

The Festivals and their Meaning

I

CHRISTMAS

RUDOLF STEINER

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Eight lectures given between the years 1904 and 1922

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The following lectures were given by Rudolf Steiner to audiences familiar with the general background and terminology of his anthroposophical teaching. In his autobiography, *The Course of My Life*, he emphasises the distinction between his written works on the one hand and, on the other, reports (not revised by him) of lectures which were given as oral communications and were not originally intended for print. It should be borne in mind that certain premises were taken for granted when the lectures were given. "These premises," Rudolf Steiner writes, "include at the very least, the anthroposophical knowledge of Man and of the Cosmos in its spiritual essence; also what may be called 'anthroposophical history', told as an outcome of research into the spiritual world."

Records exist of some 48 lectures given by Rudolf Steiner between the years 1904 and 1923 on the meaning and significance of the Christmas Festival. The present volume contains the texts of eight of these lectures and another collection on the same theme will eventually be published.

Volumes II, III and IV of this series on *The Festivals and their Meaning* contain the texts of lectures by Rudolf Steiner on Easter, Ascension and Pentecost, and Michaelmas.

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A list of publications in English translation recommended for reading in connection with the following lectures will be found at the end of this volume, also a summarised plan of the Complete Edition of Rudolf Steiner's works in the original German now (1967) in an advanced stage of preparation by the
Rudolf Steiner Nachlassverwaltung.

CONTENTS

Christmas Meditation

- I The Christmas Festival: a Token of the Victory of the Sun.
Berlin, 24th December, 1905
- II Signs and Symbols of the Christmas Festival
Berlin, 17th December, 1906
- III The Birth of the Sun Spirit as the Spirit of the Earth. The Thirteen Holy Nights *Hanover, 26th December, 1911*
- IV Christmas at a Time of Grievous Destiny
Basle, 21st December, 1916
- V The Proclamations to the Magi and the Shepherds
Stuttgart, 1st January, 1921
- VI On the Three Magi (Extract from a lecture)
Berlin, 30th December, 1904
- VII The Revelation of the Cosmic Christ
Basle, 26th December, 1921
- VIII The Birth of Christ Within Us
Berlin, 27th December, 1914

CHRISTMAS MEDITATION

Rudolf Steiner, Christmas, 1923.

At the turning-point of time,
The Spirit-Light of the World
Entered the stream of Earthly Evolution.
Darkness of Night had held its sway;
Day-radiant Light poured into the souls of men,
Light that gave warmth to simple shepherds' hearts,
Light that enlightened the wise heads of kings.

O Light Divine! O Sun of Christ!
Warm Thou our hearts,
Enlighten Thou our heads,
That good may become
What from our hearts we would found
And from our heads direct
With single purpose.

I

The Christmas Festival: A Token of the Victory of the Sun

Berlin, 24th December, 1905

How many people are there to-day who, as they walk through the streets at this season and see all the preparations made for the Christmas Festival, have any clear or profound idea of what it means? How seldom do we find evidence of any clear ideas of this Festival, and even when they exist, how far removed they are from the intentions of those who once inaugurated the great Festivals as tokens of what is eternal and imperishable in the world! A glance at the 'Christmas Reflections' as they are called, in the newspapers, is quite sufficient proof of this. Surely there can be nothing more dreary and at the same time more estranged from the subject than the thoughts sent out into the world on printed pages in this way.

To-day we shall try to bring before our minds a kind of summary of the knowledge revealed to us by Spiritual Science. I do not, of course, mean any kind of pedantic summary; I mean a gathering-together of all that the Christmas Festival can bring home to our hearts if we regard Spiritual Science not as a dull, grey theory, not as an outer confession, not as a philosophy, but as a real and vital stream of life pulsating through and through us.

The man of to-day confronts Nature around him as a stranger.

He is far more of a stranger to Nature than he thinks, far more even than he was in the time of Goethe. Is there anyone who still feels the depth of words spoken by Goethe at the beginning of the Weimar period of his life? He addressed a Hymn, a kind of prayer to Nature with all her mysterious powers:

“Nature! — we are surrounded and embraced by her; we cannot draw back from her, nor can we penetrate more deeply into her being. She lifts us unasked and unwarned into the gyrations of her dance and whirls us away until we fall exhausted from her arms ... All men are within her and she in all men ... We are obedient to her laws even when we would fain oppose them ... She (Nature) is all in all. She alone praises and she alone punishes — herself, Let her do with me what she will; she will not cherish hatred for her created work. It was not I who spoke of her, Nay, it was she who spoke it all, true and false. Her's is the blame for all things, her's the credit ...”

Verily, we are all Nature's children. And when we think we are least of all obedient to her, it may be that just then we are acting most strictly in accordance with the great laws which pervade the realm of Nature and stream into our own being. Again, there are so few who really feel the depth of other pregnant words of Goethe in which he tries to express the feeling of communion with the hidden forces common to Nature and to the human being. I refer to that passage in *Faust* where Goethe addresses Nature, not as the dead, lifeless being conceived of by materialistic thinkers of to-day, but as a living Spirit:

“Spirit sublime, Thou gav'st me, gav'st me all
For which I prayed. Not unto me in vain
Hast thou thy countenance revealed in fire.
Thou gav'st me Nature as a kingdom grand,

With power to feel and to endure it. Thou
Not only cold, amazed acquaintance yield'st,
But grantest, that in her profoundest breast
I gaze, as in the bosom of a friend.

The ranks of living creatures thou dost lead
Before me, teaching me to know my brothers
In air and water and the silent wood.
And when the storm in forests roars and grinds,
The giant firs, in falling, neighbour bough
And neighbour trunks with crushing weight bear down,
And falling, fill the hills with hollow thunders, —
Then to the cave secure thou leadest me,
Then show'st me mine own self, and in my breast
The deep, mysterious miracles unfold.”

(Translation by BAYARD TAYLOR)

This was the mood of soul which Goethe's knowledge and feeling for Nature awakened in him and these words were an attempt to bring to life again a mood which filled men's hearts in an age when wisdom itself was still organically united by living ties to Nature. And it was as tokens of this ‘feeling at one’ with Nature and the universe that the great Festivals were inaugurated.

The Festivals have become abstractions, matters of indifference to modern people. The word as a medium of strife and blasphemy often means more than the Word conceived as the power by which the world itself was created. Yet the alphabetical word ought to be the representative, the symbol of the Word Creative in Nature around us, in the great universe and within us too when self-knowledge awakens, and of which all mankind can be made conscious by those who truly understand the course of Nature. It was for this that the Festivals were instituted and with the knowledge we have

gleaned from Spiritual Science we will try to understand what it was that the wise men of old set out to express in the Christmas Festival.

Christmas is not a Festival of Christendom only. In ancient Egypt, in the regions we ourselves inhabit, and in Asia thousands and thousands of years before the Christian era we find that a Festival was celebrated on the days now dedicated to the celebration of the birth of Christ.

Now what was the character of this Festival which since time immemorial has been celebrated all over the world on the same days of the year? Wonderful Fire Festivals in the northern and central regions of Europe in ancient times were celebrated among the Celts in Scandinavia, Scotland and England by their priests, the Druids. What were they celebrating? They were celebrating the time when winter draws to its close and spring begins. It is quite true that Christmas falls while it is still winter, but Nature is already heralding a victory which can be a token of hope in anticipation of the victory that will come in spring — a token of confidence, of hope, of faith — to use words which are connected in nearly every language with the Festival of Christmas. There is confidence that the Sun, again in the ascendant, will be victorious over the opposing powers of Nature. The days draw in and draw in, and this shortening of the days seems to us to be an expression of the dying, or rather of the falling asleep of the Nature-forces. The days grow shorter and shorter up to the time when we celebrate the Christmas Festival and when our forefathers also celebrated it, in another form. Then the days begin to draw out again and the light of the Sun celebrates its victory over the darkness. In our age of materialistic thinking this is an event to which we no longer give much consideration.

In olden times it seemed to men in whom living feeling was

united with wisdom, to be an expression of an experience of the Godhead Himself, the Godhead by Whom their lives were guided. The solstice was a personal experience of a higher being — as personal an experience as when some momentous event forces a man to come to a vital decision. And it was even more than this. The waxing and waning of the days was not only an expression of an event in the life of a higher Being, but a token of something greater still, of something momentous and unique.

This brings us to the true meaning of Christmas as a Festival of the very highest order in cosmic and human life. In the days when genuine occult teaching was not disowned as it is today by materialistic thought but was the very wellspring of the life of the peoples, the Christmas Festival was a kind of memorial, a token of remembrance of a great happening on the Earth. At the hour of midnight the priests gathered around them their truest disciples, those who were the teachers of the people, and spoke to them of a great Mystery. (I am not telling you anything that has been cleverly thought out or discovered by a process of abstract deduction but was actually experienced in the Mysteries, in the secret Sanctuaries of those remote times). This Mystery was connected with the victory of the Sun over the darkness. There was a time on the Earth when the light triumphed over the darkness. And it happened thus: in that epoch, all physical, all bodily life on Earth had reached the stage of animality only. The highest kingdom upon the Earth had only reached a stage at which it was preparing to receive something higher. And then there came that great moment in evolution when the immortal, imperishable soul of man descended. Life had so far developed that the human body was able to receive into itself the imperishable soul. These ancestors of the human race stood higher in the scale of evolution than modern scientists believe, but the higher part of their being, the divine 'spark' was not yet within them. The

divine spark descended from a higher planetary sphere to our Earth which was now to become the scene of its activity, the dwelling-place of the soul which henceforward can never be lost to us.

We call these remote ancestors of humanity the Lemurian race. Then came the Atlantean race and the Atlantean race was followed by our own — the Aryan race. Into the bodies of the Lemurian race the human soul descended. This descent of the divine 'Sons of the Spirit,' this great moment in the evolution of mankind was celebrated by the sages of all times as the victory of the light over the darkness. Since then the human soul has been working in the body and bringing it to higher stages of development but not at all in the way that materialistic science imagines. At the time when the human soul was quickened by the Spirit, something happened in the universe, something that is one of the most decisive events in the evolution of mankind.

In those remote ages — and this is contrary to what modern science teaches — certain constellation of Earth, Moon and Sun was in existence. It was not until then that the Sun assumed the significance it now has in the process of man's growth and life upon the Earth and of the other creatures belonging to the Earth — the plants and animals. Before that time, the beings on Earth were adapted to the conditions then obtaining upon the planetary body. Only those who are able to form a clear idea of the process of the development of the Earth and of mankind will understand the connection of Sun, Moon and Earth with the human being as he lives upon the Earth. There was a time when the Earth was still united with Sun and Moon, when Sun, Moon and Earth were still one body, The beings who dwelt upon this planet were different in appearance from those who inhabit the Earth to-day; they lived in forms which were suited to the conditions of existence as they were on the planetary body consisting of Sun, Moon

and Earth.

The form and essential being of everything that lives upon our Earth is determined by the fact that first the Sun and then, later, the Moon separated from the Earth. The forces and influences of these two heavenly bodies henceforward played down upon the Earth from outside. This is the basis of the mysterious connection of the Spirit of man with the Spirit of the universe, with the Logos in Whom Sun, Moon and Earth are all contained. In this Logos we live and move and have our being. Just as the Earth was born from a planetary body in which the Sun and Moon were also contained, so is man born of a Spirit, of a Soul which belongs alike to Sun, Moon and Earth. And so when a man looks up to the Sun, or to the Moon, he should not only see external bodies in the heavens, but in Sun, Moon and Earth he should see the bodies of Spiritual Beings.

This truth is utterly lost to the materialism of the age. Those who do not see in Sun and Moon the bodies of Spiritual Beings cannot recognise the human body as the body of the Spirit. Just as truly as the heavenly bodies are the bodies of Spiritual Beings, so is the human body the bearer of the Spirit. And man is connected with these Spiritual Beings. Just as his body is separate from the forces of the Sun and Moon and yet contains forces which are active in the Sun and Moon, so the same spirituality which reigns in Sun and Moon is contained within his soul. Man has evolved on Earth into the being he is, and he is dependent upon the Sun as the heavenly body from which the Earth receives her light.

And so in days of old, our forefathers felt themselves to be spiritual children of the great universe and they said: "We have become men through the Sun Spirit, through the Sun Spirit from Whom the Spirit within us proceeded. The victory of the Sun over the darkness commemorates the victory of the

Sun when it shone down upon the Earth for the first time. The immortal soul has been victorious over the forces of the animal nature." It was verily a victory of the Sun when, long, long ago, the immortal soul entered into the physical body and penetrated into the dark world of desires, impulses and passions. Darkness preceded the victory of the Sun and this darkness had followed a previous Sun Age. So it is with the human soul. The soul proceeds from the Divine but it must sink for a time into the darkness, in order, out of this darkness, to build up the vehicle for the human soul. By slow degrees the human soul itself built up the lower nature of man in order then to take up its abode in the dwelling-place of its own construction. You have a correct simile for the entry of the immortal soul of man into the human body if you imagine an architect devoting all his powers to the building of a house in which he then lives. But in those remote ages the soul could only work unconsciously on its dwelling-place. The descent is expressed by the darkness; the awakening to consciousness, the lighting-up of the conscious human soul is expressed in this simile as a victory of the Sun. And so to those who were still aware of man's living connection with the universe, the victory of the Sun signified the great moment when they had received the impulse which was all-essential for their earthly existence. And this great moment was perpetuated in the Christmas Festival.

And now try to think of the course of human life in connection with the harmony of the universe. Man seems to become more and more akin to the great rhythms of Nature. If we think of all that encompasses the life of the soul, of the course of the Sun and everything that is connected with it, we are struck by something that closely concerns us, namely, the rhythm and the marvellous harmony in contrast to the chaos and lack of harmony in the human soul. We all know how rhythmically and with what regularity the Sun appears and disappears. And

we can picture what a stupendous upheaval there would be in the universe if for a fraction of a second only the Sun were to be diverted from its course. It is only because of this inviolable harmony in the course of the Sun that our universe can exist at all, and it is upon this harmony that the rhythmic life-process of all beings depends. Think of the annual course of the Sun. — Picture to yourselves that it is the Sun which charms forth the plants in spring time and then think how difficult it is to make the violet or some other plant flower out of due season. Seed-time and harvest, everything, even the very life of animals is dependent upon the rhythmic course of the Sun. And in the being of man himself everything that is not connected with his feelings, his desires and his passions, or with his ordinary thinking, is rhythmic and harmonious. Think of the pulse, of the process of digestion and you will feel the mighty rhythm and marvel at the wisdom implicit in the whole of Nature. Compare with this the irregularity, the chaos of man's passions and desires, especially of his ideas and thoughts. Think of the regularity of your pulse, your breathing, and then of the irregularity, the erratic nature of your thinking, feeling and willing. With what wisdom the powers of life are governed where the prevailing rhythmic forces meet the challenge of the chaotic! And how greatly the rhythms of the human body are outraged by man's passions and cravings! Those who have studied anatomy know how marvellously the heart is constructed and regulated and how wonderfully it is able to stand the strain put upon it by the drinking of tea, coffee and spirits.

There is wisdom in every part of the divine, rhythmic Nature to which our forefathers looked up with such veneration and the very soul of which is the Sun with its regular, rhythmic course. And as the wise men of old looked upwards to the Sun, they said to their disciples: 'Thou art the image of what the soul born within thee has yet to become and what it *will*

become.' The divine cosmic Order was revealed in all its glory to the sages of old. And again, in the Christian religion we have the '*Gloria in excelsis*.' The meaning of '*gloria*' is *revelation*, not 'glory' in the sense of 'honour.' Therefore we should not say: 'Glory (honour) to God in the highest,' but rather: 'To-day is the revelation of the Divine in the heavens!' The birth of the Redeemer makes us aware of the 'Glory' streaming through the wide universe.

In earlier times this cosmic harmony was placed as a great Ideal before those who were to be leaders among their fellow-men. Therefore in all ages and wherever there was consciousness of these things, men spoke of *Sun Heroes*. In the temples and sanctuaries of the Mysteries there were seven degrees of Initiation. I will speak of them as they were known in ancient Persia.

The first stage is attained when a man's ordinary feeling and thinking is raised to a higher level, where knowledge of the Spirit is attained. Such a man received the name of 'Raven.' It is the 'Ravens' who inform the Initiates in the temples what is happening in the world outside. When medieval poetic wisdom desired to depict in the person of a great Ruler an Initiate who amid the treasures of wisdom contained in the Earth must await the great moment when newly revealed depths of Christianity rejuvenate mankind — when this poetic wisdom of the Middle Ages created the figure of Barbarossa, ravens were his heralds. The Old Testament, too, speaks of the ravens in the story of Elijah.

Those who had reached the second stage of Initiation were known as 'Occultists'; at the third stage they were 'Warriors,' at the fourth, 'Lions.' At the fifth stage of Initiation a man was called by the name of his own people: he was a 'Persian,' 'Indian,' or whatever it might be. For that man alone who had reached the fifth degree of Initiation was regarded as a true

representative of his people. At the sixth stage a man was a 'Sun Hero' or one who 'runs in the paths of the Sun.' And at the seventh stage he was a 'Father.'

Why was an Initiate of the sixth degree known as a Sun Hero? To reach this level on the ladder of spiritual knowledge a man must have developed an inner life in harmony with the divine rhythms pulsating through the cosmos. His life of feeling and of thinking must have rid itself of chaos, of all disharmony, and his inner life of soul must beat in perfect accord with the rhythm of the Sun in the heavens. Such was the demand made upon men at the sixth degree of Initiation. They were looked upon as holy men, as Ideals, and it was said that if a Sun Hero were to deviate from the divine path of this spiritual harmony, it would be as great a calamity as if the Sun were to deviate from its course. A man whose spiritual life had found a path as sure as that of the Sun in the heavens was called a 'Sun Hero,' and there were Sun Heroes among all the peoples.

Our scholars know remarkably little about these things. They are aware that Sun myths are connected with the lives of all the great Founders of religions, but what they do not know is that at the Initiation Ceremony it was the custom for the leading figures to be made into Sun Heroes. It is not really so surprising that materialistic research should rediscover these things. Sun myths have been sought for and found in connection with Buddha and with the Christ.

The Sun-Soul was the great example for the way in which a man's life must be ordered. How did the ancients conceive of the soul of a Sun Hero who had reached this inner harmony? They pictured to themselves that no longer did a single individual human soul live within him, but that forces of the cosmic Soul were streaming into him. This cosmic Soul was known in Greece as *Chrestos*, in the sublime wisdom of the East as *Budhi*. When a man no longer feels himself a single

being, as the bearer of an individual soul, but experiences something of the universal Soul, he has created within himself an image of the union of the Sun-Soul with the human body and he has attained something of the very greatest significance in the evolution of mankind.

If we think of these men with all their nobility of soul, we shall be able to some extent to visualise the future of the human race and the relation of the future to the ideal of mankind generally. As humanity is to-day, decisions are arrived at by individuals who amid quarrelling and strife finally reach a measure of unity in majority-resolutions. When such resolutions are still regarded as the ideal, this is evidence that men have not realised what truth really is. Where in us does truth exist? Truth lives in that realm of our being where we think logically. It would be nonsense to decide by a majority vote that $2 \times 2 = 4$, or that $3 \times 4 = 12$. When man has once realised what is true, millions may come and tell him it is not so, that it is this or it is that, but he will still have his own inner certainty.

We have reached this point in the realm of scientific thinking, of thinking upon which human passions, impulses and instincts no longer impinge. Wherever passions and instincts mingle with thinking, men still find themselves involved in strife and dispute, in wild confusion, for the life of instincts and impulses is itself a seething chaos. When, however, impulses, instincts and passions have been purged and transmuted into what is known as *Budhi* or *Chrestos*, when they have developed to the level at which logical, dispassionate thinking stands to-day, then the ideal of the ancient wisdom, the ideal of Christianity, the ideal of Anthroposophy will be realised. It will then be as unnecessary to vote about what is held to be good, ideal and right as it is to vote about what has been recognised as logically right or logically wrong.

This ideal can stand before the soul of every human being and then he has before him the ideal of the Sun Hero, the ideal to which every aspirant at the sixth stage of Initiation has attained. The German Mystics of the Middle Ages felt this and expressed it in the word '*Vergöttung*' — deification. This word existed in all the wisdom-religions, What does it signify? Let me try to express it in the following way. — There was a time when those whom we look upon to-day as the ruling Spirits of the universe also passed through a stage at which mankind as a whole now stands -the stage of chaos. These ruling Spirits have wrestled through to the divine heights from which their forces stream through the harmonies of the universe. The regularity with which the Sun moves through the seasons, the regularity manifested in the growth of plants and in the life of animals-this regularity was once chaos. Harmony has been attained at the cost of great travail. Humanity stands to-day within the same kind of chaos but out of the chaos there will arise a harmony modelled in the likeness of the harmony in the universe.

