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THE SOUL'S QUESTION—WHITHER AM I BOUND?

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THIS is the question which the soul in every age and every clime has reiterated. This is the question which of all others presses home the nearest, and with the most imperative urgency upon the human mind, involving as it does all that is important in man's eternal welfare. What if we learn how fearfully and wonderfully we are made? What if we comprehend our lordship over space, and even learn to realise the methods of creation, until we, ourselves, can model after the Creator in controlling them, and make our knowledge a power by which we put the material universe beneath our feet? We may understand that though we count but as units in the grand scheme of human existence, still we never lose the actual fact of our personal individuality; that we live for ever, each one as a god-like identity; that we are larger and grander than even suns, stars and systems—which think not—mightier than the whole universe of matter, because we alone are endowed with an immortal spirit.

And yet, although we may realise all this, and rejoice in the divine Fatherhood of God, the question will arise, if this knowledge exists beyond the grave? Are the glorious beams of intellect quenched in death? Do we lose these transcendent powers when the light of our earthly life grows dim, and at length goes out, and all around is darkened?

These are questions which must be answered. In the day of our great sorrow, how earnestly do they press home upon us; they knock at the door of our hearts and demand entrance when our loved ones depart from us, importunately questioning whither they have gone. Mankind has reiterated the question of that philosophy which purports to interpret the problems of life; but, alas! it is only life present. Philosophy cannot follow life's issues into the realm of spirit. And yet, says philosophy, we behold eternity written upon every form of matter; the passing seasons whisper, "we will come again." The sighing winds of winter, the burning beams of summer, all return with their recurring season; the mournful voices of autumn, as they sing the requiem of the flowers, and blooms that are passing away, still whisper, "another year we shall come again." Eternity is written in the blue heavens; the stars which have disappeared from the gaze of the astronomer, live still in space. All things return in reconstructed beauty; but the most beautiful of all, the form that we have best loved—must the noblest work of God—man—perish, then, and leave

us alike un instructed of his fate, and comfortless? The sweet vibrating tones of love, are they hushed for ever beneath the waving grass of the silent tomb? And these questions are for the living as for the dead:—Whither am I bound? What is my destiny? All other subjects of living interest cluster around the theme of immortality; all else sinks into insignificance before it.

The more we reflect upon the nature of human action, the more do we find in it notes of instinctive preparation for the future. We build for to-morrow, we gather riches for to-morrow; all our stores of learning are laid up with a hope of applying them to the uses of the future. The moment which we call the present is gone ere we can number its gifts. If there be no hereafter for the spirit, then is the soul—the great governing power of humanity—the only failure in the universe.

I do not propose to reiterate now the evidences of the soul's immortality; I do not press home this question upon those thinkers of the nineteenth century who have received the full assurance of immortality from the demonstrated presence of the immortals themselves. With the believers in spirit-communion I need but consider that which attempts to solve the question, Whither am I bound? To answer this, I know that the modern Spiritualist can gaze through the open gate of the hereafter, and that his eyes have been permitted to look down the shining corridors of eternity. It is true this most blessed privilege has only been accorded to the few exceptional persons known as mediums; nevertheless, as the seers of the nineteenth century give in their testimony from every land of civilization, our part is on behalf of those who are not thus highly favoured by immediate intercourse with the revelators of the spheres, to offer you a summary of the knowledge that has thus been gleaned and attested by the witness of many thousands, whose testimony has been rendered under circumstances that rendered collusion impossible; to rehearse the generalities of the answer which the immortals themselves have brought to the weighty query—Whither am I bound?

The first link of evidence in which we find a response, is in the soul's own intuitive recognition of its immortal nature, and the warnings of conscience that compensation and retribution must follow the results of earthly action. Another of the witnesses concerning the soul's destiny hereafter, is to be found in the universality of the belief which has ever prevailed in the wise and beneficial doctrine of eternal progress.

In ancient times the universal belief of mankind was, that this earth was a probationary state, wherein the soul was

compelled to pass through conditions of preparation for the hereafter.

The doctrine of metempsychosis, or the transmigration of souls, prevailed throughout the East; but, repulsive as that doctrine appears to us now, it originated in the philosophical belief that every human being was, to some extent, allied to the animal creation; that the passions, which are inherent in the human form, are represented in the various types of the animal kingdom; and that those who preserved, in a marked degree, those tendencies that distinguish the lower creatures must, of necessity, return to earth at death, and inhabit the form whose attributes the spirit exhibited.

