

## 6. The Soul's Bright Vessel

Extract from a lecture given in Leipzig on 2 January 1914

*In a series of resonant interconnections and correspondences, Steiner now goes on to show how we can read the image of the 'new moon with the old moon in its arms' as an emblem of the puer: of the mother of Jesus bearing his dead body at Easter, and thus symbolically as the pure soul bearing the spirit. Yet none of this can really be grasped in intellectual concepts alone—wählich, like the ailing Amfortas, have no rejuvenating power. Steiner stresses the need to go beyond words and concepts into intuitive experience of and heartfelt engagement with these pictures; and suggests that this itself forms a vital part of our approach to the Grail, just as it did in Parzival's own quest.*

Yesterday I tried to present what I had to tell you about the Mystery of the Grail and its connections in a way that allowed you to see how these things reveal themselves gradually to the seeker's soul. I have not withheld the various difficulties that must be gone through before the soul receives the results of research from the world of spirit. [...] I have for once given you this unvarnished account, because for you, as anthroposophists, it should be important to see that the results one arrives at in spiritual research are to be reached only after overcoming all the obstacles which stand in the way. And the final result of spiritual research is not the outcome of ideas that have been merely compiled; for these ideas are like messengers leading to the final result and have nothing to do with the result itself. [...]

I have said that the stellar script is to be found in the

heavens, but it is not in any sense the Grail itself, and it does not yield us the Grail. I have expressly emphasized—and I beg you to take this very seriously—that the name of the Grail, not the Grail itself, is to be found in the stellar script. I have pointed to the fact that in the gold-gleaming sickle of the moon—as any close observer can see—the dark part of the moon emerges and is as though delineated from the bright sickle; and there, in occult writing, the name of Parzival is to be found.

Now before we go further and try to interpret this sign in the heavens, I must draw your attention to an important law, an important fact. The gold-gleaming sickle becomes apparent because the physical rays of the sun fall on the moon. The illuminated part of the moon shines out as the gleaming vessel, and within it rests the dark host: in physical terms, this is the dark part where the sun's rays do not fall; spiritually, there is something else. When the rays of the sun fall on part of the moon and are reflected in gleaming light, something nevertheless passes through its physical matter. This something is the spiritual element that lives in the sun's rays. The spiritual power of the sun is not held back and reflected, as the sun's physical power is, but passes through; and because of the moon's resistance, what we see at rest, contained as a disc in the golden vessel, is actually the spiritual power of the sun. So we can say that in the dark part of the moon we are looking at the spiritual power of the sun. In the gold-gleaming part, the vessel, we see reflected the physical power of the sun. The spirit of the sun rests within the vessel of the sun's physical power. So in truth the spirit of the sun rests in the vessel of the moon. And if we now recollect all that we have ever said about this sun spirit in relation to Christ, then what the moon does physically

embodies an important symbol. Because the moon reflects the sun's rays and in this way brings into being the gold-gleaming vessel, it appears to us as the bearer of the sun spirit, for the latter appears within the moon's vessel in the form of the wafer-like disc.

And let us remember in the Parzival saga how the host descends from heaven into the Grail and is renewed every Good Friday—thus during the Easter festival. It sinks into the Grail like a rejuvenating nourishment at the Easter festival, when the hermit directs Parzival towards the Grail; at the Easter festival, whose significance for the Grail Wagner's *Parzival* has again brought close to us.

Now let us recall how the date of the Easter festival was established in accordance with an old tradition—one of those traditions I mentioned yesterday as arising from the working of the Christ impulse in the depths of the soul. What day is assigned to the Easter festival? The day when the vernal sun, which means the sun that is gathering strength—our symbol for the Christ—reaches the first Sunday after the full moon. How does the vernal full moon stand in the heavens at the Easter festival—how must it stand? It starts, if only a little, to form a sickle. Something must be visible of the dark part; something of the sun spirit who has gained his vernal strength must be contained within it. This means that, according to an ancient tradition, the picture of the Holy Grail must appear in the heavens at the Easter festival. It must be so. At the Easter festival, therefore, everyone can see this picture of the Holy Grail. According to a very ancient tradition, the date of the Easter festival is regulated with this in view. [...]