When this thought takes root in our souls, not as a theory, not as a doctrine, but as living insight, then we shall understand what Christmas signifies in the light of anthroposophical teaching. If the glory, the revelation of the divine harmony in the heavenly heights is a real experience within us, and if we know that this harmony will one day resound from our own souls, then we can also feel what will be brought about in humanity itself by this harmony: peace among men of goodwill. These are the two thoughts or, better, the two feelings which arise at Christmastide. When with this great vista of the divine ordering of the world, of the revelation, the glory of the heavens, we think of the future lying before mankind, we have a premonition even now of that harmony which in the future will reign in those who know that the more abundantly the

harmony of the Cosmos fills the soul, the more peace and concord there will be upon the Earth. The great ideal of Peace stands there before us when at Christmas we contemplate the course of the Sun. And when we think about the victory of the Sun over the darkness during these days of Festival there is born in us an unshakable conviction which makes our own evolving soul akin to the harmony of the cosmos — light over the darkness had always been commemorated. (10) And so Christianity is in harmony with all the great world-religions. When the Christmas bells ring out, they are a reminder to us that this Festival was celebrated all over the world, wherever human beings knew what it signified, wherever they understood the great truth that the soul of man is involved in a process of development and progress on this Earth, wherever in the truest sense man strove to reach self-knowledge.

We have been speaking to-day, not of an undefined, abstract feeling for Nature but of a feeling that is full of life and spirituality. And if we think of what has been said in connection with Goethe's words: "Nature! we are surrounded and embraced by thee ..." it is quite obvious that we are not speaking here in any materialistic sense, but that we see in Nature the outward expression, the countenance of the Divine Spirit of the Cosmos. Just as the physical is born out of the physical, so are the soul and the Spirit born out of the Divine Soul and the Divine Spirit. The body is connected with purely material forces and the soul and Spirit with forces akin to their own nature. The great Festivals exist as tokens that these things must be understood in their connection with the whole universe; our powers of thinking must be used in such a way that we realise our oneness with the whole universe. When this insight lives within us, the Festivals will change their present character and become living realities in our hearts and souls. They will be points of focus in the year uniting us with

the all-pervading Spirit of the universe.

Throughout the year we fulfil the common tasks and duties of daily life, and at these times of Festival we turn our attention to the links which bind us with eternity. And although daily life is fraught with many a struggle, at these times a feeling awakens within us that above all the strife and turmoil there is peace and harmony.

Festivals are the commemoration of great Ideals, and Christmas is the birth feast of the very greatest Ideal before mankind, of that Ideal which man must strain every nerve to attain if he is to fulfil his mission. The birth festival of all that man can feel, perceive and will — such is Christmas when it is truly understood.

The aim of Spiritual Science is to stimulate a true and deep understanding of the Christmas Festival. We do not want to promulgate a dogma or a doctrine, or a philosophy. Our aim is that everything we say and teach, everything that is contained in our writings, in our science, shall pass over into life itself.

When in all that pertains to his daily life man applies spiritual wisdom, life will be filled with it and from all pulpits, far and wide, godlike wisdom, the living wisdom of the Spirit will resound in the words that are spoken to the 'faithful.' It will then be unnecessary to utter the actual words 'Spiritual Science' at all. When in Courts of Law the deeds of human beings are viewed with the eyes of spiritual perception, when at the bed of sickness the doctor spiritually perceives and spiritually heals, when in the schools the teacher brings spiritual knowledge to the growing child, when in the very streets men think and feel and act spiritually, then we shall have reached our Ideal, for Spiritual Science will have become common knowledge. Then too there will be a spiritual understanding of the great turning-points of the year and the

everyday experiences of man will be truly linked with the spiritual world. The Immortal and the Eternal, the spiritual Sun will flood the soul with light at the great Festivals which will remind man of the divine Self within him. The divine Self, in essence like the Sun, and radiant with light, will prevail over darkness and chaos and will give to his soul a peace by which all the strife, all the war and all the discord in the world will be quelled.

NoteS:

1 We cannot here enter into the details of the wisdom-teachings of Christianity itself which will form the subject of a later lecture. But this much shall be said to-day: that nothing could be more correct than to place at this time the Birth Festival of that divine Individuality Who is to the Christian a guarantee and an assurance that his divine soul will ultimately prevail over the darkness in the outer world.

II

Signs and Symbols of the Christmas Festival

[The lecture was given by the side of a Christmas Tree adorned with the symbols (see text), thirty-three lighted candles and thirty-three fresh red roses.]

Berlin, 17th December, 1906 GA 96

THE Festival of Christmas which we shall soon be celebrating acquires new life when a deeper, more spiritual conception of the world is brought to bear upon it. In a spiritual sense the Christmas Festival is a Festival of the Sun, and as such we shall think of it to-day. To begin with, let us listen to the beautiful apostrophe to the sun which Goethe puts into the mouth of Faust: —

Life's pulses newly-quicken'd now awaken,
Softly to greet the ethereal twilight leaping;
Thou Earth through this night too hast stood unshaken,
And at my feet fresh breathe'st from thy sleeping.
Thou girdest me about with gladness, priming
My soul to stern resolve and strenuous keeping,
Onward to strive, to highest life still climbing. —
Unfolded lies the world in twilight-shimmer;
With thousand throated song the woods are chiming;
The dales, where through the mist-wreaths wind, lie dimmer,
Yet heavenly radiance plumbs the deeps unnumbered,
And bough and twig, new-quicken'd, bud and glimmer
Forth from the fragrant depths where sunk they slumbered,
Whilst hue on hue against the gloom still heightens,

Where bloom and blade with quivering pearls are cumbered.
A very Paradise about me lightens!

Look up! — The giant peaks that rise supernal
Herald the solemn hour; for them first brightens
The early radiance of the light eternal,
Upon us valley-dwellers later showered.

Now are the green-sunk, Alpine meadows vernal
With radiance new and new distinctness dowered,
And stepwise downward hath the splendour thriven.
He sallies forth, and I mine overpowered
And aching eyes to turn away am driven.

Thus when a yearning hope, from fear and wonder
Up to the highest wish in trust hath striven,
The portals of fulfilment yawn asunder.
Then bursts from yonder depths whose days ne'er dwindle
Excess of flame — we stand as smit with thunder.
The torch of life it was we sought to kindle,
A sea of fire-and what a fire! — hath penned us.
Is't Love? Is't Hate? that yonder glowing spindle
In bliss and bale alternating tremendous
About us twines, till we the dazed beholders
To veil our gaze in Earth's fresh mantle wend us.

Nay then, the sun shall bide behind my shoulders!
The cataract, that through the gorge doth thunder,
I'll watch with growing rapture, 'mid the boulders
From plunge to plunge down-rolling, rent asunder
In thousand thousand streams, aloft that shower
Foam upon hissing foam, the depths from under.
Yet blossoms from this storm a radiant flower;
The painted rainbow bends its changeful being,
Now lost in air, now limned with clearest power,
Shedding this fragrant coolness round us fleeing.

Its rays an image of man's efforts render;
Think, and more clearly wilt thou grasp it, seeing
Life in the many-hued, reflected splendour.

(Translation by Latham)

Goethe lets these words be spoken by Faust, the representative of humanity, as he gazes at the radiant morning sun. But the Festival of which we are now to speak has to do with a Sun belonging to a far deeper realm of being than the sun which rises anew every morning. And it is this deeper Sun that will be the guiding moth in our thoughts to-day.

And now we will listen to words in which the deepest import of the Christmas Mystery is mirrored. In all ages these words resounded in the ears of those who were pupils of the Mysteries — before they were allowed to participate in the Mysteries themselves: —

Behold the Sun
At tire midnight hour;
Build with stones in the lifeless ground,
Thus in decay and in the night of Death
Find the Creation's new beginning,
Young morning's strength;
Glory in the heights the eternal Word of Gods;
Shelter in the depths the Powers of Peace.
In darkness dwelling, create a Sun.
In matter weaving, know the joy of Spirit!

Many to whom the Christmas Tree with its candles is a familiar sight to-day, believe that it is a very ancient institution — but this is not the case. The Christmas Tree is a very recent European custom, dating no further back than about a hundred years or so. Although, however, the

Christmas Tree is a recent custom, the Christmas Festival is very ancient. It was celebrated in the earliest Mysteries of all religions, not as a festival of the outer sun but as one which awakens in men an inkling of the very wellsprings of existence. It was celebrated every year by the highest Initiates in the Mysteries, at the time of the year when the sun sends least power to the earth, bestows least warmth. But it was also celebrated by those who might not yet participate in the whole festival, who might witness only the outer, pictorial expression of the highest Mysteries. This imagery has been preserved through the ages, varying in form according to the several creeds.

The Christmas Festival is the Festival of the Holy Night, celebrated in the Mysteries by those who were ready for the awakening of the higher Self within them, or, as we should say in our time, those who have brought the Christ to birth within them.

Only those who have no inkling of the fact that as well as the chemical and physical forces, spiritual forces are also at work and that the workings of both kinds of forces take effect at definite times and seasons in cosmic life, can imagine that the moment of the awakening of the higher Self in man is of no importance. In the Greater Mysteries man beheld the forces working through all existence; he saw the world around him filled with spirit, with spiritual Beings; he beheld the world of spirit around him, radiant with light and colour. There can be no more sublime experience than this and in due time it will come to everyone. Although for some it may be only after many incarnations, nevertheless the moment will come for all men when Christ will be resurrected within them and new vision, new hearing will awaken. In preparation for the awakening, the pupils in the Mysteries were first taught of the cosmic significance of this awakening and only then was the sacred Act itself performed. It took place at the time when

darkness on the earth is greatest, when the external sun gives out least light and warmth — at Christmas time — because those who are cognisant of the spiritual facts know that at this time of the year, forces that are favourable for such an awakening stream through cosmic space. During his preparation the pupil was told that one who would be a true knower must have knowledge not only of what has been happening on the earth for thousands and thousands of years but must also be able to survey the whole course of the evolution of humanity, realising that the great festivals have their own, essential place within that evolution and must be dedicated to contemplation of the eternal truths. The pupil's gaze was directed to the time when our earth was not as it is now, when there was no sun, no moon out yonder in the heavens, but both were still united with the earth, when earth, sun and moon formed one body. Even then man was already in existence, but he had no body; he was still a spiritual being. No sunlight fell from outside upon these spiritual beings, for the sunlight was within the earth itself. This was not the sunlight that shines from outside upon objects and beings to-day, but it was inner sunlight that glowed within all beings of the earth. Then came the time when the sun separated from the earth, when its light shone down upon the earth from the universe outside. The sun had withdrawn from the earth and inner darkness came upon man. This was the beginning of his evolution towards that future when the inner light will again be radiant within him. Man must learn to know the things of the earth with his outer senses; he evolves to the stage where the higher Man, Spirit-Man, again glows and shines within him. From light, through darkness, to light — such is the path of the evolution of mankind.

The pupils of the Mysteries were prepared by these constantly inculcated teachings. Then they were led to the actual awakening. This was the moment when, as chosen ones, they

experienced the spiritual Light within them; their eyes of spirit were opened. This sacred moment came when the outer light was weakest, when the outer sun was shining with least strength. On that day the pupils were called together and the inner Light revealed itself to them. To those who were not yet ready to participate in this sacred enactment, it was presented as a picture which made them realise: For you too the great moment will come; to-day you see a picture only; later on, what you now see as a picture will be an actual experience. Thus it was in the lesser Mysteries. Pictures were presented of what the candidate for initiation was subsequently to experience as reality. To-day we shall hear of the enactments in the lesser Mysteries. Everywhere it was the same: in the Egyptian Mysteries, in the Eleusinian Mysteries, in the Mysteries of Asia Minor, of Babylon and Chaldea, as well as in the Mithras-cult and in the Indian Mysteries of Brahman. Everywhere the same experiences were undergone by the pupils of these Mysteries at the midnight hour of the Holy Night.

Early on the previous evening the pupils gathered together. In quiet contemplation they were to be made aware of the meaning and import of this momentous happening. Silently and in darkness they sat together. When the midnight hour drew near they had been for long hours in the darkened chamber, steeped in the contemplation of eternal truths. Then, towards midnight, mysterious tones, now louder, now gentler, resounded through the space around them. Hearing these tones, the pupils knew: This is the Music of the Spheres. Then a faint light began to glimmer from an illumined disc. Those who gazed at it knew that this disc represented the earth. The illumined disc became darker and darker — until finally it was quite black. At the same time the surrounding space grew brighter. Again the pupils knew: the black disc represents the earth; the sun, which otherwise radiates light to

the earth, is hidden; the earth can see the sun no longer. Then, ring upon ring, rainbow colours appeared around the earth-disc and those who saw it knew: This is the radiant *Iris*. At midnight, in the place of the black earth-disc, a violet-reddish orb gradually became visible, on which a word was inscribed, varying according to the peoples whose members were permitted to experience this Mystery. With us, the word would be *Christos*. Those who gazed at it knew: It is the sun which appears at the midnight hour, when the world around lies at rest in deep darkness. The pupils were now told that they had experienced what was known in the Mysteries as "seeing the sun at midnight."

He who is truly initiated experiences the sun at midnight, for in him the material is obliterated: the sun of the Spirit alone lives within him, dispelling with its light the darkness of matter. The most holy of all moments in the evolution of man is that in which he *experiences* the truth that he lives in eternal light, freed from the darkness. In the Mysteries, this moment was represented pictorially, year by year, at the midnight hour of the Holy Night. The picture imaged forth the truth that as well as the physical sun there is a Spiritual Sun which, like the physical sun, must be born out of the darkness. In order that the pupils might realise this even more intensely, after they had experienced the rising of the spiritual Sun, of the Christos, they were taken into a cave in which there seemed to be nothing but stone, nothing but dead, lifeless matter. But springing out of the stones they saw ears of corn as tokens of life, indicating symbolically that out of apparent death, life arises, that life is born from the dead stone. Then it was said to them: Just as from this day onwards the power of the sun awakens anew after it seemed to have died, so does new life forever spring from the dying.

The same truth is indicated in the Gospel of St. John in the words: "He must increase, but I must decrease!" John, the herald of the coming Christ, of the spiritual Light, he whose festival day in the course of the year falls at midsummer — this John must 'decrease' and in this decreasing there grows the power of the coming spiritual Light, increasing in strength in the measure in which John 'decreases.' Thus is the new life, prepared in the seed-grain which must wither and decay in order that the new plant may come into being. The pupils of the Mysteries were to realise that within death, life is resting, that out of the decaying and the dying the new flowers and fruits of spring arise in splendour, that the earth teems with the powers of birth. They were to learn that at this point of time something is happening in the innermost being of the earth: *the overcoming of death by life, by the life that is present in death*. This was portrayed to them in the picture of the Light gradually conquering the darkness; this is what they experienced as they saw the Light beginning to shine in the darkness. In the rocky cave they beheld the Light that rays forth in strength and glory from what is seemingly dead. Thus were the pupils led on to believe in the power of life, in what may be called man's highest Ideal. Thus did they learn to look upwards to this supreme Ideal of humanity, to the time when the earth shall have completed its evolution, when the Light will shine forth in all mankind. The physical earth itself will then fall into dust, but the spiritual essence will remain with all human beings who have been made inwardly radiant by the spiritual Light. And the earth and humanity will then waken into a higher existence, into a new phase of existence.

When Christianity came into being it bore this Ideal within it. Man felt that the *Christos* would arise in him as the representative of the spiritual re-birth, as the great Ideal of all humanity and moreover that the birth takes place in the Holy Night, at the time when the darkness is greatest, as a sign and

token that out of the darkness of matter a higher Man can be born in the human soul.

Before men spoke of the Christos, they spoke in the ancient Mysteries of a 'Sun Hero' who embodied the same Ideal which, in Christianity, was embodied in the Christos. Just as the sun completes its orbit in the course of the year, as its warmth seems to withdraw from the earth and then again streams forth, as in its seeming death it holds life and pours it forth anew, so it was with the Sun Hero, who through the power of his spiritual life had gained the victory over death, night and darkness. In the Mysteries there were seven degrees of Initiation. First, the degree of the *Ravens* who might approach only as far as the portal of the temple of Initiation. They were the channels between the outer world of material life and the inner world of the spiritual life; they did not belong entirely to the material world but neither, as yet, to the spiritual world. We find these 'Ravens' again and again; everywhere they are the messengers who pass hither and thither between the two worlds, bringing tidings. We find them too, in our German sagas and myths: the Ravens of Wotan, the Ravens who fly around the Kyffhäuser. At the second degree the disciple was led from the portal into the interior of the temple. There he was made ready for the third degree, the degree of the *Warrior* who went out to make known before the world the occult truths imparted to him in the temple. The fourth degree, that of the *Lion*, was reached by one whose consciousness was no longer confined within the bounds of individuality, but extended over a whole tribal stock. For this reason Christ was called "the Lion of the stem of David." To the fifth degree belonged a man whose still wider consciousness embraced a whole people. He was an Initiate of the fifth degree. He no longer bore a name of his own but was called by the name of his people. Thus men spoke of the '*Persian*,' of the '*Israelite*.' We understand now why

Nathaniel was called a 'true Israelite'; it was because he had reached the fifth degree of Initiation. The sixth degree was that of the *Sun Hero*. We must understand the meaning of this appellation. Then we shall realise what awe and reverence surged through the soul of a pupil of the Mysteries who knew of the existence of a Sun Hero. He was able in the Holy Night to participate in the festival of the birth of a Sun Hero.

Everything in the cosmos takes its rhythmic course: the stars, as well as the sun, follow a regular rhythm. Were the sun to abandon this rhythm even for a moment, an upheaval of untold magnitude would take place in the universe. Rhythm holds sway in the whole of nature, up to the level of man. Then, and only then is there a change. The rhythm which through the course of the year holds sway in the forces of growth, of propagation and so forth, ceases when we come to man. For man is to have his roots in freedom; and the more highly civilised he is, the more does this rhythm decline. As the light disappears at Christmas-time, so has rhythm apparently departed from the life of man: chaos prevails. But man must give birth again to rhythm out of his innermost being, his own initiative. By the exercise of his own will he must so order his life that it flows in rhythm, immutable and sure; his life must take its course with the regularity of the sun. Just as a change of the sun's orbit is inconceivable, it is equally inconceivable that the rhythm of such a life can be broken. The Sun Hero was regarded as the embodiment of this inalterable rhythm; through the power of the higher Man within him, he was able to direct the rhythm of the course of his own life. And this Sun Hero, this higher Man, was born in the Holy Night. In this sense, Christ Jesus is a Sun Hero and was conceived as such in the first centuries of Christendom. Hence the festival of His birth was instituted at the time of the year when, since ancient days, the festival of the birth of the Sun Hero had been celebrated. Hence, too, all that was

associated with the history of the life of Christ Jesus; the Mass at midnight celebrated by the early Christians in the depths of caves was in remembrance of the festival of the sun. In this Mass an ocean of light streamed forth at midnight out of the darkness as a remembrance of the rising of the spiritual Sun in the Mysteries. Hence the birth of Christ in the cave — again a remembrance of the cave of rock out of which life was born — life symbolised by the ears of corn. As earthly life was born out of the dead stone, so out of the depths was born the Highest — Christ Jesus. Associated with the festival of His nativity was the legend of the three Priest-Sages, the Three Kings. They bring to the Child: *gold*, the symbol of the outer, wisdom-filled man; *myrrh*, the symbol of the victory of life over death; and *frankincense* the symbol of the cosmic ether in which the Spirit lives.

And so in the whole content of the Christmas Festival we feel something echoing from primeval ages. It has come over to us in the imagery belonging to Christianity. The symbols of Christianity are reflections of the most ancient symbols used by man. The lighted Christmas Tree is one of them. For us it is a symbol of the Tree of Paradise, representing all-embracing material nature. Spiritual Nature is represented by the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life.

There is a legend which gives expression to the true meaning of the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life. Seth stands before the Gate of Paradise, craving entry. The Cherubim guarding the entrance with a fiery sword, allow him to pass. This is a sign of Initiation. In Paradise, Seth finds the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge firmly intertwined. The Archangel Michael who stands in the presence of God, allows him to take three grains of seed from this intertwined Tree. The Tree stands there as a prophetic indication of the future of mankind. When the whole of mankind has attained Initiation and found knowledge, then only the Tree of Life will remain,

there will be no more death. But in the meantime only he who is an Initiate may take from this Tree the three grains of seed - the three seeds which symbolise the three higher members of man's being. When Adam died, Seth placed these three grains of seed in his mouth and out of them grew a flaming bush. From the wood cut from this bush, new sprouts, new leaves burst ever and again. But within the flaming ring around the bush there was written: "I am He who was, who is, who is to be" — in other words, that which passes through all incarnations, the power of ever-evolving man who descends out of the light into the darkness and out of the darkness ascends into the light.