This idea was based on the belief that earth was the only sphere of probation for the soul of man; hence we perceive that these views, although originating in the recognition of man's material nature, and his alliance with the animal kingdom, nevertheless take their peculiar shape from ignorance of the grander vistas of a progressive hereafter, which the spheres of the modern spiritual philosophy describe. Limited as were the perceptions of the divine economy implied by a *belief* in the metempsychosis, the central idea embodied a recognition of the law of progress and probation for the soul; also, the absolute necessity of perfect purity before we can enter upon those higher conditions of spirit-life which we are accustomed to call Heaven. This doctrine, too, recognized the kindly alliance which man sustains with all creation, and inculcated tenderness toward the lower creatures. The universality of this belief may be traced by the scholar through all the beliefs of the Orient, except amongst the Jews. We find no trace of it in the Old Testament; but then its pages contain no proof, no direct teaching of the soul's immortality, and we can only vaguely infer from it that there were some sects amongst the Jews who entertained such a belief. In the New Testament Christ the Spirit not only taught the immortality of the soul, but also that our immortal existence was fashioned by the deeds done in the body. The central idea of His doctrine was ever that the kingdom of heaven is within us, and is born of our own pure acts and thoughts.

There are two points to which, in connection with His teachings, we would call your attention: In the very moment when the parting spirit of the gentle Nazarene might have truly beheld the realities of the hereafter, He uttered to the penitent thief those memorable words, "*To-day* shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

The theology of Christianity teaches that Jesus did not ascend into Heaven till the third day. Where, then, was that

Paradise in which the sufferers were to meet on the first day—aye, even on the very day when their mortal eyes were for ever closing upon earth? All commentators upon Oriental beliefs declare that the ancients believed Paradise was an intermediate state; a realm where the discipline of human life was still continued, and the pilgrim soul passed from sphere to sphere, in the fulfilment of its progressive destiny.

Again: one of the companions of Jesus—Peter—affirms, in the epistle ascribed to him, that Jesus went and preached to disobedient spirits in prison. Can we suppose that He whose meek and gentle heart could so hardly brook the sight of sorrow that He wept at the tomb of Lazarus, could go to that region of gloom for the alleviation of woe, and work in vain? If the wretched spirits in prison to whom Jesus preached were incapable of reform and progress, would he have mocked them with his teachings? Wherefore did Christ descend to teach the spirits in prison at all? The fact that He is said to have done so is in itself a gospel of progress and hope. How should we rejoice that at last the dark pall which superstition, bigotry, and ignorance has woven around us is rent in twain, and the gloom of the grave is converted into the sunlight of immortal life! The testimony, however, which is given by the very lips of the Founder of Christianity concerning the existence of Paradise or a mid region of progress, is one of the strongest points which the Christian Scriptures afford concerning the soul's destiny hereafter.

I shall now refer to the general features of agreement in which the spirits of the nineteenth century answer the question, Whither am I bound? And first, we must consider the spirits' teachings concerning the nature and locality of the spirit world, in which the hosts of returning intelligences, who are now in our midst, claim to be dwelling. Whilst they speak to you in many varied tongues, whilst they give you widely different information concerning their individual conditions, there are certain specialities in which all communicating spirits agree. They affirm that all creation witnesses of three and only three primitive elements; these they call matter, life, and spirit. They hold that these three elements are imperishable and eternal; that in all forms of being they exist, and that all varieties of being can be resolved back into these three primal elements; that matter is the passive, unintelligent element moved upon; life—with its dual attributes of attraction and repulsion—permeates all matter; spirit, the universal, active, powerful governing element, controls and animates both the others, and is known by its attributes of will or mind. All this science admits, but adds that, if these elements are primaries, they are never

exhibited apart; that wherever we behold the form of matter, there it is permeated by life; and that matter and life take their highest forms through the chemistry of atoms in man. Spirits proclaim that these three elements exist apart, and that they are three original, primal, and yet separate, existences. They claim that whilst the forms of matter exist, as long as life inheres in them, that life exists without the form of material things. The walls around you, the floor beneath your feet, the garments you wear, all things you call *inanimate*—these are, in reality, permeated by the element of life. The cohesion that exists in the particles of this garment maintains its integrity only by virtue of the life within it. The day shall come when the garment waxes old, when the particles of matter shall cease to cohere, and the scattered atoms become a thing of death and dust; the form crumbles, but the life remains for ever.

