal more to the feelings of an unspoiled soul, which is already near to Christianity, but would not contribute much to a spiritual understanding of the world—and would therefore not be strong enough ultimately to oppose the powers of the present time. The picture of Christ upon the Cross must not today be merely an impression upon the soul, however deep it may be, but must become an all-inclusive experience of the world, a last illumination of the world for us. Goethe's esthetic distaste for the crucifix is also connected with this defect.

Here it is important to point out that, not only was the Cross no chance instrument of torture, but it was from the point of view of the mysteries especially a picture of material existence. We recognize this when we remember the well-known passage in Plato's *Timaeus* in which this view of the mysteries is still apparent. In this is mentioned the world-soul which is stretched in the form of a cross upon the body of the world. When, before the present stage of our earth's development, there was only a spiritual world, it was otherwise. Then the divine could be immediately present everywhere, as it still is today in the spirit. When the world was spread forth in the four spatial directions, this meant at the same time a decision for the divine,

that it must allow itself to be spread out over the breadth of the world of sense. We are here speaking, in accordance with the senses, of four directions, that is to say, of a world of two dimensions, and are leaving out of consideration the third dimension, the direction upwards, because matter has within itself the tendency always to fall down from the upward direction when it can, and to spread itself out over the level ground.

This all sounds cold and abstract when we speak of it in the language of thought. But it may become a living experience. One then really feels the material world to be in the form of a cross on which God is outstretched. In ancient times men have had a very strong feeling of such truths in a picture. Thus in the Vedas it is told how, when one reaches the inside of the world, one finds there the figure of a man who is fastened to a cross, on one side of him the sun, on the other the moon. *If God will have man to be what he can become upon earth, he must resolve to allow himself to be nailed to the Cross.*

The usual Christian view today assumes too much "a chance historical occurrence," as Lessing said, and as the Indian critics still say. The Father of the World once resolved—that is more or less how one represents it to oneself—to redeem the world and to give His Son to death. From this humanity may judge how great His love is. If one looks at Church history, one will keep on finding men who have found a stumbling block to their feelings in such an act of the Father of the World, as it is described to them. They can be helped only when they see that Christ has simply revealed that which is itself the deepest fact of the world. The Father lives on the Cross in this earthly world of ours. He has formed the incredible resolve to stretch out his life over a shattered existence. All our life touches this fact of sacrifice. But Christ has raised up the Cross upon the earth as *the* divine revelation for all men. He has really raised it *up*. He has given it the direction towards the heights. In Plato the World Cross appears lying down. In Christ it stands. By this is pictorially expressed that the material existence is now finding its way upward again. The World Cross stands, since Christ, upright upon the earth. (Continued) □