

## Contentment

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WHAT a pleasure it is to meet anyone possessed of this rare and lovely virtue! Such a restful and yet, at the same time, bright and invigorating atmosphere surrounds them, blessing with refreshment and strength all with whom they come in contact.

What is the secret of its attainment and maintenance ? Is it only the fruit of natural disposition and temperament ? There is, truly, a species of contentment which seems to be the product of the constitution; the mere result of a harmonious compound of mental and physical elements, suitably environed. But this sort of contentment will soon wither in the rude, cold blasts of life. It requires sunshine, fair weather; and under stress of sorrow is very apt to give way utterly, and to leave the sufferer on a level with the born grumbler and hypochondriac. Is it that the person possessing it has no ambition, no desires, no stirrings after an unattained good, and so is content with anything ? That is indifference, not contentment. Content implies satisfaction, which again implies fulfilled desire. It is something other and more and greater than these.

What is most commonly understood by it may perhaps be thus defined — "the feeling which arises upon the satisfaction of our ordinary and natural wishes and desires"; — such as the attainment of success in our work in the world, the creation of congenial surroundings, the realizing of the love for which we sigh, and the like. Aye ? But time after time experiences rudely give the lie to our fond expectation of entering into rest by these means. How seldom to any, and to most how scarcely ever, are these "ordinary" desires even approximately satisfied ! And when they are, is contentment the invariable result ? Anything but it. The longed-for treasure grasped, we awake to find ourselves unsatisfied still; there is something within us which is restless and still unsatisfied. We imagined that these desires were the strongest we had, that these longings arose from the secret depths of our nature; and we find it is not so. The Inner, Higher Self is truer to its innate divinity than the Common Self believed; it refuses to be — it cannot be — content with such satisfaction. There is a thirst within the soul which the waters of earth may not quench; we rise from the feast, hungry still; the fuller our hands become, the emptier they are. This is not misty theorizing; everyday experience shows us that there are desires in the heart deeper, stronger than the desires of comfort, wealth, knowledge, fame, power, love. And it is felt, vaguely, sadly that the hardest tiling remains yet to be done — namely, to discover [Page 20] first what these desires are, and then how they may be satisfied. Till this has been done, contentment is to us a word of eleven letters, and nothing more.

This desire of desires, then, is — what ? The yearning of the Divine spark which is the core of the soul, as the soul is the core of the body, which refuses to be ignored or smothered, which ever struggles to return to the Central Fire, whence it emanated that it might by the accumulation of new experiences add

to infinity — if so wildly paradoxical a phrase may be permitted.

"Son of Eternity, fettered in time, and an exile, the Spirit  
Tugs at its chains evermore and struggles like flame ever upwards."

Only when the desire dies away into the fruition of consummation, when "the Dewdrop slips into the Shining Sea", will perfect contentment, the fulness of the "peace that passes understanding", be known. But even here and now foretastes of that crowning bliss may be realized. In proportion as the aspirations of the Spirit are encouraged, in strictly answering proportion will the man come to feel the blessedness which is his birthright.

Yes ! Even here and now it is possible for us to attain to a state in which joy shall have lost its power to intoxicate, sorrow its power to prostrate; and this, without becoming insensible to either joy or sorrow. The surface of the sea may be ruffled, but down underneath, deep, calm, utter content will be the habitual state. We can so live that we shall be satisfied without the pleasures of life, if they fall not to our lot; not that we have ossified ourselves, cauterized the heart till all capacity of feeling has gone out of it: but because, possessing the greater, the soul can do without the less. Content, too, mark well, with a bright, cheerful contentment, not with a mere passive calm; the soul so rich in its possessions that it is invigorated with a gladsomeness that gives it strength to endure and bear all things; to delight in all pure joys, to rise above sorrows, and to shed an influence on all around, to bring with it an atmosphere of happiness and peace. This was that of which Paul wrote when he said he had learned, in whatsoever state he was, therewith to be CONTENT.

"LEARNED !" Mark well the word. Not in a day, not in a year, can this lessons of lessons be learned. But at any time, so good is the Soul of Things, the first beginning can be made. Just where and as we are we can open our book and begin the study. To struggle is to rest, to renounce is to enjoy, to aspire is to be content. Why fret our hearts to death over trifles, when by devotion to the One Reality we can attain all in one ?