What is our witness? Spirit affirmations and clairvoyance. The eye of the spirit, embodied and disembodied, not only reveals the fact that there is life in me, but that when I undergo the transformation of death all that made me the real man has passed away with the spirit; all the attributes of matter remain in the crumbling dust; weigh the form, and you shall not detect a difference that would turn the scales against a single hair; nothing of matter has passed away and yet the man is dead. Where is the life? Oh, scientists, ye who claim that matter is eternal—that there is no such thing as annihilation, how can you account for the absence of the solemn mystery of life; for the sudden departure of that magnetic force or cohesion which bound together the atoms of the now crumbling form? The eye of clairvoyance perceives moreover every form that in the past has ever existed. We call these perceptions mere images. What are images? Are they not the shadows of that which now has or else has had an existence? Each shadow predicates a substantial origin—each image a reflection from a reality. But let us glance at the claims which the spirits make concerning the nature of the spirit-country. They assert that all that has ever been born of matter dies and gives back its material part to earth again, but that the real force, which is the life essence, remains an entity for ever in the spirit-country, and it is of this element, the life principle, that the spirit-world and all it contains is composed. Age after age have the temples, palaces, houses, cities and villages which man has built, flourished, decayed and passed away from human ken, but their forms still remain, and are perpetuated in the soul-world, which permeates this globe. Even now upon its surface the soul of all things is quivering and throbbing in every

existing form. The mortal eye beholds not the real existence, for that is the invisible life; the outer form is but the mould in which it is represented. Within is the spirit, which in the disintegration of death becomes the permanent and essential being. Thus, then, as the generations of material forms decay, their essences remain, and form the constituent elements and things of the spirit-country. Thus of the generations of man whom age after age you have seen depart; millions after millions passing through the silent gates of death into what you have deemed the oblivion or sleep of death, we know now they neither sleep nor even pass away from you! The garment drops off, and as it falls the living spirit stands in the realities of the interior soul or spirit-world—the soul-world, that permeates every form of matter, and after the transformation of mortal death becomes the second sphere of existence.

It would seem, from the various communications that have been given by spirits during the last twenty years, that there are various ascending spheres or states in which the soul dwells; that whilst all the forms of earth have passed into this spirit-country, there are great diversities in its conditions. It is difficult for man to comprehend the character of that immortality which includes the vast and almost illimitable freight of human life that has passed from earth during past ages, except we remember that law of matter which proves that the finer penetrates the grosser and denser almost to infinity.

Surrounding this earth are various strata of atmosphere filled with spaces, the extreme extenuation of which you cannot follow to any ultimate point. By analogy, therefore, you may apprehend how the sublimated existences of spirit-life permeate the realms of space; and how, in like manner, the finer and more attenuated realms of spirit-life permeate the denser, and that in multiform conditions beyond man's power to calculate.

Again, there is one law of physics which defines the conformation of this spirit-world—it is this:—that as the finer particles of matter radiate outwards by centrifugal action, so do the finer particles of the spiritual element fly off from the centre, until, during countless ages, they have formed zones around the central sphere, encompassing it with myriads of refined and ever-refining belts of atmosphere.

We must now briefly notice the condition of that soul-world which lies nearest and is most intimately connected with this earth. This spirit-sphere is that which, in point of progress, you may call the second. Remember that all forms of matter are permeated by the soul-world, and it requires no actual distance, in point of space, to define different spheres. As the

elements of life pervade every part of matter, so does the soul-world penetrate all space; yet in point of proximity, the second sphere of mortal existence is immediately within this earth, and is, in fact, a duplicate of earth, differing only in its states of mind—for to the inhabitants of this sphere, it is dark and comfortless, and unlighted by the beams of that physical sun which constitutes the life of this planet. In the spirit-world death effects this stupendous change, namely, that whilst here all you possess you acquire from the external; in spirit-life every object you behold, and the entire of your possessions and surroundings are outwrought from within.

And, again, these surroundings are made up from the deeds and thoughts which have fashioned the soul in its earthly pilgrimage. In a word, those who live in this soul-world are merely the dwellers on the threshold of our own; they are the spirits of those who have not done with earth, whose earthly mission has not been fulfilled. Here they have to learn that stupendous lesson of spiritual existence, which teaches that God has given to every creature on this planet a work to do—no matter how small or how large.

This work, entrusted to us by the Great Spirit, must be performed through two methods—the one, the love of self, the impulse that makes us guard the integrity of our being; the other the love of our neighbour, the higher but equally imperative feeling which should impel us to regard his rights as our own, himself as an equal participator with us in all the privileges which God has bestowed upon us. In a word, the law of life is the law of love—that love that includes self and the neighbour alike. What but love to the creature is love to God, exhibited in acts of kindness to his creature?

