

Lonely Musings

by Anonymous

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Thou that art directing thy will to the attainment of perfection — thou that wilt be content with nothing short of the highest, hearken to a description of the road thou must travel.

Think not that thou shalt attain in a day the power even to recognise the illusions of sense for what they are. Many a time shalt thou sink and wallow in the mire, but at each withdrawal it shall seem to thee more hateful than before, and if only thy will be directed aright the God in thee wil not long leave thee wandering. And think not that thy road will be a pleasant one. After some few gleams of brightness to refresh thee, it will lead through the torture-chamber, and when thou art led there thou needest not to stir a finger, for all shall be done for thee, and thy soul shall endure searching torture, and of thy loftiest thoughts and most impassioned dreams shall be formed the rack on which thou shalt be stretched.

Nor when one fancy is over and the cords are loosened, imagine that thou art then to be released. Thou mayest spend many years — perchance even thy whole life — in this chamber, and again and again shalt thou be [Page 18] stretched on the rack so soon as thou art able to bear it. And happy is it for thee if between the pangs thou dost not fall away from this high calling — weaving again the entanglements of the senses — for them thou dost but repeat the previous torment and dost not advance to the more subtle tortures that await the spirit. But if there be no falling away, then are the intervals filled with a peace and bliss which is a foretaste of the joys beyond, and the soul like one escaped from a dark dungeon revels in the light of day.

To use an apt simile given by St. John of the Cross, this purgative affliction — this subtle torture — is the effect of the divine light on the soul that is being purified, and is analogous to the action of fire on fuel. "For the first action of material fire on fuel is to dry it, to expel from it all water and all moisture. It then blackens it and soils it, and drying it by little and little, makes it light, and consumes away its accidental defilements which are contrary to itself. Finally, having heated and set on fire its outward surface, it transforms the whole into itself, and makes it beautiful as itself. Thus fuel subject to the action of fire retains neither active nor passive qualities of its own except bulk and specific weight, and assumes all the qualities of fire. It becomes dry, then it glows, and glowing, burns; luminous, it gives light, and burns much brighter than before. All this is the action of fire".

Thus in the secret chamber of affliction and divine contemplation is the soul consumed away and transformed, though few there are who in a single incarnation are strong enough to endure the complete purging. But blessed are they who are found worthy even partially to undergo this suffering. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receith".

One of the first great griefs of this dark night of the soul, which may be compared to the drying of the fuel under the action of the fire, is that thou art no longer able to love or admire any of thy former friends, who nevertheless remain well worthy of thy love and admiration; nor canst thou any longer take joy in any earthly thing, however innocent, for everything with thee seems to be blasted into aridity, and except for the latent knowledge that thou art set towards the highest, thou feelest as if thy whole life were turned into pain. But this also ought to be a help in thy passage through the dark night, for if thou seest nothing worthy around thee, then shouldst thou the more strenuously set thy soul towards that ideal beauty — that divine wisdom and goodness which already is thy lode-star.

And the passion that was in thee — the unsatisfied desire that was like a serpent gnawing at thy heart, — shall now be re-directed. Thou art now **[Page 19]** set to lift the veil of Isis — not that of any mortal maiden — and thy one and only aim shall henceforth be — call it by what name thou wilt — the mystical marriage on the Hierophant, the at-one-ment of the seven principles of man, the union of the soul with God.

No longer with high-drawn sentimental feelings, no longer with hysterical sobbings, shall the spirit make its presence known, but with a face hard set amidst a world of practical men, thou bearest now within thee the hidden life of which the world knows not, but which is now to thee the only worth living; and as all strong emotion has come to thee not as a binding but as a loosening from the chains of sense, so that thought of earthly society and companionship that were so sweet are now merged in the desire to be at one with the life of the whole world, in the intense longing that the thought and aspiration of all Humanity should become the very pulsations of thy being.