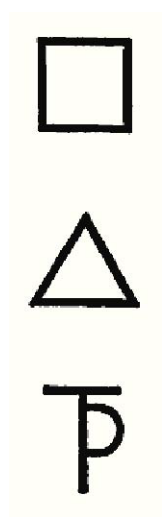
The staff with which Moses performed his miracles is cut from the wood of the bush; the door of Solomon's Temple is made of it; the wood is carried to the waters of the pool of Bethesda and from it the pool receives the healing properties of which we are told. And from this same wood the Cross of Christ Jesus is made, the wood of the Cross which is a symbol of life that passes into death and yet has within it the power to bring forth new life. The great symbol of worlds stands before us here: Life the conqueror of Death. The wood of this Cross has grown out of the three grains of seed of the Tree of Paradise.

The Rose Cross is also a symbol of the death of the lower nature and the resurrection of the higher. Goethe expressed the same thought in the words:

"As long as thou best it not,
This Dying and Becoming,
Thou'rt but a dreary guest
Upon the dark earth."

The Tree of Paradise and the wood of the Cross are connected in a most wonderful way. Even though the Cross is always an Easter symbol, it deepens our conception of the Christmas

Mystery too. We feel how in this night of Christ's Nativity, new, upwelling life streams towards us, This thought is indicated in the fresh roses adorning this Tree; they say to us: the Tree of the Holy Night has not yet become the wood of the Cross but the power to become that wood is beginning to arise in it. The Roses, growing out of the green, are a symbol of the Eternal which springs from the Temporal.



The *square* is the symbol of the fourfold nature of man; physical body, ether-body, astral body and ego.

The *triangle* is the symbol for Spirit-Self, Life-Spirit, Spirit-Man.

Above the triangle is the symbol for *Tarok*. Those who were initiated into the Egyptian Mysteries knew how to interpret this sign. They knew too, how to read the Book of Thoth, consisting of 78 leaves on which were inscribed all happenings in the world from the beginning to the end, from Alpha to Omega and which could be read if the signs were rightly put together. These pictures gave expression to the life that dies and then springs again to new life. Whoever could combine the right numbers with the right pictures, were able to read

the Book.

This wisdom of numbers and of pictures had been



taught from time immemorial. In the Middle Ages it was still in the fore ground although little of it survives to-day.



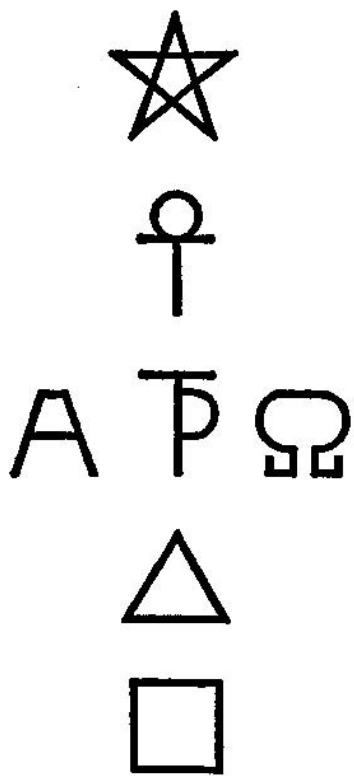
Above this symbol is the *Tao* — the sign that is a reminder of the conception of the Divine held by our early forefathers; it comes from the word: TAO. Before Europe, Asia and Africa were scenes of human civilisation, these early forefathers of ours lived on the continent of Atlantis which was finally submerged by mighty floods. In the Germanic sagas of Nifelheim or Nebelheim, the memory of Atlantis still lives. For Atlantis was not surrounded by pure air. Vast cloud-masses moved over the land, like those to be seen to-day clustering around the peaks of high mountains. The sun and moon did not shine clearly in the heavens — they were surrounded by rainbows — by the sacred *Iris*. At that time man understood the language of nature. To-day he no longer understands what speaks to him in the rippling of waves, in the noise of winds, in the rustling of leaves, in the rolling of thunder — but in old Atlantis he understood it. He felt it all as a reality. And within these voices of clouds and waters and leaves and winds a sound rang forth: TAO — *That am I*. The man of Atlantis heard and understood it, feeling that Tao pervaded the whole universe.



Finally, the cosmic symbol of Man is the *pentagram*, hanging at the top of the tree. Of the deepest meaning of the pentagram we may not now speak. But it is the star of humanity, of evolving humanity; it is the star that all wise men follow, as did the Priest-Sages of old. It symbolises the very essence and meaning of earth-existence. It comes to birth in the Holy Night because the greatest Light shines forth from the deepest Darkness. Man is living on towards a state where the Light is to be born in him, where words full of significance will be replaced by others equally significant, where it will no longer be said: 'The Darkness comprehendeth not the Light,' but when the truth will ring out from cosmic space: The Darkness gives way before the Light that shines in the Star of Humanity — and now the Darkness comprehendeth the Light!

This should resound and the spiritual Light ray forth from the Christmas Festival. We will celebrate this Christmas Festival as the Festival of the supreme Ideal of mankind, for then it will bring to birth in our souls the joyful confidence: I too shall experience the birth of the higher Man within me! In me too the birth of the Saviour, the birth of the Christos will take place!

Positions of the symbols on the Christmas Tree



III

The Birth of the Sun-Spirit as the Spirit of the Earth

THE THIRTEEN HOLY NIGHTS

Hanover, 26th December, 1911

WHEN the candles are lit on the Christmas Tree, the human soul feels as though the symbol of an eternal reality were standing there, and that this must always have been the symbol of the Christmas Festival, even in a far distant past. For in the autumn, when outer Nature fades, when the sun's creations fall as it were into slumber and man's organs of outer perception must turn away from the phenomena of the physical world, the soul has the opportunity — nay not only the opportunity but the urge — to withdraw into its innermost depths, in order to feel and to experience: Now, when the light of the outer sun is faintest and its warmth feeblest, now is the time when the soul withdraws into the darkness but can find within itself the inner, spiritual Light. The lights on the Christmas Tree stand there before us as a symbol of the inner, spiritual Light that is kindled in the outer darkness. And because what we feel to be the spirit-light of the soul shining into the darkness of Nature seems to be an eternal reality, we imagine that the lighted fir-tree shining out to us on Christmas Night must have been shining ever since our earthly incarnations began.

And yet it is not so. It is only one or at most two centuries ago that the Christmas Tree became a symbol of the thoughts and feelings which arise in man at the Christmas season. The Christmas Tree is a recent symbol but each year anew it reveals to man a great, eternal truth. That is why we imagine that it must always have existed, even in the remote past. It is as if from the Christmas Tree itself there resounded the proclamation of the Divine in the cosmic expanse, in the heavenly heights. The human being can feel this to be the unfailing source of those forces of peace in his soul which spring from good-will. And thus, according to the Christmas Legend, did the proclamation also resound when the shepherds visited the birthplace of the Child whose festival we celebrate on Christmas Day. To the shepherds there rang forth from the clouds: From the cosmic expanse, from the heavenly heights, the Divine Powers are revealing themselves, bringing peace to the human soul that is filled with good-will.

For centuries and centuries men could not bring themselves to believe that the symbol presented to the world in the Christmas Festival ever had a beginning. They felt in it the hallmark of eternity. Christian ritual has for this reason clothed the intimation of eternity in what takes place symbolically on Christmas Night, in the words: 'To us Christ is born anew!' It is as though every year the soul is called upon to feel anew a reality of which it is thought that it could happen once and once only. The eternity of this symbolic happening is brought home to us with infinite power if we have the true conception of the symbol itself. Yet as late as 353 A.D., 353 years after Christ Jesus had appeared on earth, the birth of Jesus was not celebrated, even in Rome. The Festival of Jesus' birth was celebrated for the first time in Rome in the year A.D. 354. Before then this Festival was not celebrated between the 24th and 25th December; the day of supreme commemoration for those who understood something of the

deep wisdom relating to the Mystery of Golgotha, was the 6th of January. The Epiphany was celebrated as a kind of Birth-Festival of the Christ during the first three centuries of our era. It was the Festival which was meant to revive in human souls the remembrance of the descent of the Christ Spirit into the body of Jesus of Nazareth at the Baptism by John in the Jordan. Until the year A.D. 353 the happening which men conceived to have taken place at the Baptism was commemorated on the 6th of January as the Festival of Christ's birth. For during the first centuries of Christendom an inkling still survived of the mystery that is of all mysteries the most difficult for mankind to grasp, namely, the descent of the Christ Being into the body of Jesus of Nazareth.

What were the feelings of men who had some inkling of the secrets of Christianity during those early centuries? They said to themselves: The Christ Spirit weaves through the world that is revealed through the senses and through the human spirit. In the far distant past this Christ Spirit revealed Himself to Moses. The secret of the human 'I' resounded to Moses as it resounds to us from the symbol on the Christmas Tree from the sounds I A O — the Alpha and the Omega, preceded by the I. This was what resounded in the soul of Moses when the Christ Spirit appeared to him in the burning bush. And this same Christ Spirit led Moses to the place where He was to recognise Him in His true being. This is described in the Old Testament where it is said that the Lord led Moses to Mount Nebo 'over against Jericho' and showed him what must still come to pass before the Christ Spirit could incarnate in the body of a man. To Moses on Mount Nebo, this Spirit said: But thou to whom I revealed myself in advance, mayest not bear what thou hast in thy soul into the evolution of thy people; for they have first to prepare what is to come to pass when the time is fulfilled.

And when, through many centuries, the evolutionary preparation had been completed, the same Spirit by Whom Moses had been held back, did indeed reveal Himself -by becoming Flesh, by taking on a human body, the body of Jesus of Nazareth. Therewith mankind as a whole was led from the stage of Initiation signified by the word 'Jericho' to that indicated by the crossing of the Jordan.

The hearts and minds of those who in the early centuries of our era understood the true import of Christianity turned to the Baptism in the Jordan of Jesus of Nazareth into whom Christ descended, Christ the Sun-Earth-Spirit. It was this — the birth of Christ — that was celebrated as a Mystery in the early Christian centuries. The insight for which we prepare ourselves to-day through Anthroposophy, through the wisdom belonging to the fifth Post-Atlantean epoch of civilisation, flashed up in the form of vision from the vestiges of ancient clairvoyance still surviving during the age when the Mystery of Golgotha took place; it flashed up in the Gnostics, those remarkable, enlightened men who lived at the turning-point of the old and the new eras, whose conception of the Christ Mystery differed in respect of form but not in respect of content, from our own. What the Gnostics were able to teach trickled through into the world and although what had actually come to pass in the event indicated symbolically by the Baptism in the Jordan was not widely understood, there was nevertheless an inkling that the Sun Spirit had been born at that time as the Spirit of the Earth, that a cosmic Power had dwelt in the body of a man of earth. And so in the early centuries of Christendom the festival of the birth of Christ in the body of Jesus of Nazareth, the festival of Christ's Epiphany, was celebrated on the 6th of January.

But insight, even dim, uncertain insight into this deep Mystery faded away more and more as time went by. The age came when men could no longer comprehend that the Being called

Christ had been present in a physical human body for three years only. More and more it will be realised that what was accomplished for the whole of earth-evolution during those three years in the physical body of a man is one of the very deepest and most difficult Mysteries to understand. From the fourth century onwards, with the approach of the materialistic age, the powers of the human soul — then still at the stage of preparation — were not strong enough to grasp the deep Mystery which from our time on will be understood in ever greater measure. And so it came about that to the same extent to which the outer power of Christianity increased, inner understanding of the Christ Mystery decreased and the festival of the 6th of January ceased to have any essential meaning. The birth of Christ was placed thirteen days earlier and envisaged as coincident with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. But in this very fact we are confronted by something that must always be a source of inspiration and thanksgiving. Actually, the 24th/25th of December was fixed as the day of Christ's Nativity because a great truth had been lost, as we have heard. And yet ... although the error would seem to point to the loss of a great truth, such profound meaning lay behind it that — although the men responsible knew nothing of it — we cannot but marvel at the subconscious wisdom with which the festival of Christmas Day was instituted.

Verily, the working of Divine wisdom can be seen in the fixing of this festival. Just as Divine wisdom can be perceived in outer nature if we know how to decipher what reveals itself there, so we can perceive Divine wisdom working in the unconscious soul of man when the following is borne in mind. In the Calendar, the 24th of December is the day dedicated to Adam and Eve, the following day being the Festival of Christ's Nativity. Thus the loss of an ancient truth caused the date of Christ's birth to be placed thirteen days earlier and to be identified with the birth of Jesus of Nazareth-but in a most

wonderful way the birth of Jesus of Nazareth was linked with the thought of man's origin in earth-evolution, his origin in Adam and Eve. All the dim feelings and experiences connected with this festival of Jesus' birth which were alive in the human soul — although in their upper consciousness, men had no knowledge of what lay behind — all these feelings that were astir in the depths of the soul speak a wondrous language.

When understanding was lost of what had streamed from cosmic worlds in the event which would rightly have been celebrated on the 6th of January, forces working in hidden depths of the soul caused the picture to be presented of man as a being of soul-and-spirit before physical embodiment, at the starting-point of evolution as a physical human being. The picture is of the new-born child whose soul is as yet untouched by the effects of contact with the physical body, of the child at the beginning of physical evolution on earth. But this is not a human child in the ordinary sense; it is the child who was there before human beings had reached the point of the first physical embodiment in earth-evolution. This is the being known in the Kabbala as Adam Kadmon — Man who descended from divine-spiritual heights, with all that he had acquired during the periods of Saturn, Sun and Moon. The human being in his spiritual state at the very beginning of earth-evolution, born in the Jesus Child — this was presented to mankind by a Divine wisdom in the festival of Jesus' birth. At a time when it was no longer possible to understand what had descended from cosmic worlds, from heavenly spheres, to the earth, remembrance of their origin, of their state before the advent of the Luciferic forces in earth-evolution was engraved into the souls of men. And when it was no longer realised that in the highest and truest sense it could be said of the Baptism by John in the Jordan: From cosmic worlds there has come into human souls the power of the self-revealed

Godhead, in order that peace may reign among men who are of goodwill — when understanding of how this picture could be presented as a sacred festival was lost, another affirmation was presented in its place, the affirmation that at the beginning of earth revolution, before the Luciferic forces began their work, man had a nature, an entelechy that can inspire him with undying hope.

The Jesus of the Gospel of St. Luke — not the Jesus described in the Gospel of St. Matthew — is the Child before whom the shepherds worship. To them the proclamation rang forth: Now is the Divine revealed from the heavenly heights, bringing peace to the souls of men who are of good-will. And so for the centuries when the higher reality was beyond man's grasp, the festival was instituted which every year brings to his remembrance: Although you cannot gaze into the heavenly heights and there recognise the great Sun-Spirit, you bear within you, from the time of your earthly beginning, the Child-Soul in its state of purity, unsullied by the effects of physical incarnation; and the forces of this Child-Soul can give you the firm confidence that you can be victorious over the lower nature which clings to you as the result of Lucifer's temptation. The linking of the festival of Jesus' birth with remembrance of Adam and Eve gave emphasis to the thought that at the place visited by the shepherds a human soul had been born in the state of innocence in which the soul existed before the first incarnation on earth.

At this time of festival, therefore, since the birth of the God was no longer understood, the birth of a human being was commemorated. For however greatly man's forces threaten to decline and his sufferings to take the upper hand, there are two unfailing sources of peace, harmony and strength. We are led to the first source when we look out into cosmic space, knowing it to be pervaded by the weaving lift, movement and warmth of the Divine Spirit. And if we hold fast to the

conviction that this Divine-Spiritual Power weaving through the universe can permeate our being provided only that our forces do not flag — there we have the Easter thought, equally a source of hope and confidence flowing from the cosmic spheres. And the second source can spring from the dim inkling that as a being of soul-and-spirit, before he became the prey of the Luciferic forces at the beginning of his earthly evolution, man was still part of the same Spirit now awaited from cosmic worlds as in the Easter thought. Turning to the source to be found in man's own, original being, before the onset of the Luciferic influence, we can say to ourselves: Whatever may befall you, whatever may torment you and draw you down from the shining spheres of the spirit, your divine origin is an eternal reality, hidden though it be in the depths of the soul. Recognition of this innermost power of the soul will give birth to the firm assurance that the heights are within your reach. And if you conjure before your soul all that is innocent, childlike, free from life's temptations, free from all that has already befallen human souls through the many incarnations since the beginning of earthly evolution, then you will have a picture of the human soul as it was before these earthly incarnations began.

But one soul — one soul only — remained in this condition, namely the soul of the Jesus Child described in the Gospel of St. Luke. This soul was kept back in the spiritual life when the other human souls began to pass through their incarnations on the earth. This soul remained in the guardianship of the holiest Mysteries through the Atlantean and Post-Atlantean epochs until the time of the events in Palestine. Then it was sent forth into the body predestined to receive it and became one of the two Jesus children -the Child described in the Gospel of St. Luke.

Thus did the festival of Christ's Nativity become the festival of the Birth of Jesus.

If we rightly understand this festival we must say: That which we believe to be born anew symbolically every Christmas Night, is the human soul in its original nature, the childhood-spirit of man as it was at the beginning of earth-evolution; then it descended as a revelation from the heavenly heights. And when the human heart can become conscious of this reality, the soul is filled with the unshakable peace that can bear us to our lofty goals, if we are of goodwill. Mighty indeed is the word that can resound to us on Christmas Night, do we but understand its import.

Why was it that the festival of Christ's birth was set back thirteen days and became the festival of the birth of Jesus? To understand this we must penetrate into deep mysteries of human existence. Of outer nature, man believes, because he sees it with his eyes, that what the rays of the sun charm forth from the depths of the earth, unfolding into beauty through the spring and summer, withdraws into those same depths at the time when the outer sun-sphere is darkest, and that what will spring forth again the following year is being prepared in the seeds within the depths of the earth. Because his eyes bear witness, man believes that the seed of the plant passes through a yearly cycle, that it must go down into the earth's depths in order to unfold again under the warmth and light of the sun in spring. But to begin with, man has no notion that the human soul too passes through such a cycle. Nor is this revealed until he is initiated into the great mysteries of existence. Just as the force contained in the seed of every plant is bound up with the physical forces of the earth, so is the inmost being of the human soul bound up with the spiritual forces of the earth. And just as the seed of the plant sinks into the depths of the earth at the time we know as Christmas, so does the soul of man descend at that time into deep, deep spirit-realms, drawing strength from these depths as does the seed of the plant for its blossoming in spring.

What the soul undergoes in these spirit-depths of the earth is entirely hidden from the ordinary consciousness. But for one whose eyes of spirit are opened the Thirteen Days and Thirteen Nights between the 24th of December and the 6th of January are a time of deep spiritual experience.

Parallel with the experience of the plant-seed in the depths of the natural earth, there is a spiritual experience in the earth's spirit-depths — verily a parallel experience. And the seer for whom this experience is possible either as the result of training or through inherited clairvoyant faculties, can feel himself penetrating into these spiritual depths. During this period of the Thirteen Days and Nights, the seer can behold what must come upon man because he has passed through incarnations which have been under the influence of the forces of Lucifer since the beginning of earthly evolution. The sufferings in Kamaloka that man must endure in the spiritual world because Lucifer has been at his side since he began to incarnate on the earth — the dearest vision of all this is presented in the mighty Imaginations which can come before the soul during the Thirteen Days and Nights between the Christmas Festival and the Festival of the 6th of January, the Epiphany. At the time when the seed of the plant is passing through its most crucial period in the depths below, the human soul is passing through its deepest experiences. The soul gazes at a vista of all that man must experience in the spiritual worlds because, under Lucifer's influence, he alienated himself from the Powers by whom the world was created. This vision is clearest to the soul during these Thirteen Days and Nights. Hence there is no better preparation for the revelation of that Imagination which may be called the Christ Imagination and which makes us aware that by gaining the victory over Lucifer, Christ Himself becomes the Judge of the deeds of men during the incarnations affected by Lucifer's influence. The soul of the

seer lives on from the festival of Jesus' birth to that of the Epiphany in such a way that the Christ Mystery is revealed. It is during these Thirteen Holy Days and Nights that the soul can grasp most deeply of all, the import and meaning of the Baptism by John in the Jordan.

