

OVERCOMING DEATH

Some time ago it was my privilege to address you upon the subject of “The Keynote of Christianity,” and in the course of that talk we called up before our mind the meeting of Pilate with Christ, where the great and momentous question was asked: “What is truth?” Let us look at that picture once again. Yonder stands Pilate, the representative of Caesar, and by virtue of that fact an embodiment of the highest temporal power, a ruler of the whole world, with power over life and death, a man before whom all tremble. And before him stands the Christ, meek and lowly, yet far greater, for while this man Pilate has power over the present world, which is evanescent and temporal, he is himself subject to death. But Christ is Lord of Life, Prince of a spiritual kingdom that passes not away. He does not then answer the question of Pilate “What is Truth,” but on another occasion, he said: “I am the Way, the Truth and the Life,” and also, “The Truth shall set you free.”

It is not to be denied that we are now under the law of sin and subject to death. The great question is therefore: how to find the truth that shall really and truly set us free; and for the purpose of finding the way, let us take a look into the dawn of time, when infant humanity first came upon earth. According to the Bible, a mist went up from the earth as the crust of the cooling planet dried, and when we look at this epoch as depicted in the memory of nature, we find a wonderful tropical growth of gigantic size covering the basin of the earth where now the Atlantic Ocean is. Truly, it was a veritable garden, but the mist was so dense that the light of the Sun could never penetrate it, yet infant humanity lived in this paradise as children of the Great Father. They had bodies then as now, but were not aware of them, although able to use them, just as we use our digestive apparatus without being conscious thereof. And though they were unable to see physically, the spiritual sight was a faculty still possessed by every one. Thus they saw each other soul to soul; there was neither guile nor hypocrisy, but *truth* was with everyone.

Gradually, however, the mist cleared and gathered into an enormous cloud, surrounding the earth. Simultaneously these children of the mist began vaguely to see one another; they became more and more encrusted in their dense physical bodies and perceived at last that this vehicle is a part of the human being. But at the same time they gradually lost touch with the spiritual world; they no longer saw the soul clearly as heretofore, even the voice of the spiritual hierarchs who had hitherto guided them, as a father guides his children, became faint and dim. In the course of time the cloud which hovered above this valley had condensed sufficiently in the cooling atmosphere so that it burst and sent down upon the earth a flood that drove these children of the mist up to the highlands, where, in the clear atmosphere, under the arch of the rainbow, they saw one another face to face for the first time. Gradually the great illusion that “we are bodies,” took possession of all; the soul was no longer seen, neither could they then hear the voice of the Great Father who had cared for them during their infancy in yon paradisiacal state. Humanity was orphaned, adrift in the wilderness of the world. Life became a struggle with Death.

Soon the majority of mankind seemed to forget that there had been such a blissful state, although the story lived in song and legend, and although there dwelt, and dwells in, every human breast a deep inherent recognition of this truth, a memory of something that has been lost, something more precious than anything that the world can give. And there

is therefore in every human breast a deep yearning after that spiritual companionship which we have lost through identification with our lower natures. We find an embodiment of this longing in the Tannhauser, who entered the Mt. of Venus to gratify his lower desire. After a while he longs for the world he left and pleads with Venus to allow him to depart that he may enjoy again the suffering, the tortures of a love unrequited, for he has tired of that which she had freely given him. As he says:

*A God can love without cessation,
But under laws of alternation,
We mortals need in changing measure
Our share of pain, as well as pleasure.*

That was the purpose when Humanity was led out of Atlantis into the present rainbow age; the law of alternation was given that we may reap as we have sown, that sorrow and joy may change as the seasons follow each other in unbroken sequence; and thus it must continue until the suffering engendered by our trespasses has demolished the chrysalis which now holds the soul fettered while the lower nature is feeding upon the husks of materiality. At first, mankind reveled in the power over the world and the pride of life was born; the lust of the eyes was great, but although “the mills of the Gods grind slowly, they grind exceedingly fine” and though we may attain to power, though health and prosperity may be our servants today, there comes a day when, like Faust, we feel that life is not worthwhile. And then begins the struggle spoken of by Faust to his friend Wagner in the following words:

*Thou by one sole impulse art possessed,
Unconscious of the other still remains,
Two souls alas are struggling in my breast
And battle there for undivided reign,
One to the earth with passionate desire
And closely clinging garment still adheres,
Above the mist the other doth aspire
With sacred ardor unto purer spheres.*

Paul also finds that there is within him a lower nature, “the cravings of the flesh,” that battles against the cravings and desires of the spirit, but Goethe, with the wonderful penetration of the Mystic, solves the great problem for us. “What we must do in order that we may attain liberation,” he says:

From every power that holds the soul in chains,
Man frees himself, when self-control he gains.

We may, like Pilate, have authority, perhaps not so great authority. But even suppose it were possible for anyone present to become a “ruler of the world,” and exercise authority over life and death of the whole of humanity, what would it profit him if he were not able to conquer and control himself? By means of physical aggression, Caesar, the master of Pilate (whom he represents) had conquered the world, all paid tributes to

him, and yet his kingdom was only for a few years. Then the grim specter of death came to end his life and his rulership in the physical world. Look to the other one, the Christ, who stood there meek and lowly, yet able to say, "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and whosoever believeth on Me shall not perish but have eternal life." The ruler of the world, despite all his seeming present power and pomp, is still subject to death, but the One who had learned to have power over himself, the One who had conquered his lower nature, the body of death, had thereby made himself the Lord of Life, with a kingdom that is eternal in the heavens. And it is the duty of everyone of us to follow in His footsteps, for did He not say, "these things which I do shall ye also do, and greater." Every one of us is a Christ in the making, a conqueror in the sign of the cross.

And when shall this be? When the feeling of Egoism imprisoned the spirit in the body, we lost sight of the soul, and death became our portion. As soon as we overcome this feeling of Egoism by Altruism, as soon as we forsake and forget self and become illumined by the Universal Spirit, we shall have conquered the great enemy. Then we are ready to mount the cross to soar thence into the higher spheres with that glorious cry of triumph "Consummatum est," it has been accomplished.

The Way is by Service.

The Truth is that by service we serve ourselves, for we are all one in Christ.

The Life is the Life of the Father, in Whom we live and move and have our being, and in Whom, consequently, there can be no death.