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SUNDAY SCHOOL LESSON

JESUS WASHES THE DISCIPLES' FEET

by Rev. R. C. Todd

LESSON John 13:1-17

Chap. 13

Lesson texts for the rest of the

Quarter, are taken from John's re-

cord of the last night before the Cru-

cifiction. It has often been thought

that John does not refer to the Sacra-

ment of the Last Supper. It is true

that he does not deal with it histori-

cally as do the other Evangelists. But

he does deal with it. As we said at

the beginning of these lessons, John

is not concerned to give an historical

outline of Jesus' life but rather to

give a doctrinal interpretation of the

teachings and practices of the Chris-

tian Church, as they were given by

Jesus and spiritually apprehended by

the Apostles. He has already given

us his doctrine regarding the Sacra-

ment of the Lord's Supper and Com-

munion with Christ in Chap. 6, in the

discourse concerning "bread from

heaven." In the text under consider-

ation, he refers to the last Supper

and introduces at it the episode of the

feet washing. His teaching here con-

cerns how Jesus deals with that which

keeps men from feasting on the

Bread of Life, — the sin that prevents

Communion with Christ. "Leave the

gift at the altar; first go and be re-

conciled with thy brother."

This incident fits quite naturally in-

to the context of the Supper as de-

scribed by the other Evangelists, espe-

cially in view of Luke 22:24-30. Here,

strife arises among the disciples as

to which is to be accounted the great-

est. Jesus chidingly tells them that

the greatest of all is the servant of

all. We see then, these disciples, heat-

ed, angry and resentful, after their

verbal battle, hustling into the super-

per room and seating themselves like

so many school-boys, refusing to cast

even a glance at the piteous and bas-

in containing water for the custom-

ary washing of feet. For any one of

them to condescend to wash the feet

of the others, would be a mark of his

inferiority.

It is significant that at the begin-

ning of this episode John lays, special

emphasis upon the divine position

and authority of Jesus. It was know-

ing that he was divinely superior to

them, that Jesus laid aside his gar-

ments and performed the slave's task

they had all refused. Although he

thought it not robbery to be equal

with God, he took upon himself the

form of a servant. (see Phil. 2:5-13).

It is this kind of action that is not only suitable to God, but also marks his character. It is an acted parable of the whole spirit of Jesus' ministry among men, of the significance of his sacrificial death, and of the mind that must also be in his disciples. The truest evidence of the life of God among men, is to be found in service performed with no thought of recompense, but solely as the expression of love.

That the disciple, Peter, should at first refuse to let Jesus wash his feet, expresses the reverence which the disciples felt for their Master, and their shame and humiliation at seeing the places of Master and servant reversed. None of them, unless it be Judas, could endure it, for they were all loyal. And so Peter refuses. His refusal is met with the rebuke: "If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me." Peter almost hears in the words a sentence of expulsion from the company of disciples, and as rapidly as he had withdrawn his feet from Jesus' touch, he now offers his whole body to be washed, as though to say: "If this washing is a symbol of me being yours, then wash my hands and head as well, wash all of me, for I want to be all yours."

Jesus throws light upon the real meaning of this feet washing action, when he says: "He that is washed, needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit; and ye are clean, but not all." He had something more in mind than bodily washing. Judas' feet were as clean as Peter's, but his heart wasn't. It was a traitor's heart, fundamentally at odds with friendship and love. Jesus intended by his action, not just to wash their feet but to wash from their hearts the hard and proud feelings which were so unbecoming to that night of communion and friendship. The example he set would do the trick, if the men's hearts were fundamentally loyal to him. The eleven were loyal, but Judas was not.