It is remarkable that during the centuries of Christendom, wherever powers of spiritual sight developed in the right way, it was known to seers that vision penetrated most deeply during the period of the Thirteen Holy Nights at the time of the winter solstice. Many a seer — either schooled in the mysteries of the modern age or possessing inherited powers of clairvoyance — makes it evident to us that at the darkest point of the winter solstice the soul can have vision of all that man must undergo because of his alienation from the Christ Spirit, how adjustment and catharsis were made possible through the Mystery enacted in the Baptism by John in the Jordan and then through the Mystery of Golgotha, and how the visions during the Thirteen Nights are crowned on the 6th of January by the Christ Imagination. Thus it is correct to name the 6th of January as the day of Christ's birth and these Thirteen Nights as the time during which the powers of seership in the human soul discern and perceive what man must undergo through his life in the incarnations from Adam and Eve to the Mystery of Golgotha.

During my visit to Christiania last year (1) it was interesting to me to find the thought which in rather different words has been expressed in so many lectures on the Christ Mystery, embodied in a beautiful saga known as 'The Dream Legend.' Strange to say, it has come to the fore in Norway during the last ten to fifteen years and has become familiar to the people, although its origin is, of course, very much earlier. It is the legend which in a wonderfully beautiful way relates how Olaf Åsteson is initiated, as it were by natural forces, in that he falls asleep on Christmas Eve, sleeps through the Thirteen Days

and Nights until the 6th of January, and lives through all the terrors which the human being must experience through the incarnations from the earth's beginning until the Mystery of Golgotha. And it relates how when the 6th of January has come, Olaf Åsteson has the vision of the intervention of the Christ Spirit in humanity, the Michael-Spirit being His forerunner. I hope that on some other occasion we shall be able to present this poem in its entirety, for then you will realise that consciousness of vision during the Thirteen Days and Nights survives even to-day, and is in fact, being revived. A few characteristic lines only will now be quoted. The poem begins:

Come listen to me and hear my song
The song of a wonderful youth,
I'll sing you of Olaf Åsteson
Who slept many days — 'tis the truth.
'Twas Christmas Eve when down he lay
And slept so long all unknowing,
He never woke till the thirteenth day
When to Church the people were going.
Yes, it was Olaf Åsteson
Who lay so long a-sleeping.

(Translated from a German version of *The Dream Legend*, by E.C.M.)

And so the poem goes on, relating how in his dream during the Thirteen Days and Nights, Olaf Åsteson is led through all that man must experience on account of Lucifer's temptation. A vivid picture is given of Olaf Åsteson's journey through the spheres where human beings have the experiences so often described in connection with Kamaloca, and of how the Christ Spirit, preceded by Michael, streams into this vision.

Thus with the coming of Christ in the Spirit, it will become more and more possible for men to know how the spiritual forces weave and hold sway and that the festivals have not been instituted by arbitrary opinions but by the cosmic wisdom which so often lies beyond the reach of men's consciousness yet works and reigns throughout history. This cosmic wisdom has placed the festival of the birth of Jesus at the beginning of the Thirteen Days. While the Easter Festival can always be a reminder that contemplation of the cosmic worlds will help us to find within ourselves the strength to conquer all that is lower, the Christmas thought — if we understand the festival which commemorates man's divine origin and the symbol before us on Christmas Day in the form of the Jesus Child — says to us ever and again that the powers which bring peace to the soul can be found within ourselves. True peace of soul is present only when that peace has sure foundations, that is to say, when it is a force enabling man to know: In thee lives something which, if truly brought to birth, can, nay must, lead thee to divine Heights, to divine Powers. — The lights on this tree are symbols of the light which shines in our own souls when we grasp the reality of what is proclaimed to us symbolically on Christmas Night by the Jesus Child in its state of innocence: the inmost being of the human soul itself, strong, innocent, tranquil, leading us along our life's path to the highest goals of existence. May these lights on the Christmas Tree say to us: If ever thy soul is weak, if ever thou believest that the goals of earth-existence are beyond thy reach, think of man's divine origin and become aware of those forces within thee which are also the forces of supreme Love. Become inwardly conscious of the forces which give thee confidence and certainty in all thy works, through all thy life, now and in all ages of time to come.

Notes:

1 7th-17th June, 1910, when the Lecture Course on *The Mission of the Folk-Souls* was given.

IV

Christmas at a Time of Grievous Destiny

Basle, 21st December, 1916

THE yearly celebration of the physical birth of the Being Who entered earth-evolution in order to give that evolution its meaning, has for many people become a matter of habit. But if, conformably with the task of our spiritual-scientific movement, we are not content with celebrating a festival of mere custom — as is so general nowadays — it will be opportune at this grave time to turn our minds to many things that are connected with the physical birth of Christ Jesus.

We have often pictured how in Christ Jesus, so far as human comprehension goes, two Beings merge as it were into one: the Christ Being and the human Jesus Being. In the evolution of Christianity there has been much conflict, much conflict of dogma, about the meaning of the union of Christ with Jesus, in the Being whose physical birth is celebrated at the Christmas Festival. We ourselves, of course, recognise in the Christ a cosmic, super-earthly Being, a Being Who descended from spiritual worlds in order, through His birth in a physical man, to impart meaning to earth-evolution. And in Jesus we recognise the one who, as man, was predestined after thirty years of preparation, to unite the Christ Being with himself, to receive the Christ Being into himself.

Not only has there been much strife, much conflict of dogma, about the nature of the union of Christ with Jesus, but the relationship of Christ to Jesus contains a hint of significant secrets of the earthly evolution of mankind. If, in the endeavour to understand something of the union of Christ with Jesus, we follow events up to the present day and reflect upon what has still to take place in the evolution of humanity before this relationship can be rightly understood, then we touch upon one of the deepest secrets of human knowledge and human life.

At the time when Christ was about to enter the evolution of humanity, it was possible, through faculties that were a heritage from the days of the old clairvoyant wisdom, to form certain conceptions of the sublimity of the Christ Being. And at that time there existed a wisdom of which people often speak nowadays in a way that is almost blasphemous, but of which they are scarcely able to form any true idea. There existed something which up to this day has been completely exterminated from human evolution, rooted out by certain currents running counter to the deeper Christian revelation: this was the Gnosis, a wisdom into which had flowed much of the ancient knowledge revealed to men in atavistic clairvoyance. Every trace of the Gnosis, whether in script or oral tradition, was exterminated root and branch by the dogmatic Christianity of the West — after this Gnosis had striven to find an answer to the question: Who is the Christ?

There can be no question to-day of reverting to the Gnosis — for the Gnosis belongs to an age that is past and over. True, its extermination was caused by malice, ignorance, enmity towards knowledge and wisdom ... but for all that it happened out of an underlying necessity. When anthroposophical spiritual science is accused of wanting to revive the ancient Gnosis, that is only one of the many expressions of ill-will directed towards it to-day. The accusation is, of course, made

by people whose ignorance of the Gnosis is on a par with their ignorance of Anthroposophy. There is no question of reviving the Gnosis, but of recognising it as something great and mighty, something that endeavoured, in the time now lying nineteen hundred years behind us, to give an answer to the question: Who is the Christ?

Before the inner eye of the Gnostic lay a glorious vista of spiritual worlds, with the Hierarchies ranged in their order, one above the other. How the Christ had descended through the worlds of the spiritual Hierarchies to enter into the sheaths of a mortal man — all this stood before the soul of the Gnostic. And he tried to envisage how the Christ had come from heights of spirit, how He had been conceived on earth. The best way to get some idea of the knowledge then existing is to reflect that everything produced by the world after the extermination of the Gnosis was paltry in comparison with the grandeur of the Gnostic idea of the Christ. The Mystery-wisdom behind the Gospels is infinitely great — greater by far than anything which later theology has been able to discover from them. To realise how paltry and insignificant compared with the Gnosis is the current conception of the Christ Being, we have but to steep ourselves in the ancient Gnostic idea of Him. Picturing this, one is filled with humility by the grandeur of the conception of the Christ Being entering into a human body from cosmic heights, from far distant cosmic worlds.

This majestic, sublime concept of Christ has fallen into the background, but all the dogmatic definitions handed down to us as Arian or Athanasian principles of faith are meagre in comparison with the Gnostic conception, in which vision of the Christ Being was combined with wisdom relating to the universe. (1) Only the merest fragments of this great Gnostic conception of Christ have survived.

This, then, is one aspect of the relationship of Christ to Jesus: that Christ came into the world at a time when the wisdom capable of understanding Him, yearning to understand Him, had already been rooted out. People who speak of the ancient Gnosis as oriental phantasy that had to be exterminated for the good of Western humanity, have always believed themselves to be good Christians, but the real cause was that the mind of the age lacked the strength to unite earthly with heavenly concepts. One must have a feeling for the tragic if human evolution is to be understood.

How long after the Mystery of Golgotha was the Temple at Jerusalem, the sanctuary of peace, destroyed? The Temple of Solomon was within the precincts of the city of Jerusalem. What the Gnosis contained in the form of *wisdom*, Solomon's Temple contained in the form of *symbolism*. Cosmic secrets were presented in symbols and pictures. And it was intended that those who entered the Temple, where the pictures all around them were reflected in their souls, should receive something through which alone they became truly *man*. The purpose of the Temple of Solomon was to inculcate the meaning of worlds into the souls of those who were permitted to enter it. What the Temple revealed was something that the earth as such did not reveal, namely, all the cosmic secrets that ray into the earth from the cosmic expanse.

If one of the old Initiates possessing real knowledge of the Temple of Solomon had been asked: Why was the Temple of Solomon built? — the answer would have been somewhat as follows: 'In order that here on the earth there shall be a beacon light for those Powers who accompany the souls seeking their way into earthly bodies.' Let us try to grasp what this means, realising that these old Initiates of the Temple of Solomon knew that when men were being accompanied into earthly bodies in conformity with all the signs of the stars, then particular souls must be guided to bodies in which the

great symbols of Solomon's Temple could be mirrored.

This, in the nature of things, might give rise to arrogance. If the knowledge was not received with humility, with the humility of the *Essenes*, it led men into *Pharisaism*! But at all events, this was the situation: The eye of earth looked up to the heavens, beholding the stars; the spiritual eyes of those who were guiding souls from cosmic worlds to the earth gazed downwards and beheld the Temple of Solomon with its symbols. The Temple was like a star whose light enabled them to guide the souls into bodies which would be capable of understanding its meaning. It was the central star of the earth, shining out with special brightness into the spiritual heights.

When Christ Jesus had come to the earth, when the Mystery of Golgotha had taken place, the great secret that was intended to be mirrored in every single human soul was this: "My kingdom is not of this world!" It was then that the external, physical Temple of Solomon lost its significance and its destiny was tragically fulfilled. Moreover at that time there was no living person who would have been capable of apprehending the full compass of the Christ Being from the reflections of the symbols in Solomon's Temple.

But the Christ Himself had now entered earth-evolution, had become part of it. That is the all-important fact. The Gnostics were the last survivors of the bearers of that ancient, atavistic earth-wisdom which was comprehensive and powerful enough to make some understanding of the Christ possible.

That, then, is one aspect of the relation of Christ to Jesus. In those days the Christ Being could have been understood through the Gnosis. But according to the world-plan it was not to be — although the Gnosis teemed with wisdom concerning the Christ. And it may truly be said that the path now taken by Christianity through the countries of the South, through

Greece, Italy, Spain and so on, led more and more to the obliteration of insight into the essential nature of Christ. And Rome, sinking into decline, was destined to bring about the final extinction of understanding.

In regard to this relation of the Christ to Jesus it is strange that on the one hand we find lighting up in the Gnosis a sublime conception of the *Christ* which died away as Christianity passed through the Roman system, while on the other hand, when Christianity encountered the peoples from the North, the concept of *Jesus* came to the fore. In the South, the concept of Christ flickered out. The form in which the concept of Jesus emerged was by no means very sublime, but it gripped men's hearts and feelings in such a way that something wonderfully absorbing stirred in their souls at the thought of how the Child who receives the Christ is born in the Holy Night. Just as in the South the concept of Christ was inadequate, so in the North was man's feeling for Jesus. But for all that it was a feeling that stirred the very depths of the human heart. Yet in itself it is not quite comprehensible. For if we contrast the immeasurable significance of Christ Jesus for the evolution of humanity with all the sentimental trivialities about the 'dear little Jesus' contained in many poems and hymns commonly used to move the human heart — for in their egoism men believe that these trivialities kindle emotions capable of storming the heavens — then we have a direct impression that something is striving to make its home but is not fully able to do so, that one element is mingling with another in such a way that the deeper meaning, the far deeper significance, remains in the subconsciousness.

What actually is it that remains in the subconsciousness while the Jesus-thought, the Jesus-feeling, the Jesus-experience, is coming to the surface? The process takes a strange and remarkable course. The understanding for Christ sank into the subconsciousness and there, in the subconsciousness, the

understanding for Jesus began to glow. In the subconsciousness — not in the consciousness, which was dim — the consciousness of Christ that was flickering out and the consciousness of Jesus that was beginning to stir were destined to meet and counter-balance each other. Why was it, then, that the peoples who came down from Scandinavia, from the North of present-day Russia, received Christianity without the Christ-idea which, to begin with, was wholly foreign to them? Why was it that they received Christianity with the Jesus-idea? Why was Christmas the festival which above all others spoke to the human heart, awakened in the human heart feelings of holy bliss? Why was it? What was present in this Europe which in truth received from the South a completely distorted Christianity? What was it that kindled in men's hearts the idea which then, in the Christmas Festival, created such a deep, deep fount of experience?

Men had been prepared — but had largely forgotten by what they had been prepared. They had been prepared by the old Northern Mysteries. But they had forgotten the import and meaning of these ancient Mysteries. And we have to go very far back into the past to discover from the source and content of the Northern Mysteries the deep secret of the penetration of the Jesus-feeling into the soul-life of the European peoples.

The principles underlying the Northern Mysteries were quite different from those underlying the Mysteries of Asia Minor and of the South. The experiences underlying the Northern Mysteries were more intimately and directly connected with the existence of the stars, with nature, with earthly fertility, than with the wisdom represented in symbols within a Temple. The Mystery-truths are not the childish trifles presented by certain mystic sects to-day; the Mystery-truths are great and potent impulses in the evolution of mankind. Present-day Anthroposophy can no more revert to the Gnosis than mankind can revert to what the ancient Mysteries of the

North, for example, signified for human evolution. And to believe that such Mystery-truths are now being revealed because of some kind of hankering to go back to what was once alive in them, would be a foolish misunderstanding. It is for the sake of deepening self-recollection, self-knowledge, that mankind to-day must be made aware of the content of such Mysteries. For what linked the Northern Mysteries with the whole evolution of the universe, arose from the earth, just as the Gnostic wisdom, inspired from the cosmos, was connected with happenings in the far distances of the universe. How the *secret of man*, linked as it is with all the secrets of the cosmos, comes into operation when a human being enters physical existence on the earth — it was this that, with greater depth than anywhere else at a certain period of earth-evolution, lay at the root of these ancient Northern Mysteries.

But we have to go very far back — to about three thousand years before Christ, perhaps even earlier — to understand what was alive in the hearts of those in whom, later on, the feeling for Jesus arose. Somewhere in the region of the peninsula of Jutland, in present-day Denmark, was the centre from which, in those ancient times, important impulses went out from the Mysteries. And — let the modern intellect judge of this as it will — these impulses were connected with the fact that in the third millennium before Christ, in certain Northern tribes, he alone was regarded as a worthy citizen of the earth who was born in certain weeks of the winter season. The reason for this was that from those places of the Mysteries on the peninsula of Jutland, among the tribes which at that time called themselves the Ingaevones, or were so called by the Romans — by Tacitus (**Note 2**) — the Temple Priest gave the sign for sexual union to take place at a definite time during the first quarter of the year. Any sexual union outside the period ordained by this Mystery-centre was taboo; and in this tribe of

the Ingaevones a man who was not born in the period of the darkest nights, at the time of greatest cold, towards our New Year, was regarded as an inferior being. For the impulse went out from that Mystery-centre at the time of the first full moon after the vernal equinox. Only then, among those who might believe themselves united with the spiritual world as became the dignity of man, was sexual union permissible. The characteristic virility — even in its aftermath — marvelled at by Tacitus, writing a century after the Mystery of Golgotha, was due to the fact that the forces which enter into such sexual union were preserved through the whole of the rest of the year.

And so those who belonged to the tribe of the Ingaevones (and in a lesser degree this was also true of the other Germanic tribes) experienced the process of conception with particular intensity at the time of the first full moon after the vernal equinox. They experienced it, not in wide-awake consciousness, but as it were heralded in dream. Yet they were aware of its significance in regard to the connection between the secret of man and the secrets of the heavens. A spiritual being appeared to the woman who was to conceive and in a kind of vision announced to her the human being who, through her, was to come to the earth. There was no clear consciousness, but only semiconsciousness, in the sphere experienced by souls when the entry of a human being into the physical world is taking place; subconsciously men knew that they were under the direction of the Gods, who then received the name of the *Wanen*, connected with *wähnen*, that is to say with what takes its course, not in clear, intellectual, waking consciousness, but in cognitive dream-consciousness.

What was once in existence and fitting for its own epoch, is often preserved in later times in symbols. Thus the fact that in those ancient times the holy mystery of the generation of a

human being was wrapped in subconsciousness, and led to all births being concentrated in a particular period of the winter season, so that it was regarded as sinful for a man to be born at another time — this was preserved in fragments which passed over to a later consciousness as the Hertha or Erda or Nertus Saga. No erudition, as scholars themselves openly admit, has hitherto been able to interpret these fragments, for actually all that is known externally of the Nertus Saga, with the exception of a few brief notes, comes from Tacitus, who writes as follows about the Nertus or Hertha cult:

"The Reudigni, Aviones, Anglii, Varini, Eudoses, Saurini and Nuitones — Germanic peoples living amidst rivers and woods" (that is, roughly the several tribes who belong to the Ingaevones) "specially revere *Nertus*, that is, *Mother Earth*, and they believe that she intervenes in human affairs, makes journeys to the peoples." (Germania 40).

In the ancient cult of the Wanen it became known in dream-consciousness to every woman who was to give a citizen to the earth that the Goddess worshipped later on as Nertus would appear to her. The Divinity was, however, represented not exactly as female, but as male-female. It was not until later, through a corruption, that Nertus became an entirely feminine principle. Just as the Archangel Gabriel drew near to Mary, Nertus on her chariot drew near to the woman who was about to give a citizen to the earth. The woman concerned saw this in the spirit. Later, when the Mystery-impulse in this form had long since died out, echoes of the happening were celebrated in symbolic rites which Tacitus was still able to witness and of which he says the following: —

"On an island of the ocean is a sacred grove and in it there is a consecrated chariot covered with a veil. Only the priest may approach it." (— This priest was taken to represent the 'Initiate' of the Hertha-Mystery — "He knows when the

Goddess appears in the sacred chariot. He becomes aware of the presence of the Goddess in her holy place, and in deep reverence accompanies her chariot drawn by cows. Then there are days of joy and feasting in all the places which the Goddess honours with a visit. Then there are joyous days and wedding feasts. At those times no war is waged, no weapons are handled, the sword is sheathed. Only peace and quiet are at those times known or desired, until the Goddess, tired of her sojourn among mortals, is led back into her shrine by the same priest." (— This was actually the form taken by the vision —

"Then there are joyous days and wedding feasts." In such ancient records the descriptions are accurate and exact, only men do not understand them. "Then there are joyous days and wedding feasts. At those times no war is waged, no weapons are handled, the sword is sheathed." And so it was in very truth at the time which is now our Easter, when human beings believed in their inmost soul that the time of earthly fruitfulness had come for them too; it was then that the souls who were born at the time that is now our Christmas, were conceived. Easter was the time of conception. The experience was regarded as a holy, cosmic mystery, and it was this that was symbolised later on by the Nertus cult. The whole experience was veiled in the subconscious region of the soul, might not rise up into consciousness. This is hinted at in the description of the cult given by Tacitus: "Only peace and quiet are at those times known or desired — until the Goddess, tired of her sojourn among mortals, is led back into her shrine by the same priest. Then the chariot and the veil and even the Goddess herself are bathed in a hidden lake. Slaves perform the cult, slaves who are at once swallowed up as forfeit by the lake, so that all knowledge of these things sinks into the night of unconsciousness. A secret horror and a sacred darkness hold sway over a being who is able to behold only the sacrifice

of death."

Everything that comes into the world calls forth a Luciferic and an Ahrimanic counterpart. The event which — as experienced by the Ingaevones — was part of the regular, ordained evolution of mankind was connected with the time of the first full moon after the vernal equinox. But owing to the precession of the equinox, what had remained from olden days as a dream-experience was transferred to a later date and therefore became Ahrimanic. When the experience that had arisen in ancient times in the true Hertha cult was advanced about four weeks, it became Ahrimanic. This meant that the union of the woman with the spiritual world was sought in an irregular way — at the wrong time. Here lies the explanation of the institution of the *Walpurgis Night* — between the 30th April and the 1st May. It is nothing but an Ahrimanic transposition of time. Luciferic transposition of time goes backward; Ahrimanic transposition of time runs in the opposite direction, being connected with the precession of the equinox. Thus the Ahrimanic, Mephistophelean form of the Hertha cult, the perversion into the diabolic, later became the Walpurgis Night; it is connected with the most ancient Mysteries of which only faint echoes remained.

