

A Beginner's Sorrows

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[Page 18] REAPING the fruit of rightly-spent lives, some of those now living started this new stage of their existence with a decided preponderance of the Higher over the Lower Self. The same law, working reversely, is the cause that others have started with as decided a preponderance of the Lower over the Higher Self. The former is a born "saint"; the latter a born brute. Yet are both *men*; and the saint may em brutalize himself, the brute, sanctify. Only in either case it must be at the cost of terrible effort, downward or upward as the case may be. The one may crucify the flesh, and rise again in the resurrection of life; the other may do what Bunyan meant when he wrote of some who "fight their way to hell over the Cross of Christ."

But in the average man — such as you and I, reader — the two Selves co-exist (so to speak) in a state of more or less unstable equilibrium. Neither can be given the governance except at the price of much bitterness — whether of shame and remorse, or of unsatisfied cravings which die very slowly. The struggle may not be so severe as in the first-named exceptional cases, but it is quite severe enough. It is a long time before the upward path (not to speak further of the other) grows smooth to the feet. At the outset, it seems generally as if difficulty only led to difficulty, and the aspirant feels entangled in a maze from which there seems no outlet.

How? In this way, for one:

Moved by a ray of Light which pierces through the fog of the material and touches his innermost spirit, and which may be coloured with the hue of the creed-window through which it comes, or pure from the fount of the Absolute, one of us — one of the average class — dares to aspire. And he learns and feels that the first step is to master the Lower Self. He cannot withdraw from the world; he has to mix with his fellows in business and social relations, to do his daily work, to come into contact with low and mephitic influences. He finds the task arduous beyond expectation; he fails repeatedly; but the Light fascinates [Page 19] him and he rises again and struggles on. He begins with the coarsest aspect of the Lower, and after a prolonged conflict succeeds at last in reducing to control the fleshly appetites. He is master of his body as once he never dreamed of being. But the work is barely begun. Semi-physical tendencies, semi-sensuous proclivities, await him beyond the grossly material; and beyond them again are lying in ambush what theologians call the purely "spiritual" evils. But the Light shines, and he fights on. He wars now, daily, hourly, with such subtle foes as conceit, vanity, love of applause, censoriousness, envy, contempt, and a hundred others, each with a hundred ramifications and sub-ramifications, all mutually interlacing like jungle underwood. And as if this were not enough, he discovers a new source of sorrow.

He has struggled to live in a wise silence; it seems to him that he has simply become sullen. In

abstaining from the faults and follies of those around him, he is alarmed to find himself in danger of growing morose. Though the centre has shifted from one region to another, he finds it is still in the Lower Self. Avoiding Scylla, behold Charybdis! How to cease to have anything in common with the gross amusements and frivolous occupations of his fellows, and yet to retain quick and vivid sympathies towards them, is a problem found increasingly difficult of solution.

At last it dawns — as flashes — on him. He had always taken for granted that he loved his kind; the "Enthusiasm of Humanity" had long been a favourite theme of his. And he is sorely disquieted to find — now that the tumult of the senses is somewhat hushed — that it is not the silver tone of Love which is heard in his heart. "Heart? *have* I a heart?" he is tempted to ask, despondingly. If he could only *love* his fellow-men! if he could only go out towards them with an ebbless tide of sympathy and affection! Then there would be no danger of his un-humanizing while seeking to develop himself. While grave and silent, abstemious and self-restrained, he would yet be tender and gentle, quick to respond, swift to help. But how can Love be compelled? how can he *will* himself to love?

Is this your case, reader? Be comforted. Listen, and think. Life is Love; the Higher Self is Life; therefore, *the Higher Self is Love*. Do not be discouraged; only persevere. As the Lower Self is ever more and more subordinated, the Higher Self *will* rise, though, perhaps, gradually, imperceptibly, as a Northern sunrise. But it *will* rise. And as the Higher Self comes more and more into the field, there will come gentleness and tenderness and unutterable, self-annihilating Love. It is only a question of time. Have faith, and have patience. [Page 20]

And in the meantime, to the best of your ability act, speak, and even (so far as is possible) think as you would act, speak, and think if you did *feel* as you long to feel. There will be no hypocrisy in this. The engineer who cut a deep, wide channel, in the dry rock is no hypocrite, although the result of his labour is the skeleton of a river without its soul; for he is only making a course along which the waters will *run*, presently. So with you. Cut deep and wide the channel, though your heart seems as dry as the Sahara. For sometime you will reach a point where a few more strokes — and lo! either by tiny but ever-growing tricklings, or in one glad mighty rush, the waters come, and learning what it is to *Live*, you shall learn what it is to *Love*.