

THE VOW OF POVERTY

"Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven".
"Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth".

---Matthew V, 3 and 5.

When first the discipline is recognized it is because his heart is vowed to poverty. This alone constitutes his discipleship.

The Mystic Recognition is not had upon outer planes. Persons do not bestow nor receive it. The heart evolves it and the Law accepts it. When the Vow is evolved, a bloom spreads over the sphere; the heart has put forth its vital sap, soon to burgeon into deeds which are its blossoms. This bloom is seen upon interior planes, where the cloud of ever-living witnesses hail the first promise of man's redemption. By this new vesture of the soul, the returning prodigal is seen while he is yet far from his Father's house. A toilsome path is still before him, but his face is turned towards his only home. Man has no abiding home in Nature, for there he wanders desolate in the intimate and dreary companionship of his personal self-consciousness, which is but the dry husk of Life.

Where outward recognition appears to be, the true is rarely present. The two may go together, for reasons of outer work and service, for the Divine require visible agents among men. Permission may be given to this one or to that to take some pledge which they so persistently offer, self-blinded; self-deceived; such pledges are received at their real value and not at the estimate of would-be disciples. Or the Aspirant is permitted to look upon himself in the light of a disciple so far as he can. Such offers are accepted, such are received, even though Treachery, Failure and Ambition are the grim guides of the self-deceived Acolyte. The Law of Compassion has written this truth upon every atom in space---that man has a right to all that he can take from the Spirit, and that Those Who are One in that Spirit encourage every effort made towards It. Karma, which permitted both the making and the hearing of the man's demand, judges it by the Light which it emits and provides a reply wholly just. External acceptance of service, promise of aid in return for help given others, these cannot commit the Law and are not in themselves the Mystic Recognition; they are more often devoid of that enduring base. The disciple is only received upon that plane from which his offer proceeds, and not upon that from which he thinks it proceeds.

Yet let us not imagine that the Lodge names actual Agents, to abandon them, or for temporary purposes. If we judge these agents by our lesser lights we do but confuse ourselves. There will be but one in visible authority at a time---the senior one; the others, if there be others, are his junior brothers acting under him and with him, for such is the evolutionary hierarchy, and Law provides for the orderly re-emergence of its servitors. The juniors may fall away but not the senior, who IS senior because of this inability. This does not mean that his soul is sinless while still human. It means that, whatever his oscillations, he has evolved in his sphere a "holding center" from which he cannot break away. He is never more perfect than the age, the nation, and above all, those with whom he works admit of his being. When we are more perfect, then we have more perfect helpers. The helper is always in advance of those he leads; their greater attainment promotes his own. There is no waste of energy in that Center of Conservation called the Lodge; this is why the perfect souls do not dwell among us. Hence the occult crime of uncovering the fault---if fault there be---of the teacher or agent of this plane: it is in a

large part our own, for we have not as yet made it possible for the pure and perfect to dwell among us. We demand the greatest and are not ourselves the least. We judge not as the Perfect Ones judge. What, then, commands recognition? Only the true Vow of Poverty.

What is this Vow? Is it not giving up all for Truth, or for Peace, or for Mercy, as one sees these onesself, and abandoning all other beatitudes for self-indulgence in some favorite forms of virtue? The truth we see is relative; in embracing it we oft embrace some temperamental inclination of our own. Peace may be a false peace, and the sword of lawful war the only mercy. Kindness to preferred men and objects is that partiality which a Master has declared to be "one form of black magic," the magic of self. Humility is the favorite wife of the elemental devil; and outward ambitions, burned away, have root and substance upon interior planes of life---aye, and a firmer grasp there upon the struggling soul. These virtues are still the possessions of the personal self; they constitute those riches of the human mind which inhibit the entrance to the kingdom.

The Vow of Poverty is a power. It is the power to say, at each instant, and to the Law: "Thy will be done!" The power to abandon hopes, fears, plans, codes, thoughts. To see each moment dawn as 'twere the last, yet to live as though it were eternal. To have no rights, no wrongs, no mental possessions. To see all things, even the innermost, appear and disappear as Life now forms and now dissolves. To lay claim to nothing save to patience, and then to abandon that for a supreme content. Careless of self-vindication, careless even of justification for causes or persons with which one is identified; ready to explain onesself; equally ready to remain unexplained. Amid a deep interior peace to arise on outward planes, sword in hand, for the defence of principles and the maintenance of justice to others. Without aggression to defend most earnestly; to strike home, when needed, to the heart of hypocrisies and ambitions, waging war with every ally of material darkness, and most of all with one's own material mind; and all these while remote in spirit and calm in soul. On the outer plane there is no real peace, but only a base compromise, with which the flaming Christ Sword is forever at war.

Not all who have taken the Vow wear an aspect of external amiability. The mendicant is a stranger to professions of sweetness and light; he neither rejects nor invites sacrifice and pain. He blesses the Law when it gives and when it takes; he takes hold and quits alike indifferently so far as himself is concerned, and for his erring fellows greives in silence, not with that audible pity which is itself a form of self-complacency. Deep within his soul he has found the Unconscious. He knows It possesses naught because Itself is all. He strives to merge his personal consciousness into the Great Deep. His ever-widening mind becomes a breath and embraces the Universe; the Vow has born its harvest when it "inherits the earth", which is the conquest of the personal thought, and at last for him the beatitude is more mystically translated:

"Immortal are the votaries of the Breath; because theirs is the Realm of the Over-world."

Jaspar Neimand.

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