Now Jesus could very well have eaten with men who had dirty feet, but he could not have eaten that Last Supper, nor talk about his mission, with men who were angry with each other, glared angrily across the Table, declining to answer or pass what they were asked for, and in every way showing their malice and pride. He knew that this vicious temper was but the soil that stained the feet for an hour. None the less it must be washed off. And he did effectively wash it off, by washing their feet. From a group of angry, proud, insolent, quarrelling, and resentful men, they were changed in a matter of minutes into

a company of humble friends. They had seen themselves judged for the mean sinners — they were by this action of the Master and that judgment had humbled and cleansed them effectively so that they were able to enter upon the supper with pure conscience in the presence of the Master, with restored and increased affection for each other, and with deepened adoration for the marvellous wisdom and all-accomplishing grace of their Lord.

Christ does not suppose that because we sin after professing our love and faith, we have no real root of grace in us. If at present unworthiness prevails, (and in whom does it not?) He does not misunderstand as foolish men do, nor dismiss us from His company. He recognizes that our feet need washing. No sooner do any of us take a step in the life of today, than our footfall raises the dust which does not settle without dirtying us. This happens to those who are the truest disciples of Christ. But these stains must be washed away before we are fit for His company. Humbly we must own them; humbly accept their forgiveness, and their cleansing. He that sits down at Christ's Table with Him must sit down clean. He may not have come clean, but he must allow Christ to cleanse him. And if we have given Him our allegiance, the judgment of seeing Him crucified, is all we need to cleanse us.

Christians are to wash one another's feet, — as Christ did. They are to love one another, — as Christ loved. They are to serve one another, — as Christ served; even when that service seems to compromise dignity and man-made position. And no disciple of Christ needs to go very far to find feet that need washing, feet that are stained or bleeding with the hard ways that have been trodden. To wipe off some of the soil from other men's lives, is to follow Him who got Himself with the slave's apron.

SCOTCH BLOCK NATIVE IS ROYAL ASTRONOMICAL ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

Newly-elected president of the Royal Astronomical Association of Canada is Dr. John William Campbell, a Halton native. Born in the Scotch Block near Milton in 1889, he attended elementary schools in Waterloo and Dufferin counties and went to high school in Milton and Georgetown. In 1906 he took teacher training in Milton Model School and then taught for three years in the county.

He entered Queen's University in the fall of 1910 and graduated with first-class honours and an M.A. degree in 1913. He continued his studies at the University of Chicago, obtaining his Ph.D. degree in mathematical astronomy, and after a year's teaching at Wesley College, joined the army. At war's end, he became an instructor at the Khaki University, later took a position as astronomy professor at Iowa State University and a year later went to the University of Alberta as professor of mathematics, which position he has since held.

In 1917, Dr. Campbell, married Miss Ruby Kilgour of Cornwall. Their children, Donald and Elizabeth, are graduates of the University of Alberta and Donald served with the ROE in the war.

CEDARVALE

(last week)

Cedarvale W.I. held their monthly meeting on February 19 at the home of Mrs. W. Cunningham. Roll call was answered by each member presenting a home-made Valentine. Mrs. Cunningham gave the Scripture reading from Matthew, Chapter 8. Eleanor Griffin read a paper on "The Legend of St. Valentine" and Misses Blanche McKinnon and Doris Pines, who were visitors, demonstrated salads as a year round meal. Miss McKinnon was winner of a cent contest. An enjoyable half hour was spent over the tea cups at the meeting's conclusion.

Mrs. Gordon and Miss Eleanor Griffin spent the week-end with friends in Toronto.

Mr. Burt James of Acton visited at the home of Mr. Smith Griffin.

FATHER OF TEACHER DIES IN TORONTO

William Wallace Luke, father of Miss Florence Luke of the Georgetown High School teaching staff, passed away on Saturday, February 22, in Toronto. Predeceased by his wife, formerly Abigail Doidge he leaves a family of five children — Mrs. Marjorie Taylor, Mrs. Violet Mosher, Mrs. Marguerite Bowden, Miss Florence Luke and Albert Luke.

The funeral service was held on Monday from the William Sherrin Funeral Home, with interment following in St. John's Cemetery, Norway.