Much of the content of the ancient Northern Mysteries lived on — if the matter is rightly understood — in the Scandinavian Mysteries. There, instead of Nertus, we find Friggo, a god who, according to the symbolism associated with him — but this can become intelligible only through spiritual science — turns into the very betrayer of what lies at the root of this Mystery.

One more thing must be mentioned in regard to these Mystery-practices. You can see that if the human seed was ripening from the time of the vernal full moon to winter time, *one* such human being would be the *first* to be born in the

‘Holy Night.’ Among the Ingaevones the first to be born in the Holy Night — the Holy Night of every third year in the most ancient times — was chosen as their leader when he reached the age of thirty, and he remained leader for three years, for three years only. What happened to him then I may perhaps be able to tell you on another occasion.

Careful investigation reveals that not only are Frigg, Frei, Freiga, merely additional designations for Nertus, as is the Scandinavian ‘Nört,’ but the name ‘Ing’ itself, whence Ingaevones, is another name for Nertus. Those who were connected with the Mystery called themselves "Men belonging to the God or the Goddess Ing" — Ingaevones. Only fragments of what really lived in this Mystery survived in the external world. One such fragment consists of the words of Tacitus already quoted. Another fragment is the well-known Anglo-Saxon rune of a few lines only. These famous lines are known to every philologist of the Germanic languages, but no one understands their meaning. They are approximately as follows:

"Ing was first seen among the East Danes. Later he went towards the East. He walked over the waves, followed by his chariot."

In this Anglo-Saxon rune there is an echo of what lay behind the old Mystery-customs of the Easter conception with a view to the Christmas birth. What happened then in the spiritual world was known best on the Danish peninsula. Hence the rum correctly says: "Ing was first seen among the East Danes."

Then came the time when this ancient knowledge fell more and more into corruption, when it was to be found only in echoes, in symbolism. This was the time in the evolution of humanity when what originated in the warm countries spread abroad. And what comes from the warm countries is

something that is not connected — as is the case in the cold countries — with the intimate relation between the seasons and man's own inner experiences. From the warm countries came the impulse which resulted in the distribution of conceptions and births over the whole year; this of course had already happened in the South even in the days of the old, atavistic clairvoyance, although it was still to some extent pervaded by the old principles, the principles which prevailed in the times when in the cold regions the Women held sway and in the South the Temple Mysteries had long since superseded the old Nature-Mysteries. The Southern practice spread towards the North, although an intermixture of the old still remained at the time when the Wanen gods were superseded by the *Asen* gods. Just as the Wanen are connected with *wähnen*, so are the Asen connected with the German *sein* (being) — that is to say, being or existence in the material world which the mind tries to grasp externally. And when the men of the North had entered into an age when individual intelligence began to assert itself, when the Asen had supplanted the Wanen, the old Mystery-customs fell into decay. They passed over into isolated, scattered Mystery-communities of the East. And one Being only — he in whom the whole meaning of the earth was to be made new, he in whom the Christ was to dwell — he alone was destined to unite within himself what had once been the essence and content of the Northern Mysteries.

Hence the origin of the account in St. Luke's Gospel of the appearance of the Archangel Gabriel to Mary, is to be sought in the visions of spiritual realities once reflected in the *Nertus*-symbol of the ancient Northern Mysteries. The symbol had moved eastward. Spiritual science discloses this to-day and this alone explains the meaning of the Anglo-Saxon rune. For *Nertus* and *Ing* are the same. Of *Ing* it is said: "Ing was first seen among the East Danes. Later he went towards the East.

He walked over the waves, followed by his chariot," — over the waves of the clouds, that is, just as Nertus moved over the waves of the clouds.

What had once been general in the colder regions, here became *singular*, individual. It occurred as a single, unique event, and we find it again in the descriptions given in the Gospel of St. Luke.

But whatever has once existed in the world and has taken root, whatever is anchored in the heart's understanding, remains a possession of the soul. And when knowledge of Christianity was received in the North from the Roman South, men felt — not in clear consciousness but in the subconsciousness — it had some connection with an ancient Mystery-custom. Hence in the North, men were able to develop a particularly intense feeling for *Jesus*. The reality that had lived in the old Nertus Mystery had already sunk into the subconsciousness, yet in the subconsciousness it was present, it was sensed and dimly experienced.

When in those long past times in the far North, when the earth was still covered with forests that were the home of the bison and the elk, families came together in their snowcovered huts and under their lantern-lights gathered around the newborn child, they spoke of how with this new life there had been brought to them the new light announced by the heavens in the previous spring. Such was the ancient Christmas. To these people, who were one day to receive the tidings of Christendom, it was said: In the hour that is especially holy, one destined for greatness is born. It is the child who is the first to be born after midnight in the night designated as *holy*. And although men no longer possessed the ancient knowledge, when the tidings came that such a one had been born in far-off Asia, one in whom lived the Christ Who had come down from the world of the stars to the earth, something

of the old feeling came alive in them.

It is incumbent upon the present age to understand such things more and more deeply and thereby grasp in concrete reality the meaning of the evolution of earthly humanity. Truths of mighty, awe-inspiring significance are contained in the Holy Scriptures, not just the trivialities of which we so often hear in religious teachings to-day, but sacred truths which thrill through the very fibres of our being, stirring our hearts to the depths. These are truths which flow through the whole evolution of humanity and resound in the Gospels. And as spiritual science reveals their deep, deep source, the Gospels will one day become a precious treasure, prized at their true worth. Men will know, then, why it is recounted in the Gospel of St. Luke:

"And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria).

And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.

And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David).

To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child.

And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for him in the inn."

It was for Him, the first-born among men in whose souls true ego-hood was to awaken, that the holy Mystery-power of ancient days had passed over from the Danish peninsula to the distant East.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid."

Nerta too, moving across the land, had announced to the old Wanen-consciousness, that is to say, in the subconsciousness of atavistic clairvoyance, the arrival of human beings on the earth.

"And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying ..."

And now the heavenly Powers proclaimed what the Nerta-Priest in the old Northern Mystery-cult had proclaimed to the woman about to conceive.

"The revelation of the Divine from the Heights takes place at the time when there is peace among men who are of goodwill."

As Tacitus narrates: "Then there are joyous days and wedding feasts. At those times no war is waged, no weapons are handled, the sword is sheathed."

The great goal for which man must strive is the attainment of the power to gaze into the course of the evolution of humanity. For the Mystery of Golgotha, too, through which earth-evolution received its deeper meaning, will become fully comprehensible when its place in the whole evolution of humanity is understood. In future times, when, with the disappearance of materialism, man will know, not in abstract theory but as a concretely real experience, that he is of *divine* origin, the ancient, holy Mystery-truths will again be understood; then the intervening time will be over, a time in which the Christ, it is true, lives on earth, but can be understood only by the awakened consciousness. For the Gnostic conception of Christ faded away; understanding for Jesus developed in connection with the old Nertus cult, but in unconsciousness. In the future, however, humanity will have to bring both the unconscious streams to consciousness, and unite them. And then an ever greater understanding of the Christ will take foothold on earth, an understanding that will unite the Mystery-knowledge with a great and renewed Gnosis.

Those who take the anthroposophical view of the world seriously, and the movement associated with it, will see in what it has to say to mankind no child's play but great and earnest, soul-shaking truths. And our souls must submit to this because it is right that we should be shaken by greatness.

Not only is the earth a mighty living being; the earth is an exalted spirit-being. And just as the greatest human genius could not stand at the height he reaches in later life if he had not first developed through childhood and adolescence, so the Mystery of Golgotha could not have taken place, the Divine

would not have been able to unite with earth-evolution, if at the beginning of earthly days the Divine — in a different manner but in a manner still divine — had not descended to the earth. The form taken by the revelation of the Divine from the heavenly heights was not the same in the ancient Nertus cult as it was at a later time, but for all that it was a true revelation.

The knowledge contained in this ancient wisdom was, it is true, atavistic in character, but for all that it was infinitely more exalted than the materialistic view of the world which, in the sphere of knowledge, so brutally reduces humanity to the level of the animal.

In Christianity we have to do with a *Fact*, not with a theory. The theory is a necessary consequence and of importance for the consciousness that has had to develop in the further course of human evolution. But the essence of Christianity as such, the Mystery of Golgotha, is an accomplished Fact. The impulse entered, to begin with, into subconscious currents, as was still possible in Asia Minor at the time when the union of Christ with the earth took place.

Shepherds, men bearing a similarity with those among whom the Nertus cult flourished, are also described in the Gospel of St. Luke. I can give only very brief indications of these things. If we were able to speak of them at greater length you would find that there are deep foundations for what I have told you to-day. The human being has descended from spiritual heights ... hence the revelation of the Divine from the heavenly heights ... The revelation had to be expressed in this form to those who out of the ancient wisdom knew the destiny of man to be united with the secrets of the stars of heaven. But what must live on earth as the result of Christ's union with a man of earth — that can be understood only very gradually. The message is twofold: 'Revelation of the Divine from the heights'

— ‘Peace in the souls on earth who are of good-will.’ Without this second part, Christmas, the Festival of the birth of *Christ*, has no meaning!

Not only was Christ *born* for men; men have also crucified Him. Even behind this lies necessity. But it is none the less true that men have crucified the Christ! And it may dawn upon us that the crucifixion on the wooden Cross on Golgotha was not the only crucifixion. A time must come when the second part of the Christmas proclamation becomes reality: ‘Peace to the men on earth who are of good-will.’ For the negative side too is discernible. Men are very far indeed from a true understanding of Christ and of the Mystery of Golgotha.

Does it not cut to the very heart that we ourselves should be living at a time when men's longing for peace is shouted down? (3) It seems almost a mockery to celebrate Christmas in days when voices are raised in outcry against the desire for peace. To-day, when the worst has not actually befallen, we can but fervently hope that a change will take place in the souls of men, and a Christian feeling, a will for peace supersede these demonstrations against the desire for it. Otherwise it may not be those who are struggling in Europe to-day, but those coming over from Asia, who will one day wreak vengeance on this rejection of the desire for peace; it may be they who will have to preach Christianity and the Mystery of Golgotha to humanity on the ruins of European spiritual life. And then the indelible record will remain: that at Christmas time, nineteen hundred and sixteen years after the tidings of peace on earth to men of good-will, humanity came to shout down the desire for peace.

May it not succeed! May the good Spirits who are at work in the Christmas impulses protect luckless European humanity from such a fate!

Notes:

1 Arius: "The Son was once created out of nothing by the Divine Will, was the first creature and the creator of the Universe, hence to be called God, though subject to the Father," This was declared heretical by the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325, and replaced by the Athanasian principle of faith. "The Son of God is from eternity, not created, but begotten out of the Being of the Father, and is of like nature to the Father.

Streams of blood were shed in consequence of these doctrines, impenetrable as they are by the human mind (Weber: *Lehrbuch der Weltgeschichte*, 1875).

2 "Mannus had three sons, after whom the people nearest the North Sea are called Ingaevones, those of the centre, Hermiones, the remainder Istae. (Germania 2).

3 A reference to the agitation against the German proposal in December, 1916 for peace negotiations.

V

The Proclamations to the Magi and the Shepherds

Stuttgart, 1st January, 1921 GA 203

For a different translation of this lecture, see: The Two Christmas Annunciations

WE will turn our thoughts to-day to the Festival which every year revives remembrance of the Mystery of Golgotha.

There are three such main Festivals in Christendom: at Christmas, Easter and Whitsuntide. Each of these Festivals brings man's life of soul into a different relation with the great events from which the whole of earth-evolution receives purpose and meaning.

The Christmas Festival is connected more directly with man's life of *feeling*. In a certain sense it has the most popular appeal of all the Festivals, because when rightly understood it deepens the life of feeling and is always dear to the human heart.

The Easter Festival makes great demands upon man's powers of *understanding*, because here some measure of insight is essential into the Mystery of Golgotha itself, into how a supersensible Being entered the stream of earthly evolution. Easter is a Festival which carries the faculty of human understanding to the highest level, a level which is, of course, ultimately accessible to everyone; but the appeal of the Easter Festival can never be as widespread as that of Christmas.

Through the Whitsuntide Festival, relationship is established between the *will* and the supersensible world to which the Christ Being belongs. It is of the impulses of will which then take effect in the world that the Whitsuntide Festival makes men conscious when its meaning is rightly understood.

And so the great Christian Mystery is illustrated in a threefold way by these Festivals. There are many aspects of the Christmas Mystery and in the course of years we have studied them from different points of view at the time of the Festival. To-day we will think of an aspect brought graphically before us in the Gospels.

The Gospels tell of two proclamations of the birth of Christ Jesus. The one proclamation is made to the simple shepherds in the fields, to whom — in dream or in some kindred way — an Angel announces the birth. In this case, knowledge of the event was brought by inner soul-forces which were of a particular character in the shepherds living near the birthplace of Christ Jesus. And the Gospels tell of another proclamation made to the Three Kings, the Three Magi from the East who follow the voice of a star announcing to them that Christ Jesus has come into the world.

Here we have an indication of two ways in which higher knowledge came to men in earlier times. This is again a matter of which the modern mind has no understanding. The idea prevailing nowadays is that man's faculties of apprehension and thinking — that is to say, inner powers of the soul — have for thousands and thousands of years been fundamentally the same as they are to-day, except that in earlier times they were more primitive. But we know from spiritual science that the tenor and mood of the human soul has undergone great changes in the course of the ages. In times of antiquity, let us say about six or seven thousand years ago, man had a quite different conception not only of his own life but also of the

universe around him. His attitude of soul underwent continual change until, in the modern world, it amounts simply to intellectual analysis and a purely physical conception of things in the outer world. This development proceeds from an instinctive clairvoyance in ancient times, through the phase of our present mood-of-soul, in order, in the future, to return to a form of clairvoyant vision of the world pervaded by full, clear consciousness.

At the time when the Mystery of Golgotha took place on the earth, the old instinctive clairvoyance had already become dim. Although men's attitude of soul differed widely from that of to-day, they no longer possessed the powers of that ancient clairvoyance; neither were they able to apply the old forms of wisdom in seeking for intimate and exact knowledge of the world. The teachings of the ancient wisdom, as well as the faculties of instinctive clairvoyance, had lost their power when the Mystery of Golgotha took place. Nevertheless, echoes still survived, as the Gospels clearly indicate if we understand them aright. Echoes of the ancient wisdom survived here and there in certain exceptional individuals. These individuals might well have been the simple shepherds in the fields who with their great purity of heart possessed a certain power of clairvoyance which came over them like a dream. And there might also well have been individuals who had reached the heights of learning, like the Three Magi from the East, in whom the ancient faculty to gaze into the how of cosmic happenings had been preserved.

In a kind of dream-condition, the simple shepherds in the fields were able inwardly to realise what was drawing near in the event of the birth of Christ Jesus. On the other hand, the knowledge possessed by the three Magi from the East enabled them, by contemplating the phenomena of the heavens, to discern that an event of a significance far transcending that of the ordinary course of life was taking place on the earth.

Our attention is therefore directed to two definite but quite distinct forms of knowledge. We will think, first, of the knowledge possessed by the three Magi as a last remnant of an ancient wisdom. It is clearly indicated that these Magi were able to read the secrets of the movements of the stars. The story of the three Kings or Magi points to the existence of an ancient lore of the stars, an ancient knowledge of the secrets of the worlds of stars in which the secrets of happenings in the world of men were also revealed. This ancient lore of the stars was very different from our modern astronomical science — although in a certain respect it too is prophetic in that eclipses of the sun, of the moon, and the like, can be predicted. But it is a purely mathematical science, speaking only of conditions and relationships in space and time in so far as they can be expressed in terms of mathematics. What plays with a higher significance into man's inner life from beyond space and time, but into the world of space and time, was read by an ancient star-lore from the courses and movements of the stars, and it was this star-wisdom that formed the essential content of the science belonging to an earlier epoch. Men sought in the stars for explanations of what was happening on the earth. But to such men the world of stars was not the machinelike abstraction it has now come to be. Every planet was felt to have reality of *being*. In a kind of inner speech of the soul, these men of old conversed, as it were, with each planet, just as to-day we converse with one another in ordinary speech. They realised that what the movements of the stars bring about in the universe is reflected in man's inmost soul. This was a living, spirit-inwoven conception of the universe. And man felt that as a being of soul and spirit he himself had his place within this universe. The wisdom relating to cosmic happenings was also cultivated in Schools of the Mysteries where the pupils were prepared, carefully and intimately, to understand the movements of the stars in such a way that human life on earth became intelligible to them.

What form did these preparations take? These preparations for knowledge of the stars and their workings consisted in training the pupils, even in the times of instinctive clairvoyance, to unfold a more wide-awake consciousness than that prevailing in normal life. The masses of the people possessed faculties of instinctive clairvoyance which were natural in a life of soul less awake than our own. In ancient times the wide-awake thinking of to-day would not have been possible. Nor could mathematics or geometry be grasped in the way they are grasped by the modern mind. Man's whole life between birth and death was a kind of dreamlike existence, but on that very account he had a far more living awareness of the world around him than is possible in our fully wide-awake consciousness. And strange as it seems, in the age which lasted into the second millennium or even as late as the beginning of the first millennium B.C. (— it was to the last surviving remains of this age that men like the three Magi belonged —) individual pupils in the Mysteries were initiated into a kind of knowledge resembling our geometrical or mathematical sciences. It was Euclid (1) who first gave geometry to the world at large. The geometry presented to mankind by Euclid had already been cultivated for thousands of years in the Mysteries, but there it was communicated to chosen pupils only. Moreover it did not work in them in the same way as in men of later time. Paradoxical as it seems, it is nevertheless a fact that the geometry and arithmetic learnt by children to-day was taught in the Mysteries to individuals specially chosen from the masses on account of their particular gifts who were then received into the Mysteries.

One often hears it said to-day that the teachings given in the Mysteries were secret and veiled. In their abstract content however, these so-called 'secret' teachings were no different from what is now taught to children at school. The mystery does not lie in the fact that these things are unknown to-day

but that they were imparted to human beings in a different way. For to teach the principles of geometry to children by calling upon the intellect in an age when from the moment of waking until that of falling asleep the human being has clear day-consciousness, is a very different matter from imparting them to pupils specially chosen because of their greater maturity of soul in the age of instinctive clairvoyance and dreamlike consciousness. A true conception of these things is rarely in evidence to-day.

In Eastern literature there is a Hymn to the God Varuna which says that Varuna is revealed in the air and in the winds blowing through the forests, in the thunder rolling from the clouds, in the human heart when it is kindled to acts of will, in the heavens when the sun passes across the sky, and is present on the hills in the soma juice. You will generally find it stated in books today that nobody knows what this soma-juice really is. Modern scholars assert that nobody knows what soma-juice is, although, as a matter of fact, there are people who drink it by the litre and from a certain point of view are quite familiar with it. But to know things from the vantage-point of the Mysteries is quite different from knowing them as a layman from the standpoint of the experiences of ordinary waking consciousness. You may read to-day about the 'Philosopher's Stone' for which men sought in an epoch when understanding of the nature of substances was very different from what it is today. And again, those who write about alchemy assert that nothing is known about the Philosopher's Stone. Here and there in my lectures I have said that this Philosopher's Stone is quite familiar to most people, only they do not know what it really is nor why it is so called. It is quite well known, because as a matter of fact it is used by the ton.

The modern mind with its tendency to abstraction and theory and its alienation from reality, is incapable of grasping these things. Nor is there any understanding of what is meant by

saying that our geometrical and arithmetical sciences were once imparted to mature souls quite different in character from the souls of modern men, In my book *Christianity as Mystical Fact* I have indicated the special nature of the Mystery-teachings but these significant matters are not as a rule correctly understood; they are taken far too superficially. The way in which the subject-matter of the Mystery-teachings in ancient times was imparted — that is what needs to be understood.

Novalis was still aware of the human element, the element of feeling in mathematics which, in utter contrast to the vast majority to-day, he regarded as being akin to a great and wonderful Hymn. (2) It was to an understanding of the world imbued with feeling but expressed in mathematical forms that the pupil of the ancient Mysteries was led. And when this mathematical understanding of the universe had developed in such a pupil, he became one whose vision resembled that of the men described as the three Magi from the East. The mathematics of the universe which to us has become pure abstraction, then revealed *reality of Being*, because this knowledge was supplemented and enriched by something that came to meet it. And so the science and knowledge of the outer universe belonging to an ancient culture which in its last echoes survived in the Magi, was the origin of the one proclamation — the proclamation made by way of wisdom pertaining to the outer universe.

