

Rudolf Steiner and the Theosophical Society

A Foreword by Marie Steiner

This is the foreword for the book titled [Earthly and Cosmic Man](#) by Marie Steiner, published in 1932. In this foreword she provides an "inside look" as to the circumstances surrounding Steiner's break from the Theosophical Society.

The wealth of ideas and spiritual treasure bestowed upon us by Rudolf Steiner in his lectures often makes it difficult to arrange certain series of lectures under one category and heading. They are like concentrated foci of energy from which sparks shoot out in every direction, lighting up the near and the far, piercing their way to the primal beginnings and again into infinitudes of space and time — then giving sharp definition to details which may seem unessential but are of great symptomatic importance. Out of the cumulative mass of details the necessities of storm-charged destiny arise but also a sustaining power of the Spirit. We discern the play of forces which preceded the sufferings of our present time, discharged itself with unparalleled fury in the world war and its aftermath and will burst out in tempests yet to come. We understand why this had to be, what failings will be forgiven, what demands made of us. A great and impressive tableau of history unrolls from the precision given to details otherwise ignored and from the vast cosmic-human background against which the life of man stands out in bold relief.

These vistas of primordial cosmic happenings, of ages of grey antiquity in human history which, nevertheless, shed clearest light upon our present time, are opened up with particular vividness in the lectures given to members of the Anthroposophical Society — with certain interruptions, but in constantly recurring rhythm — in places where Rudolf Steiner made his home between continual travelling: Berlin and Dornach. The lectures were given in order that the conscience of a small group of human beings at least might be made alive to the tasks of the time, to the vital significance of the hour in which we were living before the world war, and are still living today.

Rudolf Steiner spoke gravely and impressively, like the voice of destiny itself, like the awakened human conscience, linking his arguments with factual details in every sphere. And then, when in the world outside, all supports hitherto thought secure tottered for every eye to see, as the forces burst upon one another with elemental might, it was he who tried ever and again to formulate the thoughts of deliverance and recovery without which chaos cannot be overcome. Although an unfledged humanity could not understand this voice, a light must somehow be brought into the chaos — even though it might reach only a small group of immature, but eager-hearted people. An attempt had also to be made to penetrate here and there into

the field of concrete, practical life. To be sure, the representatives of this "practical side of life" as they are pleased to call it, scornfully and with vicious measures of sabotage, rejected everything that seemed to them so remote from reality in that it spoke of spiritual worlds. Yet the living thought has the power to outlast the moment and to rise up again in a new form. Its duty is to work even where there is no prospect of success; in all its purity it has to find its way to souls who, through constant testing, gradually become open to receive it. Out of the concrete realities of existence from which his spiritual vision was never willing to withdraw, Rudolf Steiner created a science of knowledge embracing every domain of life and able to pour vitalising, creative impulses into the manifold branches of science and art, philosophy and religious activity.

To live through this was, and remains, an intense upliftment, like climbing up steep mountain crests in snow-cleansed, sun-pierced air. Deep, refreshing breaths can be drawn in this region of the higher cosmic realities which imbue human life with meaning and even now shape the picture of destiny in those future times, when, out of a quickened consciousness, thought will encompass higher and higher spheres of existence.

Treasures of the Spirit of well-nigh frightening brilliance have been bequeathed to us, demonstrating through their very existence that the might of the Dark Age, of Kaliyuga, has been broken and conquered. True, the darkness is within us still, but the Light is there and may not be withheld — not even from a humanity living in shadow.

The Light — of which Rudolf Steiner says that it is the Christ Impulse — had first to prepare and shape the vessel of human consciousness into which it can flow; it will bring to men that re-awakening by which alone they can wrest themselves from downfall.

Neither the powers of the Sentient Soul, nor the fervent passion of religious experience known to the Middle Ages, to the saints and the mystics along the path of the Christian Initiation, are competent to overcome the obstructions brought by the age of rationalism. But wise Providence, guide and leader of human existence, inaugurated, even before the dawn of the modern age, a second path of Christian Initiation along which souls were gradually to be made ready for the demands of a later future.

The call of this, the Christian-Rosicrucian path, went out above all to the powers of the Consciousness Soul, the Spiritual Soul. Hence its mission was also to establish the human being firmly within the personality, to allow him to experience to the full the significance of the single life. Through study, through imagination and contemplation, it led the human being out into the macrocosm — which was discovered again, in image, within his own being. But the full development of the forces of the personality, whereby the " I " could be led to conscious realisation of

the Spirit, made it necessary that the knowledge of repeated earth-lives should, to begin with, be hidden for a time from the portion of humanity destined to unfold these forces of personality.

What the new age needs is not a return to the past through a revival of the methods of Yoga, nor of the Gnostic or Rosicrucian paths in the form in which they served the spiritual weal of men in days gone by. In accordance with the demands of the modern age, a new impulse must be given to the rigorous path of Rosicrucian knowledge which in its true form has nothing whatever to do with the charlatany that has usurped its name — a new impulse, in the form of the revelation of the great truths of Reincarnation and Karma.

Until the task of proclaiming these truths devolved upon Rudolf Steiner, Rosicrucianism concealed them, kept silence about them. But it came about that with the passage of the centuries, these truths were able to flash into the consciousness of minds in Europe, as the result of rigorous and strenuous ways of thought, and as a fruit of knowledge born of alert reason; as a concern, too, of mankind, through which the evolution of human history receives meaning and significance, not as a concern of the single individual whose goal, as in Buddhism, is liberation from the wheel of rebirth. We need only mention the names of Goethe and Lessing.