And if we now ask how Parzival gradually gains knowledge, what do we find? Who is he, this Parzival? He is ignorant of

certain things; he is held to be ignorant—but of what? Now we have heard that the Christ impulse flows on as though through subterranean channels in the depths of the soul. Up above, in conscious debate, the theological controversies go on, and from them traditional Christianity takes shape. Let us follow the personality of Parzival, as the saga portrays him. He knows nothing about the superficial course of events; he is kept in ignorance of all that. He is protected from it. What he learns to know comes from sources active in the depths of the soul, as we heard yesterday. At first, riding away in ignorance from the Grail castle, he learns it from the woman who mourns the dead bridegroom in her lap; then from the hermit with mystic powers; and from the power of the Grail, for it is on a Good Friday that he comes to the hermit; and so already the power of the Grail is working in him unconsciously. Thus he is one of those who know nothing of what has been going on externally but who are led to meet the new age through influences flowing from unconscious sources. He is a man whose heart and soul could receive the secret of the Grail in innocence, undisturbed by the effects of the external world on human life. He is to receive the secret with the highest, purest, noblest forces of the soul. He has to meet someone who has not developed the soul forces which could fully experience the Grail: he has to meet Amfortas. While Amfortas was indeed marked out as the guardian of the Grail, he succumbed to the lower forces in human nature. And how he succumbed is connected with the guardianship of the Grail: he killed his adversary out of lust and jealousy. [...]

Worldly concerns could be approached with earthly forces, but it was not permitted to approach the concerns of the Holy Grail in this way, as Amfortas discovered. Anyone attempting it was bound to suffer pain. And since the workings of the

stars had been permeated by Christ, a man was needed who had remained untouched by controversies in the external world and whose karma enabled Christ to draw near to his soul. Parzival, in whom the Christ power was still working unconsciously, arrives [...] and the wound [of Amfortas] burns as it had never burned before.

Thus we see how the new age declares itself; how the soul of Parzival is related to the new, subconscious, historical impulse permeated by the Christ aura, the Christ impulse, although he knows nothing of it. But the forces which had guided human history from below the surface were gradually to emerge; and Parzival, accordingly, had to come by degrees to understand something that will never be understood unless it is approached with the pure and blameless forces of the soul, and not with traditional knowledge and scholarship.

[...]

Let us vividly imagine the virgin mother with the Christ upon her knees and let us then express it thus: Whoever can feel the holiness of this picture will feel the same for the Holy Grail. Above all other lights, all other gods, shines the holy vessel—the moon-mother now touched by Christ, the new Eve, the bearer of the sun-spirit Christ.

Think of the 'what', but still more of the 'how'! And let us look into the soul of Parzival: how, riding out from the Grail castle, he encounters the sight of the bride and bridegroom, which brings him into connection with subconscious Christ forces. Let us look at how the hermit at Eastertide, when the picture of the Grail is written in the heavens, in the stellar script, gives instruction to Parzival's pure soul. Let us follow him as he rides on—as I emphasized yesterday—by day and night, looking at nature by day and with the symbol of the Holy Grail often before him at night; how he rides on with the

gold-gleaming sickle of the moon before him: with the host, the Christ spirit, the sun spirit within it. Let us see how, on this journey, the correlation between the picture of the virgin mother with her bridegroom son and the sign of the heavenly script prepares him to understand the secret of the Holy Grail.

Let us see how permeation of the earth's destiny by the Christ impulse works together in Parzival's soul with the stellar script which has to be renewed; let us see how all that is permeated with Christ is related to the forces of the stars.

[...]

The Grail cannot in fact be approached through words of any kind, or through philosophical speculations. The only way to approach it is by changing all these words into feeling, by becoming able to feel in the Grail the sum of all that is holy, by feeling that what was carried over from the Moon period of planetary evolution,<sup>8</sup> appearing first in the earth mother, Eve, and then in renewed form in the virgin mother [...] flows together into the coming of the Christ being, who poured Himself into the earth's aura and became the new Lord of the earth. We approach it by feeling the confluence of what works down from the stars, and is symbolized in the stellar script, with human evolution on earth. If one takes all this into account and feels it as the consonance of human history with the stellar script, then one also grasps the secret expressed in the words entrusted to Parzival in the saga: that whenever a king of the Grail, a truly appointed guardian of the Grail, dies, the name of his accredited successor appears on the Holy Grail. 'There it is to be read'—which means that it will be necessary to learn to read the stellar script again in a new form.

Let us try to make ourselves worthy to do this; let us try to

read the stellar script in the form now given to us. For in fact it is nothing other than a reading of the script when we try to trace human evolution through the Saturn, Sun and Moon periods of evolution, right up to the Vulcan period.<sup>9</sup> But we must recognize the context in which we wish to decipher the stellar script today. Let us make ourselves worthy of it! It is far from insignificant when we hear that the Grail was at first taken from its proper location and for a season was not externally perceptible. Let us regard our studies of anthroposophy as a renewed search for the Grail, and let us try to learn to understand the meaning of what formerly spoke from subconscious depths of soul, then rose gradually into human consciousness. Let us try to transform this by degrees into a new and more conscious language! Let us try to explore a wisdom which will disclose to us the connection between the earthly and the heavenly, not relying on old traditions, but in the way in which it can be revealed today. [...]

### III

## THE QUEST AND THE QUESTION: PIERCING THROUGH MATERIALISM