On the other side, *inner feeling* of the secrets of the evolution of humanity could arise in men of a disposition specially fitted for such experiences. Such men are represented by the *shepherds in the fields*. These inner forces must have reached a certain stage of development and then instinctive-imaginative perception became direct vision. And so, through their faculty of inner vision, the simple shepherds in the fields were made aware of the proclamation: 'The God is revealing

Himself in the heavenly Heights and through Him there can be peace among all men who are of good-will.'

Secrets of the cosmos were thus revealed to the hearts of the simple shepherds in the fields and to those who were the representatives of the highest wisdom attainable by the human mind at that time. This is the revelation made to the three Magi from the East. The great mystery of earth-existence was proclaimed from two sides.

What was it that came to the knowledge of the Magi? What kind of faculties developed in specially prepared pupils of the Mysteries through the mathematics imparted to them?

The philosopher Kant says of the truths of mathematical science that they are *a priori*. By this he means that they are determined before the acquisition of external, empirical knowledge. (3) This is so much lip-wisdom. Kant's *a priori* really says nothing. The expression has meaning only when we realise from spiritual-scientific knowledge that mathematics comes from within ourselves, rises into consciousness from within our own being. And where does it originate? In the experiences through which we passed in the spiritual world before conception, before birth. We were living then in the great universe, experiencing what it was possible to experience before we possessed bodily eyes and bodily ears. Our experiences then were *a priori* — a form of cognition independent of earthly life. And this is the kind of experience that rises up, unconsciously today, from our inmost being. Man does not know — unless, like Novalis, he glimpses it intuitively — that the experiences of the life before birth or conception well up when he is engrossed in mathematical thought. For one who can truly apprehend these things, mathematical cognition is in itself a proof that before conception and birth he existed in a spiritual world. Of those to whom this is no proof of a life before birth, it must be said

that they do not think deeply and fundamentally enough about the phenomena and manifestations of life and have not the faintest inkling of the real origin of mathematics.

The pupils of the ancient Mysteries who had absorbed the kind of wisdom which in its last echoes had survived in the three Magi from the East, had this clear impression: If as we contemplate the stars we see in them the expressions of mathematical, arithmetical progression, we spread over universal space the experiences through which we lived before birth. A pupil of the Mysteries said to himself: Living here on the earth, I gaze out into the universe, beholding all that is around me in space. Before my birth I lived within these manifestations of cosmic realities, lived with the mysteries of number connected with the stars, with all that I can now only mentally picture in terms of mathematics. In that other existence my own inner forces led me from star to star; I had my very life in what is now only a mental activity. Such contemplation made vividly real to these men what they had lived through before birth, and these experiences were sacred to them. They knew that this other world was a spiritual world — their home before they came down to the earth. The last echoing remains of this knowledge had survived in the Magi from the East and through it they recognised the signs of the coming of Christ.

Whence came the Christ Being? He came from the world in which we ourselves live between death and a new birth, and united Himself with the life that extends from birth to death. Knowledge of the world in which our existence is spent from death to a new birth can therefore shed light upon an event like the Mystery of Golgotha. And it was through this knowledge that the Mystery of Golgotha, the Christmas Mystery too, was announced to the Magi.

While man is living on the earth and unfolding the forces which bring knowledge of the world around him, while he is unfolding the impulses for his actions and social life, he is unconsciously experiencing something else as well. He has no knowledge of it, but just as he experiences the aftereffects of his life before birth, so does he also experience what finally passes through the gate of death to become the content of the life after death. These forces are already present in germ between birth and death but come to fruition only in the life after death. They worked with intense strength in the old, instinctive clairvoyance, and in their last echoes they were still working in the simple shepherds in the fields because of their purity of heart. We live within the play of these forces above all during sleep, when the soul is outside the body, within the outer universe. The soul is then living in the form of existence in which it will live consciously after death, when the physical body has been laid aside.

These forces from the world of sleep and dream which in certain conditions can penetrate into waking life, were very active in the old, instinctive clairvoyance, and they were working in the simple shepherds to whom the Mystery of Golgotha was proclaimed in a way other than to the three Magi.

What kind of knowledge is brought by the forces that are paramountly active between death and a new birth, if, as was the case with the Magi, they have been kindled during life between birth and death? It is a knowledge of happenings in the world beyond the earth. The human being is transported from the earth into the world of the stars in which he lives between death and a new birth. This was the world into which the three Magi from the East were transported — away from the earth into the heavens.

And what kind of knowledge is brought by the forces that well up from the inmost being of man, above all in the world of dream? These forces bring knowledge of what is coming to pass within the earth itself. In this kind of knowledge it is earthly forces that are most strongly at work, the forces we have through the body, through existence in the body. These are the forces which are particularly active between sleeping and waking. Then too we are within the outer universe, but the outer universe that is especially connected with the earth.

You will say: this contradicts the statement that during sleep we are outside the body. But in reality there is no contradiction. We perceive only what is outside us; we do not perceive that within which we actually live. Only those who lack real knowledge and are satisfied with phrases speak of such things in glib words to the effect that it is meaningless to base spiritual science upon knowledge acquired *outside* the human being, for what really matters is that knowledge of outer nature shall be gained through the forces *within* man. 'Schools of Wisdom' like the one in Darmstadt (4) may be based on high-sounding principles of this kind, but a man can remain a phrasemonger in spite of being the founder of such a 'School of Wisdom.' We must understand the inner nature of the world before we can acquire supersensible knowledge, and it is only then that we can penetrate into the nature of our own inmost being. Men like Keyserling speak of the need to view things from the vantage-point of the soul, but they do not penetrate into the inmost being of man; they simply pour out phrases.

The truth is that between sleeping and waking we look back, feel back, as it were, into our body. We become aware of how our body is connected with the earth — for the body is given by the earth. The revelation to the shepherds in the fields was the revelation given by the earth, proceeding from their bodily nature. In a state of dream the voice of the Angel made known

to them what had come to pass.

And so the contrast is complete:

To the Magi: revelation through heavenly lore.

To the Shepherds: revelation given by the earth.

That the revelation should have been from two sides is entirely in keeping with the Mystery of Golgotha. For a heavenly Being, a Being Who until then had not belonged to the earth, was drawing near. And the coming of such a Being must be recognised through wisdom pertaining to the heavens, through wisdom that is able to reveal the descent of a Being from the heavens. The wisdom of the shepherds is knowledge proceeding from the earth; the weaving life of the earth becomes aware of the coming of the Being from heaven. It is the same proclamation, only from another side — a wonderful, twofold proclamation to mankind of a single Event.

The attitude with which the Event of Golgotha was received by mankind is to be explained by the fact that only vestiges of the ancient wisdom remained. In the first centuries of our era, certain Gnostic teachings were able to shed light upon the Mystery of Golgotha, but as time went on, men strove more and more to understand it through purely intellectual analysis and reason. And in the nineteenth century, naturalism invaded this domain of belief. There was no longer any understanding of the supersensible reality of the Event of Golgotha. Christ became the 'wise man of Nazareth' — in the naturalistic sense. What is necessary is a new, spiritual conception of the Mystery of Golgotha. The Mystery of Golgotha as such must never be confused with the attitude adopted to it by the human mind.

The mood-of-soul prevailing in the shepherds and in the Magi was in its final phase at the time of the Mystery of Golgotha. Everything in the evolution of humanity undergoes constant change and metamorphosis. What has the wisdom possessed by the Magi from the East now become? It has become our mathematical astronomy. The Magi possessed super-earthly knowledge which was actually a glorious remembrance of life before birth. This knowledge has shrivelled away into our mathematical-mechanistic conception of the heavens, to the phenomena of which we apply only mathematical laws. What wells up from within us in our mathematical astronomy is the modern metamorphosis of the knowledge once possessed by the Magi.

Our outer, sense-given knowledge, conveyed as it is merely through eyes and ears, is the externalised form of the inner knowledge once possessed by men like the shepherds in the fields. The mood-of-soul in which the secrets of earth-existence were once revealed to the shepherds now induces us to look at the world with the cold detachment of scientific observation. This kind of observation is the child of the Shepherd-wisdom — but the child is very unlike the parent! And our mathematical astronomy is the child of the Magi-wisdom. It was necessary that humanity should pass through this phase. When our scientists are making their cold, dispassionate researches in laboratories and clinics, they have very little in common with the shepherds of old, but this attitude of soul is nevertheless a metamorphosis leading back directly to the wisdom of the shepherds. And our mathematicians are the successors of the Magi from the East. The outer has become inward -the inner, outward. In the process, understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha has been lost, and we must be fully conscious of this fact. Understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha has vanished most completely of all, perhaps, in many of those who claim to be

official ministers of Christianity to-day.

With the forces of knowledge, feeling and belief possessed by modern men, the true reality of the Event of Golgotha can no longer be grasped. It must be discovered anew. The Magi-wisdom has become inward; it has become our abstract, mathematical science by which alone the heavens are studied. What has become inward in this way must again be filled with life, re-cast, re-shaped from within.

And now, from this point of view, try to understand what is contained in a book like my *Outline of Occult Science*.

The Magi gazed at the worlds of the stars; therein they beheld the Spiritual, for they could behold man's experiences in his life before birth. In our mathematics this has become pure abstraction. But the same forces that are unfolded in our mathematical thinking can again be filled with life, enriched and intensified in Imaginative perception. Then, from our own inner forces there will be born a world which, although we create it from within, can be seen as the outer universe, embracing Saturn, Sun, Moon, Earth, Jupiter, Venus, Vulcan. We then behold the heavens through inner perception, inner vision, as the Magi discerned the secrets of the Mystery of Golgotha through outer perception. The outer has become inward, has become mathematical abstraction. Therefore what is now inward must be expanded into perception of the outer universe; inward perception must lead to a new astronomy, to an astronomy inwardly experienced.

It is only by striving for a new understanding of Christ that we can truly celebrate the Christmas Festival to-day. Can it be said that this Festival still has any real meaning for the majority of people? It has become a beautiful custom to take the Christmas Tree as the symbol of the Festival, although as a matter of fact this custom is hardly a century old. The

Christmas Tree was not adopted as a symbol of the Festival until the nineteenth century. What is the Christmas Tree, in reality? When we endeavour to discover its meaning and know of the legend telling that it grew from the tiny branch carried in the arms of the boy Ruprecht on the 6th of December, when we follow its history, it dawns upon us that the Christmas Tree is directly connected with the Tree of Paradise. The mind turns to the Tree of Paradise, to Adam and Eve. This is one aspect of the way in which the Mystery of Golgotha can again be proclaimed in our time. The mind turns from the Mystery of Golgotha, back to the world's beginning. The meaning of world-redemption is not understood and the mind turns again to the Divine creation of the world. This comes to expression in the fact that the real symbol of Christmas — the Crib — so beautifully presented in the Christmas Plays of earlier centuries, is gradually being superseded by the Christmas Tree which is, in reality, the Tree of Paradise. The old Jahve religion usurped the place of Christianity and the Christmas Tree is the symbol of its recrudescence. But in its reappearance the Jahve religion has been split into multiple divisions. Jahve was worshipped, and rightly worshipped, as the one, undivided Godhead in an age when his people felt themselves to be a single, self-contained unity not looking beyond their own boundaries and full of the expectation that one day they would fill the whole earth. But in our time, although people speak of Christ Jesus, in reality they worship Jahve. In the various nations (this was all too evident in the war), men spoke of Christ but were really venerating the original Godhead who holds sway in heredity and in the world of nature — Jahve. Thus we have the Christmas Tree on the one side, and on the other, national Gods at a level inferior to that of the Christian reality. These were the principles by which men's comprehension of the Mystery of Golgotha was diverted back again to the conceptions belonging to a much earlier epoch. The assertion of the principle of nationality, the

claiming of national Gods, denotes a step backward into the old Jahve religion. Those who see fit to worship Christ as a national God — it is they who deny Him most deeply.

What must never be forgotten is that the proclamations to the Shepherds and to the Kings contained a message for *all* mankind — for the earth is common to all. In that the revelation to the shepherds was from the earth, it was a revelation that may not be differentiated according to nationality. And in that the Magi received the proclamation of the sun and the heavens, this too was a revelation destined for all mankind. For when the sun has shone upon the territory of one people, it shines upon the territory of another. The heavens are common to all; the earth is common to all. The impulse of the 'human universal' is in very truth quickened by Christianity. Such is the aspect of Christmas revealed by the twofold proclamation.

. . . .

When we think of the Christmas Mystery, our minds must turn to a *birth*, to something that must be born anew in our time. For true Christianity must verily be born anew. We need a World-Christmas-Festival, and spiritual science would fain be a preparation for this World-Christmas-Festival among men.

Notes:

1 About 300 B.C.

2 None really comprehend mathematics who do not undertake the study with reverence and devotion as a revelation from God." (From *Thoughts on Physics*).

3 "Mathematics and physics are the two theoretical sciences of reason which have to determine their objects *a priori*." (From the Preface to the 2nd ed. of *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1787).

4 Founded in 1920 by Count Hermann Keyserling (1880-1946).

VI

On The Three Magi

(Extract from a lecture)

Berlin, 30th December, 1904 GA B60

You will remember that I have spoken of the meaning of the Christmas Festival in its connection with the evolution of races, or, better said, the epochs of civilisation, and indeed the significance of the Festival lies in this very connection both in respect of the past and of the future.

I want to speak to-day about a Festival to which in modern times less importance is attached than to the Christmas Festival itself, namely, the Festival of the Three Kings, of the Magi who came from the East to greet the newly born Jesus. This Festival of the Epiphany (celebrated on the 6th of January) will assume greater and greater significance when its symbolism is understood.

It will be obvious to you that very profound symbolism is contained in the Festival of the Three Magi from the East. Until the 15th century, this symbolism was kept very secret and no definite indications were available. But since that century some light has been thrown on the Festival of the Magi by exoteric presentations. One of the Three Kings — *Caspar* — is portrayed as a Moor, an inhabitant of Africa; one as a white man, a European — *Melchior*; and one — *Balthasar* — as an Asiatic; the colour of his skin is that of an inhabitant

of India. They bring Myrrh, Gold and Frankincense as offerings to the Child Jesus in Bethlehem.

These three offerings are full of meaning and in keeping with the whole symbolism of the Festival celebrated on the 6th of January. Exoterically, the date itself throws some light; esoterically, the Festival is pregnant with meaning. The 6th of January is the same date as that on which, in ancient Egypt, the Festival of Osiris was celebrated, the Festival of the re-finding of Osiris. As you know, Osiris was overcome by his enemy Typhon: Isis seeks and eventually finds him. This re-finding of Osiris, the Son of God, is represented in the Festival of the 6th of January. The Festival of the Three Kings is the same Festival, but in its Christian form. This Festival was also celebrated among the Assyrians, the Armenians and the Phoenicians. Everywhere it is a Festival connected with a kind of universal baptism — a rebirth from out of the water. This in itself points to the connection with the re-finding of Osiris.

What does the disappearance of Osiris signify? It signifies the transition from the epoch *before* the middle of the Lemurian race to the epoch *after* the middle of that race. Before the middle of the Lemurian race, no human being was endowed with Manas. It was not until the middle of the race that Manas came down as a fertile seed into men. Manes (Spirit-Self) was now disseminated among men and in each single individual a grave was created for Manas -for the dismembered Osiris. The Divine Manas was disseminated and thereafter dwelt in men. In the Egyptian Mystery-language, the bodies of men were called the 'graves of Osiris' Manas was fettered until it was freed by the new revelation of *Love*.

What is the new revelation, the new manifestation of Love? The descent of Manas somewhere around the middle of the Lemurian epoch, was accompanied by the penetration into mankind of the principle of desire, or passion. Before that

time there had been no desire-principle in the real sense. The animals of the preceding epochs were cold-blooded; even man himself at that time, had no warm blood. In the Old Moon period and, correspondingly, in the Third Earth-Round, men may be likened to fishes, in the sense that their own warmth and the warmth of their environment were equal in degree. Of this epoch the Bible says: 'The Spirit of God brooded over the waters.' The principle of Love was not within the beings, but outside, manifesting as earthly Kama (that is to say, earthly passion or desire). Kama is egotistic love. The first bringer of Love free of all egoism is Christ Who appeared in the body of Jesus of Nazareth.

Who are the Magi? They represent the Initiates of the three preceding races or epochs of culture, the Initiates of mankind up to the time of the coming of Christ, the Bringer of the Love that is free of egoism — the resurrected Osiris. The Initiates — and so too the Three Magi — were endowed with Manas. They bring gold, frankincense and myrrh as their offerings. And why are their skins of three colours: white, yellow and black? One is European — his skin is white; one is Indian — his skin is yellow; one is African — his skin is black. This indicates the connection with the so-called Root Races. The remaining survivors of the Lemurian race are black; those of the Atlantean race are yellow; and the representatives of the Fifth Root Race, the Post-Atlantean or Aryan race, are white.

Thus the Three Kings or Magi are representatives of the Lemurians, the Atlanteans and the Aryans. They bring the three offerings. The European (Melchior) brings gold, the symbol of wisdom, of intelligence which comes to expression paramountly in the Fifth Root Race. The offering of the Initiate representing the Fourth Root Race (Balthasar) is frankincense, connected with what was intrinsically characteristic of the Atlanteans. They were united more directly with the Godhead, a union which took effect as a

suggestive influence, a kind of universal hypnosis. This union with the Godhead is betokened by the offering. Feeling must be sublimated in order that God may fertilise it. This is expressed symbolically by the frankincense, which is the universal symbol for an offering that has something to do with Intuition.

In the language of esotericism, myrrh is the symbol of dying, of death. What is the meaning of dying and of resurrection, as exemplified in the resurrected Osiris? I refer you here to words of Goethe: "So long as thou hast it not, this dying and becoming, thou'rt but a dull guest on the dark earth." Jacob Boehme expresses the same thought in the words: "He who dies not ere he dies, perishes when he dies." Myrrh is the symbol of the dying of the lower life and the resurrection of the higher life. It is offered by the Initiate representing the Third Root Race (Lemurian). A deep meaning lies in this. Jesus of Nazareth is a very highly developed individuality. In the thirtieth year of his life he gives up his own life to the descending Christ, the descending Logos. All this the Magi foresaw. The great sacrifice made by Jesus of Nazareth is that he gave up his 'I' to make way for the Second Logos. There is a definite reason for this sacrifice. Not until the Sixth Root Race will it become possible, and then only gradually, for the human body to receive into itself the Christ Principle from childhood onwards. Only then, in the Sixth Root Race, will mankind have reached such maturity that the body will not need years of preparation but will be able from the beginning, to receive the Christ Principle. In the fourth sub-race of the Fifth Root Race it was necessary for a body to be prepared for thirty years. (In the Northern regions we find something similar, in that the personality of Sig was so prepared that he could place his body at the disposal of a higher Being, and, in fact, did so). In the Sixth Root Race it will be possible for a man to place his body at the disposal of a sublime Being, as

did Jesus of Nazareth when Christianity was founded. At the time of the founding of Christianity it was still necessary for an advanced individuality to sacrifice his own ' I ' and send it into the astral realm, in order that the Logos might dwell in the body. This is an act upon which light is shed by the last words on the Cross. What other meaning could these words contain: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" These words give expression to the mystical fact then consummated. At the moment of Christ's death, the Divine Being had departed from the body, and it is the body of Jesus of Nazareth that utters these words — a body so highly developed that it could voice the reality. And so these words give expression to an event of untold significance. All this is represented by the myrrh. Myrrh is the symbol of sacrifice, of death, the sacrifice of the earthly in order that the Higher may come to lift. In the middle of the Lemurian epoch, Osiris came to his grave; Manas drew into human beings. Men were educated under the guidance of the Initiates until the principle of Love (Budhi) could shine forth in Christ Jesus. Budhi is the heavenly Love. The lower, sexual principle is ennobled through the Christ Love. Kama is purified in the fire of the Divine Love.

Melchior is the representative of the principle of wisdom, of intelligence — the task of the Fifth Root Race. This is symbolised by his offering — gold.

The principle of sacramental offering is represented by the frankincense. This offering symbolises the principle that was dominant in the Fourth Root Race, the Atlantean. The task of Christianity is fulfilled in the Sixth Root Race, when material existence will be fraught with sacramentalism and sacramental deeds. Sacraments have very largely lost their meaning today; the feeling of their significance has disappeared. But this feeling will be kindled to life again when the higher man is born. It is this that is symbolised by the

frankincense.

In the Lemurian Race, Osiris meets his death, in the Sixth Root Race, Osiris is resurrected.