Whenever the spirits of men on earth have realized that dual law, and have striven to follow its injunctions; whenever through the action of universal love to all men the soul has performed its mission fully on earth, then, and then only, does death come as the liberating angel, carrying us up to the mountains of transfiguration; and though we may stand like the "man of sorrows," despised and rejected of men, the garments of heavenly whiteness which human love has woven around us will prove our wedding robe of passport into the realms of the glorious land we call Heaven. It is failure only in this divine element of human love that renders so many spirits mere *dwellers on the threshold*, dwellers in that sorrowful realm where they must remain until all life's unfulfilled duties are performed. Within this world of unblessed spirits are the various grades of crime, whose wretched types ourselves have daily seen in life's darkest scenes. Their surroundings cor-

respond with the passions that possess their souls; hence, they live in darkness—selfish, icy cold, or anger's burning heat—sensual filth, or brutal degradation, just as their own deformed spirits create the images that are projected from within. You shrink from this repulsive picture, but have you ever asked yourselves what should be the hereafter for the sensualist, the miser, the murderer, tyrant or hypocrite? What for those who have misused the talents God has entrusted to them in any direction—who have wasted life, and made of their souls a shipwreck? Oh, believe the spirits—all such are dwellers on the threshold, and must continue the life they have led on earth—for to earth they are bound in chains themselves have forged, till time, remorse and progressive effort shall bring deliverance, and send them upward and onward. Each is in the sphere himself has made; but yet let it be remembered that even in this sphere of retribution, God's punishments are all reformatory—His penalties not as the vengeance man takes upon his fellow man, but are methods of discipline and instruction, and incentives to progress.

Mourn not for the dwellers on the threshold, even whilst you listen to the voices of these unhappy spirits, and learn why they suffer, and why they call upon you to search into the realities of their miserable condition. To gain strength and instruction from you, and, in return, inform you of the stern realities that follow as inevitable results of an ill-spent life, are the purposes of communion with these unhappy spirits: and hence you, too, may become the Christ-like preachers to the disobedient spirits in prison, whilst they shall gain from you the sympathy and guidance which false theologies and false conditions of society have deprived them of.

I shall but briefly refer to those brighter lands beyond this sphere of darkness. The sphere in locality next above the earth is inhabited by the radiant souls of little children, cared for by those blessed and purified spirits who have been deprived on earth of the joys of paternal life, but who still yearn for the sweet parental office.

In this bright realm there is no sin, and hence no darkness, sorrow, pain, or grief. The purity and innocence of its child-like people, the tender love of the teachers, and the unconsciousness of sin or woe in the pupils, make of this Summer-Land a realm of eternal bloom and beauty, a home of love, a land of light, and a Heaven where sorrow enters not.

Beyond this blessed sphere are found the realms of intellectual lore, or the spheres of knowledge. Here the glorious master-minds of earth still pursue the themes they loved, and continue the vast research for light, commenced on earth; here all

the great arcana of creation are unfolded, the mysteries of space displayed, and the spirit revels in the eternal panorama of God's universe for ever.

And still beyond this sphere, and beyond again, are worlds of life, where live the martyrs, sages, heroes, and earth's best and truest spirits, who, through suffering and the purgatorial fires of human griefs, have purged away all sin, and from their shining spirits outwork that glorious kingdom of which our finite mortal sense can form no other comprehension than to deem it Heaven; and whilst our highest conceptions of Heaven fail to realize the exceeding glory to which the good, the pure and beautiful of earth have risen, spirits still rehearse the tale of higher spheres, higher and grander still.

We may not, even in thought, follow the soul in its celestial flights beyond the dim conceptions which we, as mortal beings, entertain of earthly happiness; enough for us to know that progress is eternal, and that in the Father's many mansions our spirit's aim and flight will meet no let or hindrance, save our finite capacity for never-ending bliss—no pause in that eternal pilgrimage through realms of light and glory where there shall be no sun, no moon nor stars, but God Himself shall be the light of the beautiful kingdom for ever and for ever. It is enough for us to know that He is there—that His hand conducts us through the spaces, and opens the glories of eternity to every soul! It is enough for us to know that, in obedience to His mandate of progression, angel voices are calling, "Come up higher!" from every shining sphere to which our feet are bound!

ECCE HOMO.

Oh, Christ! Thou hope of men!
 When Thou shalt come again,
 Through Truth's new birth,
 May all the fruits of peace,
 Be found in rich increase,
 Upon the earth.

Then shall the song of sweet accord,
 Sung by the heavenly hosts of yore,
 To hail the coming of their Lord,
 Sound through the ages evermore.

LIZZIE DOTEN.