The salvation of the individuality passing onwards and unfolding through the recurrent earthly lives, the rebirth of the Divine " I " in man — this is the deed wrought by Christ, and with the stupendous power of knowledge at his command Rudolf Steiner brought this deed ever and again before our eyes.

When after long reluctance he had made up his mind to comply with the request of German Theosophists to lead their work, he was able to accept the proposal because of the avowed task of the Theosophical Society: to establish knowledge of Reincarnation and Karma in the world. The lectures leading to the request that he should become the leader of this Movement in Germany were those on *Mysticism at the Dawn of Modern Spiritual Life*, and *Christianity as Mystical Fact*. Therewith, the impulse which he was to bring to the Movement had been clearly indicated, and he was assured of absolute freedom to teach as he would. He himself acted in line with the spirit of true occultists of all ages who make a link with the store of spiritual knowledge already existing in order to preserve its life and lead it forward. He still saw hope of being able, through the new impulse, to rescue the Theosophical Society, too, from lapsing into the rigidity of dogma, to imbue it with fresh forces and enrich its very defective understanding of the Mysteries of Christianity.

Without overthrowing anything at all, gradually laying stone upon stone, he created the basis for this understanding. For the new insight must be acquired by the listeners only through knowledge consciously put to the test of reason. And so, to begin with, he adopted the terminology current among the Theosophists, gradually

widening the ideas and giving them life so that they might conform to the more alert consciousness of the modern mind. The basis once created, wider and wider perspectives could be opened out, until, from the side of the super-sensible, there broke the light which reveals the mission of the earth and the tasks of mankind.

Not only from the point of view of their content, but also from that of chronology, the opportunity of studying every such series of lectures given by Rudolf Steiner seems to us to be of great importance for newcomers to Spiritual Science, for only so is it possible to realise the living, organic growth of the work. Remarks interpolated here and there in the lectures about contemporary happenings seeming to have little bearing at a later time, have such moral and educational value that they are of lasting significance.

There can be no concealment of the firm stand Rudolf Steiner was compelled to take against the attempts that were clouding objective truth and corrupting the Theosophical Society by the introduction of pet projects and personal ambitions. The warnings given in this connection may not always be understood by the reader today. In the main they were connected with the occult despotism — for so indeed it may be called — which took the form of the announcement of the coming of a World-Saviour in the flesh — to whom they dared to give the name of Christ. The Indian boy Krishnamurti was chosen for this role and the "Order of the Star in the East" founded with a flourish of trumpets. The Theosophical Society was expected to place itself in the service of this new aim. By these crude means it was hoped to win souls who were open to listen to the explanations of Christian Esotericism given by Rudolf Steiner. But a campaign, fought with all the arms of calumny, was launched against him. The International Theosophical Congress which was to have been held in Genoa in the year 1911 and in which Rudolf Steiner was to have given two lectures on "Buddhism in the twentieth century" and "Christ in the twentieth century," was cancelled at the last minute for inadequate reasons — but in reality because of fear that the influence of Dr. Steiner's words might be too strong. In the lectures that year, many references had to be made to this affair which to very many people was absolutely incomprehensible.

It had become necessary to make it clear that methods so grievously degrading the level of the Theosophical Society, could not be countenanced. Dr. Steiner stated this firmly, but with pain, and pouring his very heart's blood into the words, he spoke repeatedly of his one great wish — that the Society led by him might not succumb to the failings into which occult societies so easily lapse when they fall short of the demands of strict truthfulness and drift into vanity and ambition.

The words should live like cleansing flames in the souls of those who represent his work and over and over again arise before them as an exhortation and warning.

The lectures given in Berlin in the year 1912, contain many references to the struggles Rudolf Steiner was obliged to face in order that in spite of hidden attacks, the spirit of such a Movement might be rescued in its purity, for Spiritual Science. The lapse in the Theosophical Society made it necessary to lay sharp emphasis upon the autonomy of the anthroposophical work in Middle Europe *vis-à-vis* the Anglo-Indian Theosophical Society, and during the last days of December, 1912, the "Anthroposophical League (*Bund*)" was officially founded. The rhythms of the years recall such days vividly to the memory.

Thirty years ago, on the 20th October, 1902, in Berlin, Rudolf Steiner gave his first lecture on Anthroposophy, and on the 21st translated into German the theosophical lecture delivered by Annie Besant who at that time had not come under the sway of the unhealthy influences to which she afterwards fell victim. Twenty years ago, Rudolf Steiner was obliged to protect the anthroposophical Movement inaugurated by him from the despotic attacks going out from Adyar, and to speak the words which are like a heritage left by the lectures and are now being made available to us once again as a memorial of those days. They rang out in power during the last days of December of that same year, in Cologne, when in Rudolf Steiner's lectures on *The Bhagavad Gita and the Epistles of St. Paul*, the purest oriental wisdom was presented to the listeners with unprecedented grandeur, in the light of Christian knowledge.

Again his concluding words were an impressive appeal for self-knowledge and humility in those belonging to the Movement inaugurated by him. But the opposing powers were not slumbering. Ten years ago, on New Year's night, 1922-23, the Goetheanum was in flames. Only the Group, sculptured in wood, portraying the Representative of Humanity between the vanquished Adversaries, was saved. We are hoping that by Christmas of this year, this Group will stand in a space worthy of it, in the new Goetheanum. There is a moving description of the Representative of Humanity, of the Christ Figure, at the end of one of the lectures of 1912, when there was no thought — even of the possibility — of its execution in sculpture. It came before us then in words, and now it stands before our eyes as a work of Art.

Marie Steiner
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