

THE QUIET HOUR

FOOT STEPS

Rev. G. H. Grose

I remember watching a programme once where the audio and the visual were combined to create an atmosphere of suspense. Very cleverly done it was, too. The noise you could hear was of footsteps. The picture on the screen was of a person all alone in a room, rather jumpy, somewhat nervous, listening to footsteps. It was quite easy to pick out the light footsteps of children, tripping along with a hop skip and a jump. Then came the quick clip-clip steps of a woman hurrying for a bus perhaps. The postman's steps could be clearly recognised, too, coming along the road, stopping every now and then to mount the riser to some front door and leave his letters in the box. Quite different were the steps of a young man, whistling as he made his way along. The slow, somewhat slouching steps of a couple out for a stroll together contrasted with the clop-step clop-step of a cripple making his way from the opposite end of the street. After a pause there came a light whispering step, rubber-soled feet, halting now and then as if the owners were looking behind them to make sure they were not being followed; looking above to make sure they were unobserved. The tension builds up as the rustle of feet comes nearer, and almost inaudible matter of voices gives way to silence. Sounds are almost imperceptible. Along with the figure on the screen one strains an ear to catch the slightest sound which might indicate whether the marauders are still approaching or whether they have passed. Dead silence is broken only by an unidentifiable rustle. Three, five, more seconds elapse, then there is the unmistakable grating of a key in the lock. Someone outside is trying keys very gently to discover which one will fit the lock. Quite suddenly, the picture on the screen changes. An ad for a nutritious beverage is flashed before you, and you take a deep breath—realizing as you do so that you have been holding your breath for about half a minute. Whew, what a relief: Only a T.V. Programme.

But have you ever thought how footsteps matter in real life? The sound of Teacher's footsteps on the verendah will set the class industriously to study. The sound of a child running home from school brings mother to the door; the crunchy step of father coming up the stairs means that homework can be forgotten temporarily while Papa is welcomed home—and even the dog has his tail wagging and nose dangerously near to the gap below the door seemingly careless of the fact that within seconds he might get a bang on his little wet nose. Then there is the reaction of a patient to the steps of a visitor—perhaps a son bringing a tiffin-carrier early in the morning, or a wife coming in the evening with a thermos flask of hot soup, made as only a wife knows how.

Our footsteps help make another person's day. Do we come with cheerfulness with good news?—Do we come reluctantly or willingly; in haste not wanting to stop and share a few moments or confidently, with some assurance to be registered even by the way we walk? The way we walk is part of our way of life—and part of the way of life for others also! Do you remember hearing the song of the *moochi* who sits in his little shop and can read the character of his customers by the condition of the shoes he is repairing? (I nearly said "the condition of their souls by the state of the soles he's mending"!).

I would like my footsteps to resound along the corridor of Time as those that indicate inward assurance and which bring comfort to others. But it's not easy. Whatever sort of person I may want to be, I can only be myself. You can't counterfeit your footsteps. You walk as you are.

Then let us listen again, for on our walk along the path of life we are not left to walk in isolation. I mean there's a sound of Another's footsteps that we can pick up, even though we cannot see the one Who journeys. These are the footsteps of God within our corridor of Times. It's his corridor. He made it. And if we are ready to listen we can set our footsteps in time with His. And if, we are ready 'to do the necessary', we can enjoy this companionship in the 'here and now' as well as beyond the door at the end of our corridor.

Gandhiji heard those footsteps and loved to sing of them:

"The night is dark, and I am far from home;
Lead Thou me on!
Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see the distant scene:
One step enough for me.
I was not ever thus, nor prayed that Thou
Shouldst lead me on.
I love to choose and see my path, but now
Lead Thou me on!
I lived the garish day, and, spite of fears,
Pride ruled my will: remember not past years.

We walk by faith and not by sight. One step at a time, purposefully, with God. "Therefore, be imitators of God, as beloved children. And walk in love.....".