Thus the offerings made by the Three Kings indicate the connection of the Festival with the Third, Fourth, Fifth and Sixth Root Races. By what are the Three Holy Kings guided, and whither are they led? They are guided by a Star to a grotto, a cave in Bethlehem. This is something that can be understood only by one who has knowledge of the so-called lower, or astral mysteries. To be led by a Star means nothing else than to see the soul itself as a Star. But when is the soul seen as a Star? When a man can behold the soul as a radiant aura. But what kind of aura is so radiant that it can be a guide? There is the aura that glimmers with only a feeble light; such an aura cannot guide. There is a higher aura, that of the intelligence, which has, it is true, a flowing, up-surging light, but is not yet able to guide. But the bright aura, aglow with Budhi, is in very truth a Star, is a radiant guide. In Christ, the Star of Budhi lights up — the Star which accompanies the evolution of mankind. The Light that shines before the Magi is the soul of Christ Himself. The Second Logos Himself shines before the Magi and over the cave in Bethlehem.

The grotto or cave is the body wherein dwells the soul. The seer beholds the body from within. In astral vision, everything is reversed — for example, 365 instead of 563. The human body is seen as a cave, a hollow. In the body of Jesus shines the Christ Star, the soul of Christ. This must be conceived as a reality, taking place in the astral world. It is an enactment of the Lesser Mysteries. There, in very truth, the Christ Soul shines as an auric Star, and it is by this Star that the Initiates of the three Root Races are led to Jesus in Bethlehem.

The Festival of the Three Kings is celebrated every year on the 6th of January, and its significance will steadily increase. Men will understand more and more what a Magi is, and what the great Magi, the Masters, are. And then understanding of Christianity will lead to understanding of spiritual science.

VII

The Revelation of the Cosmic Christ

Basle, 26th December, 1921

THE Festival of the Holy Night has for centuries been a great festival of remembrance in the whole of Christendom. And when we think of it as such we must be mindful of all that has been associated with this festival in the feelings and hearts of men. It must be remembered that the festival of the 25th of December did not become an institution in Christianity until the fourth century A.D. It was in the fourth century, for the first time actually in the year 354, in Rome, that the Festival of the Birth of Jesus was placed as it were before the Christian world as a great and memorable contribution to the times. It was out of the very deepest instincts of Christian evolution that such a contribution to the times was made in the fourth century of our era.

The peoples from the North were swarming down towards the South of Europe. Many pagan customs were still widespread in the southern regions of Europe, in Roman districts and in Greece; pagan customs were also rife in North Africa, in Asia Minor — in short, wherever Christian thought and Christian feeling were gradually beginning to spread. But by its very nature Christianity was not intended to be a sectarian teaching, destined for this or that circle of human beings. However many factors, both internal and external, have mitigated against its original purpose, Christianity was, as a matter of course, intended to nourish the souls and hearts of

all men upon the earth.

In the religious consciousness of antiquity, Divine Powers were associated with the stars, and the mightiest Power of all with the sun. This consciousness was still alive in the pagan peoples both of the North and South of Europe, and within this pagan mind there lived the thought that the time when the earth has her darkest days, at the winter solstice, is also the time when the victorious power of the sun, working in all earthly fertility, begins again to unfold.

The feeling that at this season the earth is resting in her own being, shut off from the Divine Powers of the cosmos and living in loneliness within the universe, was superseded at the time of the winter solstice by the feeling of hope that once again the rays of light and love from the realm of the sun come to awaken the earth to fruitfulness. And a realisation of the nature of man's own soul-being was intimately associated with this other feeling.

In the life of the ancient pagan religions, man felt himself inwardly part of the earth, a limb or member of the earth. It was as though the very life of the earth were continued into his own body. And so in the days of summer when the earth receives the strongest forces of warmth and light from the heavenly sphere of the sun, man felt that his own being too was given over to that world whence the radiant, warmth-giving rays of the sun shine down upon the earth. During the time of midsummer he felt as if his whole being were given up to the wide cosmic spaces. At the time of the winter solstice man felt himself in intimate connection with the earth and with all the forces preserved in the earth from the warmth and radiance of the summer. Together with the earth he felt himself living in loneliness within the cosmos. And the return of the forces of the Divine-Spiritual cosmos to the earth at this time of the winter solstice was a deep and real experience in

him.

And so into the thought of the Christmas Festival man laid all that his life of feeling, his life of soul and spirit brought home to him so intimately in connection with the universality of the cosmic Powers. This intimate experience at the festival of the winter solstice was closely connected with the Christian impulse and it was therefore quite natural that those who came into contact with Christianity should share in its most precious experience, namely, an experience connected with this festival of the winter solstice.

In line with the change that had taken place between the age described in the Old Testament and the age described in the New Testament, the most cherished experience of Christianity lay in the remembrance of the birth of Jesus. The peoples of the Old Testament expressed the great mystery of human life and death by saying: When the soul passes through the gate of death it enters upon the path which will unite it again with the Fathers. And what does this imply? It implies that in those times there was a longing to return to the Fathers, and this indeed was a cherished and intimate experience — an experience bound up with the conceptions expressed in the Old Testament.

In the course of the first four centuries of Christendom this longing for communion with the Fathers was replaced by something else. The souls of men were directed towards the birth of the Being Who is the centre around which Christendom coheres. The feeling that lived in the peoples of the Old Testament changed into a feeling connected with the events at Nazareth or Bethlehem, with the birth of the child Jesus.

And so, when it established the Christmas Festival in the fourth century, Christianity brought its contribution towards the union of men all over the earth. A cherished and intimate experience was bound up with the Christmas Festival. And if we think of the way in which this Christmas Festival was celebrated through the centuries, we find evidence everywhere that at the time of the approach of Christmas, the souls of men within Christianity were filled with loving devotion for the Jesus Child. And this loving devotion is the revelation of something of outstanding significance through the centuries which followed.

We must really have an inner understanding of what it signified when the Christmas Festival was instituted on the 25th of December, that is to say, more or less at the time of the winter solstice. For actually as late as the year A.D. 353, in Rome itself, this festival was not celebrated on the 25th of December, neither was it a commemoration of the birth of Jesus of Nazareth. The festival was celebrated on the 6th of January as a commemoration of the Baptism in the Jordan. It was a festival of remembrance associated with the Christ Being. And this festival of remembrance included the thought that through the Baptism in Jordan, the Christ, Who was a Being belonging to a world beyond the earth, had come down from the heavens and united himself with human nature in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.

It was the celebration of a birth that was not an ordinary birth. The festival was a celebration of *the descent of the Christ Being*, whereby new and quickening forces poured into earthly existence. The day was dedicated to the revelation of the Christ, to remembrance of the Mystery that a heavenly force had united with the earth, and that through this intervention of the heavens the evolution of humanity had received a new impulse. This Mystery of the descent of a heavenly Being into earthly existence was still understood in

the age of the Event of Golgotha itself, and for some time afterwards. For at that time fragments were still present of an ancient wisdom that had been capable of understanding a truth only to be known in *supersensible experience*. The old instinctive knowledge, the ancient wisdom which was poured into human beings born on earth as a gift of the Gods — this wisdom was gradually lost. It faded away little by little as the centuries went by. But at the time of the Mystery of Golgotha, enough wisdom was still left to give man some insight into the mighty Event that had come to pass.

And so in the early centuries of Christendom the Mystery of Golgotha was understood by the light of wisdom. But by the time of the fourth century after Christ, this wisdom had almost completely disappeared. Men's minds were occupied with what was being brought to them on all sides by the pagan peoples, and understanding of the deep mystery connected with the union of the Christ with the man Jesus was no longer possible. The possibility of understanding the real nature of the Mystery of Golgotha was lost to the human soul. And so it remained, on through the subsequent centuries. The ancient wisdom was lost to humanity — and necessarily so, because out of this wisdom man could never have attained his freedom, his condition of self-dependence. It was necessary for man to enter for a while into the darkness in order, out of this darkness, to develop, in freedom, the primal forces of his being. But a true Christian instinct substituted another quality in place of the wisdom which the world of Christendom had brought to the Mystery of Golgotha — a wisdom which illumined the discussions that were held on the nature of this Mystery. Something else was substituted for the quality of wisdom.

Modern Christianity has very little knowledge or understanding of the profundity of the discussions that were carried on among the wise Church Fathers in the first

centuries of Christendom as to the manner in which the two natures — the Divine and the Human — had been united in the personality of Jesus of Nazareth. In the early Christian centuries this was a Mystery which addressed itself to a living wisdom — a wisdom which then faded away into empty abstraction. Very little has remained in Western Christianity of the holy zeal with which men tried to understand how the Divine and the Human had been united in the Mystery of Golgotha.

But the Christian impulse is mighty and powerful. And it was the power of *love* which came to replace the wisdom with which the Mystery of Golgotha was greeted at the time when its radiance shone over the earth. In marvellous abundance, love has been poured out through the centuries from the minds and hearts of men to the Jesus Child in the manger. And it is really wonderful to find how strongly this power of love is reflected in the Christmas Plays which have come down to us from earlier centuries of Christendom. If we let these things work upon us, we shall realise how deeply the Christmas Festival is a festival of remembrance. We shall realise too that, just as the peoples of the Old Testament strove in wisdom to be gathered to the Fathers, so the peoples of the New Testament have striven in devotion and love to gather together at Christmas around the sinless Child in the manger.

But who will deny that the love poured out to the wellspring of Christendom by so many hearts has little by little become more or less a habit? Who will deny that in our age the Christmas Festival has lost the living power it once possessed? The men of the Old Testament longed to return to their origin, to be gathered to their Fathers, to return to their ancestors. The Christian turns his mind and heart to human nature in its primal purity when he celebrates the Festival of the birth of Jesus. And it was out of this same Christian instinct — an

instinct which caused man to associate the Christmas Festival with his earthly origin — that the day before Christmas, the 24th of December, was dedicated to Adam and Eve. The day of Adam and Eve preceded the day of the birth of Jesus. And so it was out of a deep instinct that the Tree of Paradise came to be associated as a symbol with the Christmas Festival.

We turn our eyes first to the manger in Bethlelehem, to the Child lying there among the animals who stand round the blessed Mother. It is a heavenly symbol of the primal origin of humanity. Our feelings and minds are carried back to the earthly origin of the human being, to the Tree of Paradise, and with this Tree of Paradise there is associated the crib, just as in the Holy Legend the origin of man on earth is associated with the Mystery of Golgotha. The Holy Legend tells that the wood of the Tree of Paradise was handed down in a miraculous way from generation to generation until the age of the Mystery of Golgotha, and that the Cross erected on Golgotha, the place of the skull — the Cross on which Christ Jesus hung — was made of the very wood of the Tree of Paradise. In other words, the heavenly origin of man is associated with his earthly origin.

In another sense too, the fundamental conception of Christendom tended to obliterate understanding of these things. Nobody in our days can fail to realise that men have very little insight into the truth that the Godhead may be venerated as the Father Principle but that the Godhead can also be conceived as the *Son*. Humanity in general, as well as our so-called enlightened theology, has more or less lost sight of the difference in nature between the Father God and the Son God. And because this insight had been lost, we find the most modern school of orthodox theology proclaiming the view that in reality the Gospels treat of God the Father, not of God the Son, that Jesus of Nazareth is simply to be regarded as a great Teacher, the messenger of the Father God.

When people of to-day speak of Christ, they still associate with His flame certain memories of the Holy Story, but they have no clearly defined feeling of the difference in the nature of the Son God on the one hand and of the Father God on the other. But at the time when the Mystery of Golgotha was fulfilled in the realm of earthly existence, this feeling was still quite living. Over in Asia, in a place of no great importance to Rome at the time, the Christ had appeared in Jesus of Nazareth. According to the early Christians, Christ was that Divine Nature Who had ensouled a human being in a way that had never before occurred on the earth, nor would occur thereafter. And so this one Event of Golgotha, this one ensouling of a human being by a Divine Nature, by the Christ, imparts meaning and purpose to the whole of earthly evolution. All previous evolution is to be thought of as preparatory to this Event of Golgotha, and all subsequent evolution as the fulfilment, the consequence of the Mystery of Golgotha.

The scene of this Event lay over yonder in Asia, and on the throne of Rome sat Augustus Caesar. People of to-day no longer realise that Caesar Augustus on the throne of Rome was regarded as a Divine Incarnation. The Roman Caesars were actually regarded as Gods in human form.

And so we have two different conceptions of a God. The one God upon the throne of Rome and the other on Golgotha — the place of a skull. There could be no greater contrast!

Think of the figure of Caesar Augustus, who, according to his subjects and according to Roman decree, was a God incarnate in a man. He was thought to be a Divine Being who had descended to the earth; the Divine forces had united with the birth-forces, with the blood; the Divine power, having come down into earthly existence, was pulsing in and through the blood. Such was the universal conception, although it took

different forms, of the dwelling of the Godhead on earth. The people thought of the Godhead as bound up with the forces of the blood. They said: *Ex Deo nascimur*. — Out of God we are born. And even on lower levels of existence they felt themselves related to what lived, as the crown of humanity, in a personality like Caesar Augustus.

All that was thus honoured and revered was a Divine Father Principle. For it was a Principle living in the blood that is part of a human being when he is born into the world. But in the Mystery of Golgotha the Divine Christ Being had united Himself with the man Jesus of Nazareth — united Himself not, in this case, with the blood, but with the highest forces of the human soul. A God had here united with a human being, in such a way that mankind was saved from falling victim to the earthly forces of matter. The Father God lives in the blood. The Son lives in the soul and spirit of man. The Father God leads man into material life: *Ex Deo nascimur*. — Out of God we are born. But God the Son leads man again out of material existence. The Father God leads man out of the supersensible into the material. God the Son leads man out of the material into the supersensible. *In Christo morimur*. — In Christ we die.

Two distinctly different feelings were there. The feeling and perception of God the Son was added to the feeling associated with God the Father. Certain impulses underlying the process of evolution caused the loss of the faculty to differentiate between the Father God and God the Son. And to this day these impulses have remained in mankind in general and in Christianity too. Men who were possessed of the ancient, primordial wisdom knew from their own inner experiences that they had come down from Divine-Spiritual worlds into physical and material life. Pre-existence was a certain and universally accepted fact. Men looked back through birth and through conception, up into the Divine-Spiritual worlds,

whence the soul descends at birth into physical existence.

In our language we have only the word 'Immortality.' We have no expression for the other side of Eternity, because our language does not include the word 'Unborn-ness.' But if the conception of Eternity is to be complete, the word 'Unborn-ness' must be there as well as the word 'Immortality.' Indeed all that the word 'Unborn-ness' can mean to us is of greater significance than what is implied by the word 'Immortality.'

It is true that the human being passes through the gate of death into a life in the spiritual world, but it is no less true that an exceedingly egotistical conception of this life in the spiritual world is presented to man to-day. Human beings live here on the earth. They long for Immortality, for they do not want to sink into nothingness at death. And so, in speaking of Immortality, all that is necessary is to appeal to the instincts of egotism.

If you listen carefully to sermons you will realise how many of them count upon the egotistical impulses in human beings when they want to convey an idea of Immortality to the soul. But when it comes to the conception of Unborn-ness it is not possible to rely upon such impulses. Human beings are not so egotistical in their desire for existence in the spiritual world before birth and conception as they are in their desire for a life after death in the spiritual-world. If a life hereafter is assured them, then they are satisfied. Why, they say, should we trouble about whence we have come? Out of their egotism men want to know about a Hereafter. But when once again they unfold a wisdom untinged with egotism, Unborn-ness will be as important to them as Immortality is important to-day.

In olden times men knew that they had lived in Divine-Spiritual worlds, had descended through birth into material existence. They felt that the forces around them in a purely spiritual environment were united with the blood, were living on in the blood. And from this insight there arose the conception: Out of God we are born. The God Who lives in the blood, the God whom the man of flesh represents here on earth — he is the Father God.

The other pole of life — namely, death — demands a different impulse of the life of soul. There must be something in the human being that is not exhausted with death. The conception corresponding to this is of that God Who leads over the earthly and physical to the supersensible and superphysical. It is the God connected with the Mystery of Golgotha. The Divine Father Principle has always been associated, and rightly so, with the transition from the supersensible to the material, and through the Divine Son the transition is brought about from the sensible and material to the supersensible. And that is why the Resurrection thought is essentially bound up with the Mystery of Golgotha. The words of St. Paul that Christ is what He is for humanity because He is the Risen One — these words are an integral part of Christianity.

In the course of the centuries, understanding of the Risen One, of the Conqueror of Death, has gradually been lost and modern theology concerns itself wholly with the man Jesus of Nazareth. But Jesus of Nazareth, the man, cannot be placed at the same level as the Father Principle. Jesus of Nazareth might be regarded as the messenger of the Father but he could not, according to the arguments of early Christianity, be placed beside the Father God. Co-equal and co-existent are the Divine Father and the Divine Son: the Father Who brings about the transition from the supersensible to the material — ‘Out of God we are born’ — and the Son Who brings about the transition from the material to the supersensible — ‘In Christ

we die.' And transcending both birth and death there is a third Principle proceeding from and co-equal both with the Divine Father and the Divine Son — namely, the Spirit — the Holy Spirit. Within the being of man, therefore, we are to see the transition from the supersensible to the material and from the material to the supersensible. And the Principle which knows neither birth nor death is the Spirit into which and through which we are awakened: 'Through the Holy Spirit we shall be re-awakened.'

For many centuries Christmas was a festival of remembrance. How much of the substance of this festival has been lost is proved by the fact that all that is left of the Being Christ Jesus is the man Jesus of Nazareth. But for us to-day Christmas must become a call and a summons to something *new*. A new reality must be born. Christianity needs an impulse of renewal, for inasmuch as Christianity no longer understands the Christ Being in Jesus of Nazareth, it has lost its meaning and purpose. The meaning and essence of Christianity must be found again. Humanity must learn again to realise that the Mystery of Golgotha can be comprehended only in the light of supersensible knowledge.

Another factor, too, contributes to this lack of understanding of the Mystery of Golgotha. We can look with love to the Babe in the manger, but we have no wisdom-filled understanding of the union of the Christ Being with the man Jesus of Nazareth. Nor can we look up into the heavenly heights with the same intensity of feeling which was there in men who lived at the time of the Mystery of Golgotha. In those days men looked up to the starry worlds and saw in the courses and constellations of the stars something like a countenance of the Divine soul and spirit of the cosmos. And in the Christ Being they could see the spiritual Principle of the universe visibly manifested in the glories of the starry worlds. But for modern man the starry worlds and all the worlds of cosmic space have become little

more than a product of calculation — a cosmic mechanism.

The world has become empty of the Gods. Out of this world which is void of the Gods, the world that is investigated to-day by astronomy and physics, the Christ Being could never have descended. In the light of the primeval wisdom possessed by humanity, this world was altogether different. It was the body of the Divine World-Soul and of the Divine World-Spirit. And out of this spiritual cosmos the Christ came down to earth and united Himself with a human being in Jesus of Nazareth. This truth is expressed in history itself in a profound way. All over the earth before the Mystery of Golgotha there were Mysteries, holy sanctuaries that were schools of learning and at the same time schools for the cultivation of the religious life. In these Mysteries, indications were given of what must come to pass in the future. It was revealed in the Mysteries that man bears within his being a power that is the conqueror of death, and this victory over death was an actual experience of the Initiates in the Mysteries. In deep and profound experience the candidate for Initiation knew with sure conviction: Thou has awakened within thyself the power that conquers death. The Initiate experienced in a picture the process that would operate fully in times still to come, in accordance with the great plan of world-history. In the Mysteries of all peoples, this sacred truth was proclaimed: *Man can be victorious over death*. But it was also indicated that what could be presented in the Mysteries in pictures only would one day become an actual and single event in world-history. The Mystery of Golgotha was proclaimed in advance by the Pagan Mysteries of antiquity; it was the fulfilment of what had everywhere been heralded in the sanctuaries and holy places of the Mysteries.

When the candidate had been prepared in the Mysteries, when he had performed the difficult training which brought him to the point of Initiation, when he had made his soul so

free of the body that the soul could be united with and perceive the spiritual worlds, when he was convinced by his own knowledge that life is always victorious over death in human nature — then he confronted the very deepest experience that was associated with these ancient Mysteries. And this deepest experience was that the obstacle presented by the earth, the obstacle of matter, must be removed if that which is at the same time both spiritual and material, is to become visible — namely, the *sun*. It was to a mysterious phenomenon — although it was a phenomenon well-known to every Initiate — that the candidate was led. He beheld the sun at the midnight hour, saw the sun *through* the earth, at the other side of the earth.