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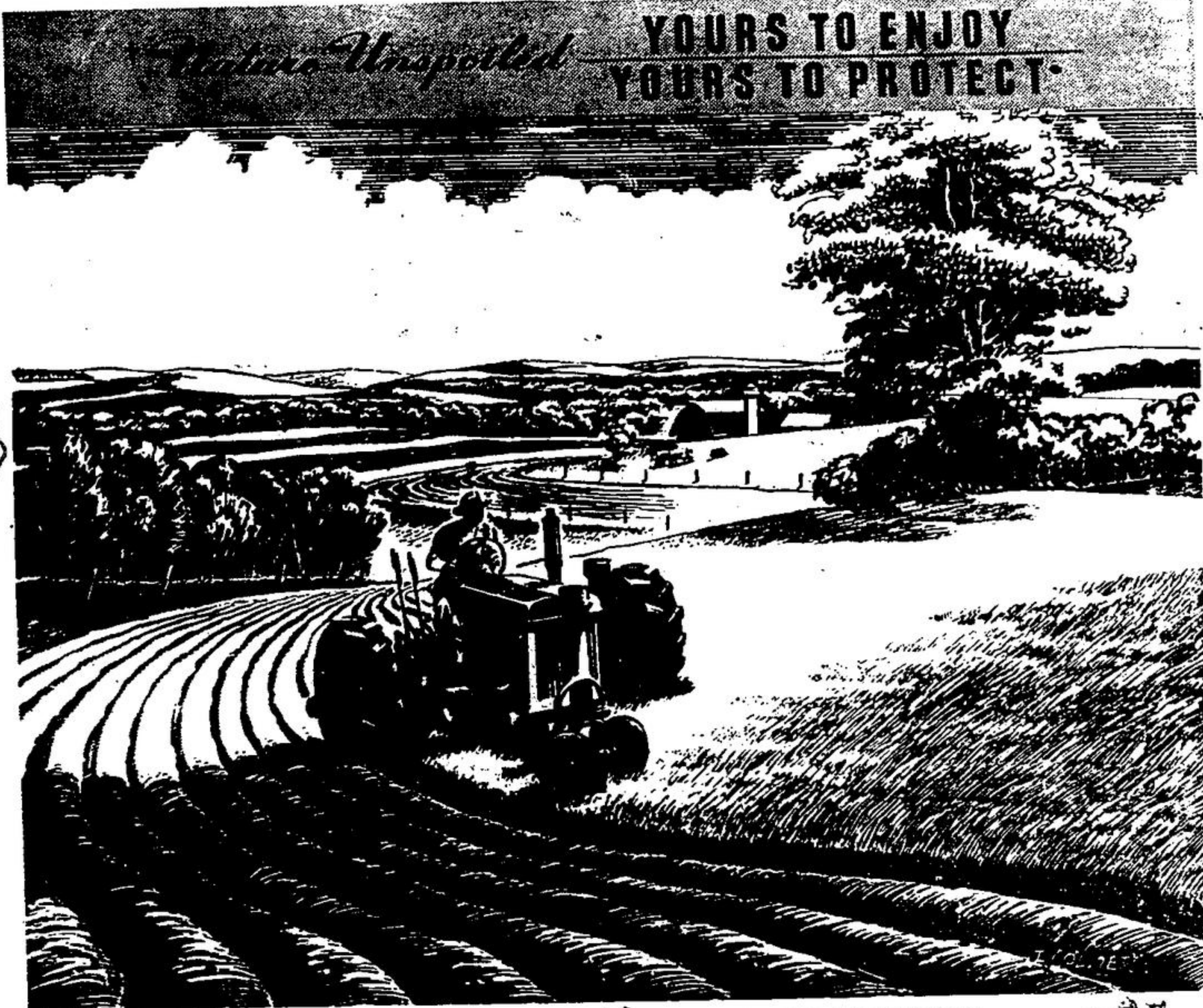
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* An excerpt from "Conservation Common Sense" by G. C. Toner, M.A., in CARLING'S CONSERVATION DIGEST, Vol. 1, No. 1, published by The Carling Conservation Club.

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