Instinctive feeling of the most holy and most sacred things have, after all, remained through the course of history. Many of these feelings and perceptions have weakened, but to those who are willing to look with unprejudiced eyes, the old meaning is still discernible. And so we can read some thing from the fact that at midnight leading from the 24th to the 25th of December, the midnight Mass is supposed to be said in every Christian Church. We can read something from this fact when we know that the Mass is nothing more nor less than a synthesis of the rites and rituals of the Mysteries which led to initiation, to the beholding of the sun at midnight. This institution of the midnight Mass at Christmas is an echo of the Initiation which enabled the candidate, at the midnight hour, to see the sun at the other side of the earth and therewith to behold the universe as a spiritual universe. And at the same time the Cosmic Word resounded through the cosmos — the Cosmic Word which from the courses and constellations of the stars sounded forth the mysteries of World Being.

Blood sets human beings at variance with one another. Blood fetters to the earthly and material that element in man which descends from heavenly heights. In our century, especially,

men have gravely sinned against the essence of Christianity, inasmuch as they have turned again to the principle of blood. But they must find the way to the Being Who was Christ Jesus, Who does not address Himself to the blood but Who poured out his blood and gave it to the earth. Christ Jesus is the Being Who speaks to the soul and to the spirit, Who *unites* and does not separate — so that Peace may arise among men on earth out of their understanding of the Cosmic Word.

By a new understanding of the Christmas Festival, super-sensible knowledge can transform the material universe into spirit before the eye of the soul, transform it in such a way that the sun at midnight becomes visible and is known in its spiritual nature. Such knowledge brings understanding of the super-earthly Christ Being, the Sun Being Who was united with the man Jesus of Nazareth. It can bring understanding, too, of the unifying peace that should hover over the peoples of the earth. The Divine Beings are revealed in the heights, and through this revelation peace rings forth from the hearts of men who are of good will.

Such is the word of Christmas. Peace on earth flows into unison with the Divine Light that is streaming upon the earth. We need something more than the mere remembrance of the day of the birth of Jesus. We need to understand and realise that a new Christmas Festival must arise, that a new Festival of Birth must lead on from the present into the immediate future. A new Christ Impulse must be born and a new knowledge of the nature of Christ. We need a new understanding of the truth that the Divine-Spiritual heavens and the physical world of earth are linked to one another and that the Mystery of Golgotha is the most significant token of this union. We must understand once again why it is that at the midnight hour of Christmas a warning resounds to us, bidding us be mindful of the Divine-Spiritual origin of man and of the fact that the revelation of the heavens is inseparable

from peace on earth.

The Holy Night must become a reality. It is not enough to give each other presents at Christmas in accordance with ancient custom and habit. The warm feelings which for centuries inspired Christian men at the Christmas Festival have been lost. We need a new Christmas, a new Holy Night, reminding us not only of the Birth of Jesus of Nazareth, but bringing a new birth, the birth of a new Christ Impulse. Out of full consciousness we must learn to understand that in the Mystery of Golgotha a supersensible Power was made manifest, was revealed in the material earth. We must understand with full consciousness what resounded instinctively in the Mysteries of old. We must receive this impulse *consciously*. Again we must learn to understand that when the Holy Night of Christmas becomes a reality to man he can experience the wonderful midnight union between the revelation of the heavens and the peace of earth.

This is the meaning of the words which will now be given and which are dedicated to Christmas. They synthesize what I wanted to bring to your souls and hearts to-night. They try to express, out of consciousness of the anthroposophical understanding of Christ, how we can come again to the wisdom that once lived in men instinctively and remained to this extent, that at the time of the Mystery of Golgotha there were still some who knew how to celebrate the revelation of the Christ Being. We, in our day, must achieve understanding of the Christ as a Cosmic Being — a Cosmic Being Who united Himself with the earth. The time at which this understanding is accessible, to the greater part of men on earth, is the time of the cosmic Holy Night whose approach we await. If we understand these things, then we can make alive within us the feelings which I have tried to express in the following verse:

Behold the Sun
At the midnight hour;
Build with stones in the lifeless ground,
Thus in decay and in the night of Death
Find the Creation's new beginning,
Young morning's strength;
Glory in the heights the eternal Word of Gods;
Shelter in the depths the Powers of Peace.
In darkness dwelling, create a Sun.
In matter weaving, know the joy of Spirit!

VIII

The Birth of Christ Within Us

Berlin, 27th December, 1914

"WERE Christ born a thousand times in Bethlehem, and not in thee, thou art lost eternally."

There are two aspects of this beautiful saying of the great Mystic Angelus Silesius. The one is the declaration that the true Christmas must be celebrated in man's inmost heart, that any outward celebration of Christmas must quicken the impulse whereby in the Holy Night of winter, the very deepest forces of the soul are drawn forth from the darkness prevailing within as the darkness of winter prevails without. These deep forces of the soul are aware of their union with the Being Who pervades all earthly evolution, giving it meaning and purpose. Within us we find some thing with which Christ is united if with conscious devotion to the Spiritual Powers working in the world we penetrate deeply enough into our life of soul.

And the other aspect of the words of Angelus Silesius is that the human being in earthly evolution to-day can become conscious of the fact that true manhood, assurance of true manhood, depends upon the soul feeling inwardly united with the essence and substantiality of Christ Jesus.

In the course of years our studies have brought it home to us that as earthly evolution proceeds, consciousness of Christ deepens, that human beings passing from incarnation to

incarnation attain greater and greater understanding of the real nature of Christ. And we have tried to intensify this knowledge by drawing upon a source which enables us to celebrate the Holy Night of Christmas, the Festival of the Birth of Jesus, in a deeper and more worthy way.

What this implies will become clear from the lecture to-day.

A famous modern historian was once asked by a man interested in world events, why no mention is made in his writings of happenings which are the outcome of the Mystery of Golgotha, nor of the influences of Christ Jesus in the course of human history. The historian was asked why his books speak of the influences exercised upon history by popes, monarchs, military campaigns, governments, even by happenings in nature, but have no single word to say about the forces that have poured into mankind from the Mystery of Golgotha and since then have been at work in all human life and human affairs. After a long pause and deep deliberation, the historian answered: The method I have adopted for the exposition of history must remain as it is; for the Christ-forces that stream through happenings in the world belong to a primordial realm into which the human mind is incapable of gazing. The effects and influences of the Mystery of Golgotha — yes, certainly they can be discerned; but to describe the intrinsic, essential nature of these deeds of Christ is not possible in the writing of history.

This is only one of the many examples that could be given in proof of the fact that the most distinguished and enlightened minds of modern times cannot claim to celebrate the Christmas Festival in an inner sense. For in the soul of this historian, Christ Jesus as a living Figure, a living Being, had not become such intense reality that he could feel His presence in all human evolution from year to year, from week to week, even from hour to hour. It is possible for a really

learned scholar to-day to survey the whole course of history without perceiving that since the Mystery of Golgotha, the Power of Christ has been working everywhere. There are many causes to account for the fact that the Festival of the Holy Night, the Festival of the Christmas Mystery, is not yet celebrated in the souls of the vast majority of human beings.

A certain illumination is given by one who has spoken of these things out of a deep and true feeling for the Christian Mystery. This was Goethe, who so beautifully recounts the life and travels of *Wilhelm Meister*. Wilhelm Meister comes to a stately building and is conducted around it by its owner. He is shown the gallery which contains a series of paintings of the most important historical occurrences among various peoples of antiquity — notably among the early Hebrews — from the time of Paradise, the Fall, and on through the later epochs. History is portrayed in impressive scenes, ending with the destruction of Jerusalem ... but there is no single picture of a scene from the life of Christ Jesus, although the series continues beyond the Crucifixion as far as the destruction of Jerusalem. Wilhelm Meister asks: Why does nothing in this picture-gallery portray the life of the divine Man who has brought such blessing into the evolution of humanity? — These are his words (1) : "In your historical series I find a chasm. The Temple of Jerusalem is destroyed and the people dispersed, yet you have not introduced the divine Man who taught there shortly before; to whom, shortly before, they would give no ear." The answer made to Wilhelm Meister is: "To have done this, as you require it, would have been an error. The life of that divine Man whom you allude to, stands in no connection with the general history of the world in his time. It was a private life; his teaching was a teaching for individuals. What has publicly befallen vast masses of people and the minor parts which compose them, belongs to the general history of the world, to the general religion of the

world, the religion we have named the First. What inwardly befalls individuals, belongs to the Second religion, the Philosophical: such a religion was it that Christ taught and practised, so long as He went about on earth."

These are deeply moving words. Every human being on the earth is related *individually* to the Christ. Folk-history, as it may be called, is woven by the affairs of the several peoples, for it is concerned with human affairs in general, within the orbit of general human destiny. But what Christ Jesus has brought into the world penetrates deeply and inwardly into the experiences of every human heart, every human soul — belonging to no matter what part of earthly evolution — in so far as it feels itself truly *Man*. We must realise that this 'feeling of oneself as man' arose for the first time from what came into human evolution through the Mystery of Golgotha.

And now to continue. The owner of the palace leads Wilhelm Meister to another gallery that has been kept closed, where the events of the New Testament are portrayed. Wilhelm Meister is therefore not permitted to see the events of the New Testament in a place where external happenings and actions in the world are presented, but only in an esoteric sanctuary, for the sight of which the soul must have been prepared, have withdrawn from things pertaining to the worldly history of the peoples. The basis of the soul's activity must now be esoteric and *individual*: then it may cross the Threshold leading to the pictures of scenes from the New Testament. Here again the pictures go no farther than the Last Supper. Wilhelm Meister asks: "As you have set up the life of the divine Man for a pattern and example, have you likewise selected his sufferings, his death?" The answer he receives is full of significance; it is an answer which indicates what reverent awe accompanies the experience of the mystery fulfilled on the earth by the Being dwelling in the body whose birth is celebrated in the Holy Night of winter. Wilhelm Meister has

been conducted as it were to the first level of esoteric truth, where he witnesses the delineation of scenes as far as the Last Supper; but then comes the most esoteric portion of all, referred to with deep and holy awe: "We draw a veil over these sufferings, because we reverence them so highly. We hold it a damnable audacity to exhibit that torturing Cross and the Holy One who suffers on it, exposing them to the light of the sun." (*Travels of Wilhelm Meister*. Part II.)

This is an example of the feeling for esotericism to be found in the 18th century. The feeling was sound and true, for we ourselves shall readily agree that pictorial representations of Christ's sufferings, unless they are from the hand of a supreme artist, drag down the Mystery of Golgotha to the human level. And we can understand that one who in the 18th century had a deep, deep feeling for the Mystery of Golgotha was averse from looking at the many distorted portrayals of this sacred Mystery, preferring to draw a veil over these things, because he felt that only the inmost forces of the soul can be united, supersensibly, with what is connected with and follows the Last Supper.

But what is it that underlies these esoteric feelings and experiences? The hearts of men were yearning for a vista, a conception of the Christ Mystery greater than any that was possible at that time. With all humility, with a humility deeper than that with which we approach any other matter presented by spiritual science, it may truly be said that for long ages the best human souls have been yearning, pining for the knowledge of Christ that can be imparted by occult science. And to-day we may be assured that when the time is ripe, the souls of men will behold as reality, what hitherto could only be known in a different form.

The consciousness that such knowledge will one day be within the reach of the human heart, and the longing for it, has been one of life's great riddles to the best souls. Men have been reaching out for an understanding of Christ that will enable them to grasp the import of the mighty Deed accomplished on Golgotha which can be revealed to the eye of soul when the veil is lifted. In the lecture yesterday I explained why a knowledge of Christ once enriched by the old clairvoyance was bound to recede, how it was received in the earliest periods of Christendom but then gradually waned and faded away. I will read, again to-day, an ancient Gnostic hymn from which it is clear that in the old, clairvoyant form of knowledge the consciousness was alive that the Christ Who came into the world through the Child born at Christmastime, is a Cosmic Being, increasing in majesty and greatness, the higher the soul's vision soars into the realms of spirit — for through these realms He descended. It was inevitable that in later times, when the springs of this knowledge had run dry, a veil should be drawn over the great Event, because men were no longer able to explain that in the secret represented by the Child, the highest wisdom is enshrined. In this Child was born a Being Who traversed the heavenly worlds before His appearance on earth. —

Behold, O Father, how, distant from Thy Breath,
This being upon earth
(this 'being' is the human soul)
Wanders, the target and victim of all ill,
Lost and perplexed, it flees the deadly chaos —
How shall it find its way?

In converse with the Father God, Jesus is speaking of the descent through the cosmic spheres, of how his eyes turn to the human soul to whom he would fain bring salvation, wandering in chaos but yet longing for Christ. —

Therefore send me, O Father,
Descending, I bear the seal of heaven,
Traversing all the Aeons ...

The spiritual worlds are ranged one above the other in the heavenly spheres and the higher we ascend the more do we find that the older worlds are still living realities, the most ancient being present to this day in the highest spheres of all. What was once connected with the Saturn evolution is to be found in the very highest spiritual spheres, and these successive spheres, related to the flow of time, are called 'Aeons.'

Traversing all the Aeons,
Teaching all sacred knowledge;
Thus may God's image be made manifest;
And thus to you I give
The deeply hidden knowledge of the sacred way:
'Gnosis' it shall be for you.

Mankind has very largely lost consciousness of the Christ as a Cosmic Being. This loss was inevitable, for the old clairvoyance had to disappear and an intervening period — an Aeon devoid of spirit — to come, in order that eventually a new form of clairvoyant vision may arise. But this new vision must again be directed to the spiritual worlds, must not characterise in forms such as are presented to men's outward sight, the Being Who in the Holy Night entered into the evolution of humanity. This new vision must reveal how the Christ Being descended from heavenly sphere to heavenly sphere and thence to the earth, giving the earth meaning and purpose.

Behold, O Father, bow, distant from Thy Breath,
This being upon earth
Wanders, the target and victim of all ill,
Lost and perplexed it flees the deadly chaos —
How shall it find its way?
Therefore send me, O Father,
Descending I bear the seal of heaven,
Traversing all the Aeons,
Teaching all sacred knowledge;
Thus may God's image be made manifest;
And thus to you I give
The deeply hidden knowledge of the sacred way:
'Gnosis' it shall be for you.

What, in reality, is the earth that surrounds us, when we perceive its essential being? If the corpse of one whose soul already dwells in spiritual worlds lies before you, will you ever say: This is a man? Will you ever say: This is still, in the full sense of the word, a man? The higher members of human nature are no longer in the corpse from which the soul has departed. But since the middle of the Atlantean epoch the earth has been gradually becoming a corpse devoid of soul. The earth around us, despite its manifold beauties, has been approaching the state of a corpse since the middle of Atlantean times and is becoming more and more corpse-like. Standing before the huge rocks, one can say no truer thing than that here is the skeleton which the earth has been in process of becoming ever since that time! In the rock-strewn earth we perceive the dying part of the earth-organism, which was a living organism only until the middle of the Atlantean epoch. Geology itself realises that when we walk over the earth or guide the plough through the soil, we are walking over the corpse of the earth, guiding the plough through the corpse of the earth. Geologists have acknowledged this and external science itself, when it begins really to think, cannot do

otherwise. And so, inasmuch as we are surrounded by the earth, we confront death; we are spectators of the gradual dying of our earthly globe.

And now let us imagine that the Mystery of Golgotha had not taken place, that the Cosmic Being Whom we call Christ had not entered through the two Jesus boys into earth-evolution. (2) Earth-evolution would then be no more, would already by to-day have been overcome by death. But through the two Jesus boys the Christ *did* enter earthly evolution and then, living in the one for three years, consummated the Mystery of Golgotha, whereby a new seed of life was imparted to the earth. Therefore when the time is fulfilled, the earth will not remain a corpse in cosmic space — the soul having become the prey of Ahriman and Lucifer! No — that is what would have happened had Christ not come into the earth as a living, fertile seed. Because He has come, the earth will not fall into dust, the soul will not be in the sole possession of Lucifer and Ahriman, for the Christ Seed has infused new life into earth-evolution! Just as the earth once separated from the sun and has become a child of the sun, so will earth-evolution, imbued with a new impulse, be fraught with the meaning and purpose imparted by Christ.

Thus spiritual science turns our eyes with awe and reverence to the Mystery of Golgotha and because it points to realms beyond the range of material vision, we feel that it is for us to lift the veil ... since we are resolved to see behind this veil not only what comes before the eyes of an age destined to grow into materialism. Therefore it is again beginning to be possible for those in whom the impulses of spiritual science have come to life, to look up to the Christ as a Cosmic Being. Again and again let it be repeated that the infinite devotion we can feel towards the Child born in the Holy Night of Christmas is not thereby diminished. Rather is this devotion deepened when we can feel the reality of Christ as did Christian

Morgenstern when there sprang from his soul a poem which seems like a resurrection of ancient and holy Gnostic thoughts pervaded alike by the Christ-Love and cosmic wisdom. And so a new Christmas is celebrated when in the dark night of materialism, voices ring out that are not the voices of the Gnostics of olden times but are quickened and enriched by dedication to the Living Being of the Cosmic Christ.

Light is Love ... the rays of sunshine are the weaving radiance of a world of loving Creator-Spirits. Who, after hiding us in their heart through endless ages, at the last surrendered to us their sublimest One. Wrapped for three years in the body of a Man, He came then into possession of His Father's estate — and is now the innermost heavenly flame of Earth herself, that she too may one day be a Sun.

"Were Christ born a thousand times in Bethlehem, and not in thee, thou art lost eternally."

May there be celebrated in our souls an inner festival of the Holy Night; may our souls be filled with the realisation that a new knowledge of Christ must be born in our time. This new knowledge of Christ links the inmost core of man's being with primal innocence, links the state of childhood, not, as yet, that of mature life, with the very heights of cosmic being. When, in the Holy Night of winter our minds turn to the Christ Child, there is enacted before our souls the greatest of all festivals of consecration, the festival that rings through all the Aeons — and we know that the deepest realities of man's being and nature are indissolubly connected with all cosmic evolution.

Those whose hearts are kindled by spiritual science feel and know that victory over all death can be achieved when the soul is united with the Christ Being. I spoke of this to-day at the funeral of one taken from us so tragically by the war.

Realisation of how the heights of cosmic being are connected with the inmost nature of man was impossible as long as the human mind was unable to conceive that the very quintessence of history lies in the Mystery of Bethlehem. But this insight will dawn in those who understand the secret of the two Jesus boys. In the one boy there was present the power of the wisest of all men in pre-Christian times, namely Zarathustra. This boy represents the flower of the previous stages of human evolution; the aura of the other boy was illumined by the forces of the great Buddha. The body of the one boy springs from the noblest blood of the ancient Hebrew peoples; the soul of the Jesus boy described in the Gospel of St. Luke leads back to the earth's beginning. (3) The soul of this Jesus boy was kept back, when, in the age of Lemuria, man came to the earth; this soul was guarded by the Mysteries until it was sent into the body of the Jesus whose birth is described in the Gospel of St. Luke. It is said that immediately after birth, this Child uttered words intelligible only to the Mother, in a language unlike any other language, and which the Child himself forgot directly earthly consciousness awoke in him. A mystery was voiced immediately after birth ... And indeed, much of what we have to reveal concerning the Christ Mystery is an exposition of what was uttered by the Jesus boy of the Gospel of St. Luke directly after his birth.

And so spiritual science enables us to understand the Christ Impulse in the deeper aspect of human evolution — in the evolution of pre-Christian times too — for the differences disappear and the voice of the Initiates can still be heard. When once the magnitude of what poured into the evolution of humanity at the Mystery of Golgotha is grasped it will be possible for these forces to be brought to even greater fruition. But men must know Who the Christ was before they can speak truly of Him — in history, for example. If within our movement there are individuals -in greater and greater

numbers — who resolve to kindle the light that can be kindled in those inner depths which since the Mystery of Golgotha have been within men's reach then the Christ Light will shine out in every single soul. This Christ Light becomes the Christmas Tree that will illumine all evolution in ages of time to come. The soul will behold an earth again made living, will find Christ everywhere within this new earth.

Those who have allied themselves with spiritual science can receive its tidings of Christ with such depth of feeling that the Christmas Festival will one day be celebrated in every individual soul. It is the Festival which represents the birth of that knowledge of Christ which comes from Christ Himself and is therefore a birth of Christ within us, True, indeed are the words: "Were Christ born a thousand times in Bethlehem, and not in thee, thou art lost eternally." But to this beautiful string of Angelus Silesius we can add: We are secure eternally if we seek the experience belonging to the Holy Night of winter, if we seek to bring Christ to birth in the depths of our souls!

Notes:

1 The translation of the quotations from Wilhelm Meister is that of Thomas Carlyle.

2 See: *The Spiritual Guidance of Man and Mankind*; also the Lecture-Courses on the *Gospel of St. Luke* and the *Gospel of St. Matthew* by Rudolf Steiner.

3 See Rudolf Steiner's Lecture-Courses on the *Gospel of St. Matthew* and the *Gospel of St. Luke*.