

THE THREE DESIRES

Ambition, Life and Comfort

THE first three of the numbered rules of "Light on the Path" must appear somewhat of an unequal character to bracket together. The sense in which they follow each other is purely spiritual. Ambition is the highest point of personal activity reached by the mind, and there is something noble in it, even to an Occultist. Having conquered the desire to stand above his fellows, the restless aspirant, in seeking what his personal desires are, finds the thirst for life stands next in his way. For all that are ordinarily classed as desires has long since been subjugated, passed by, or forgotten, before this pitched battle of the soul is begun. The desire for life is entirely a desire of the spirit, not mental at all; and in facing it a man begins to face his own soul. But very few have even attempted to face it; still fewer can guess at all at its meaning.

The connection between ambition and the desire of life is of this kind. Men are seldom really ambitious in whom the animal passions are strong. What is taken for ambition in men of powerful physique is more often merely the exercise of great energy in order to obtain full gratification of all physical desires. Ambition pure and simple is the struggle of the mind upwards, the exercise of a native intellectual force which lifts a man altogether above his peers. To rise – to be preeminent in some special manner, in some department of art, science, or thought, is the keenest longing of delicate and highly-tuned minds. It is quite a different thing from the thirst for knowledge which makes of a man a student always – a learner to the end, however great he may become. Ambition is born of no love for anything for its own sake, but purely for the sake of oneself. "It is I that will know, I that will rise, and by my own power."

Cromwell, I charge thee, fling away ambition;
By that sin fell the angels.

The place-seeking for which the word was originally used, differs in degree, not in kind, from that more abstract meaning now generally attached to it. A poet is considered ambitious when

138

he writes for fame. It is true; so he is. He may not be seeking a place at court, but he is certainly seeking the highest place he knows of. Is it conceivable that any great author could really be anonymous, and remain so? The human mind revolts against the theory of the Baconian authorship of Shakespeare's works, not only because it deprives the world of a splendid figure, but also because it makes of Bacon a monster, unlike all other human beings. To the ordinary intelligence it is inconceivable that a man should hide his light in this purposeless manner. Yet it is conceivable to an occultist that a great poet might be inspired by one greater than himself, who would stand back entirely from the world and all contact with it. This inspirer would not only have conquered ambition but also the abstract desire for life, before he could work vicariously to so great an extent. For he would part with his work for ever when once it had gone to the world; it would never be his. A person who can imagine making no claim on the world, neither desiring to

take pleasure from it nor to give pleasure to it, can dimly apprehend the condition which the occultist has reached when he no longer desires to live. Do not suppose this to mean that he neither takes nor gives pleasure; he does both, as also he lives. A great man, full of work and thought, eats his food with pleasure; he does not dwell on the prospect of it, and linger over the memory, like the gluttonous child, or the gourmand pure and simple. This is a very material image, yet sometimes these simple illustrations serve to help the mind more than any others, It is easy to see, from this analogy, that an advanced occultist who has work in the world may be perfectly free from the desires which would make him a part of it, and yet may take its pleasures and give them back with interest. He is enabled to give more pleasure than he takes, because he is incapable of fear or disappointment. He has no dread of death, nor of that which is called annihilation. He rests on the waters of life, submerged and sleeping, or above them and conscious, indifferently. He cannot feel disappointment, because although pleasure is to him intensely vivid and keen, it is the same to him whether he enjoys it himself or whether another enjoys it. It is pleasure, pure and simple, untarnished by personal craving or desire. So with regard to what occultists call "progress" – the advance from stage to stage of knowledge. In a school of any sort in the external world emulation is the great spur to progress.

139

The occultist, on the contrary, is incapable of taking a single step until he has acquired the faculty of realizing progress as an abstract fact. Someone must draw nearer to the Divine in every moment of life; there must always be progress. But the disciple who desires that he shall be the one to advance in the next moment, may lay aside all hope of it. Neither should he be conscious of preferring progress for another or of any kind of vicarious sacrifice. Such ideas are in a certain sense unselfish, but they are essentially characteristic of the world in which separateness exists, and form is regarded as having a value of its own. The shape of a man is as much an idolon as though no spark of divinity in habited it; at any moment that spark may desert the particular shape, and we are left with a substantial shadow of the man we knew. It is in vain, after the first step in occultism has been taken. that the mind clings to the old beliefs and certainties. Time and space are known to be non-existent, and are only regarded as existing in practical life for the sake of convenience. So with the separation of the divine-human spirit into the multitudes of men on the earth. Roses have their own colours, and lilies theirs; none can tell why this is when the same sun, the same light, gives the colour to each. Nature is indivisible. She clothes the earth, and when that clothing is torn away, she bides her time and re-clothes it again when there is no more interference with her. Encircling the earth like an atmosphere, she keeps it always glowing and green, moistened and sunlit. The spirit of man encompasses the earth like a fiery spirit, living on Nature, devouring her, sometimes being devoured by her, but always in the mass remaining more ethereal and sublime than she is. In the individual, man is conscious of the vast superiority of Nature; but when once he becomes conscious that he is part of an indivisible and indestructible whole, he knows also that the whole of which he is part stands above nature. The starry sky is a terrible sight to a man who is just self-less enough to be aware of his own littleness and unimportance as an individual; it almost crushes him. But let him once touch on the power which comes from knowing himself as part of the human spirit, and nothing can crush him by its greatness. For if the wheels of the chariot of the enemy pass over his body, he forgets that it is his body, and rises again to fight among the crowd of his own army. But this state can never be reached, nor even approached, until the last of the three desires is conquered,

140

as well as the first. They must be apprehended and encountered together.

Comfort, in the language used by occultists, is a very comprehensive word. It is perfectly useless for a neophyte to practice discomfort or asceticism as do religious fanatics. He may come to prefer deprivation in the end, and then it has become his comfort. Homelessness is a condition to which the religious Brahmin pledges himself; and in the external religion he is considered to fulfill this pledge if he leaves wife and child, and becomes a begging wanderer, with no shelter of his own to return to. But all external forms of religion are forms of comfort, and men take vows of abstinence in the same spirit that they take pledges of boon companionship. The difference between these two sides of life is only apparent. But the homelessness which is demanded of the neophyte is a much more vital thing than this. It demands the surrender from him of choice or desire. Dwelling with wife and child, under the shelter of a familiar roof-tree, and fulfilling the duties of citizenship, the neophyte may be far more homeless, in the esoteric sense, than when he is a wanderer or an outcast. The first lesson in practical occultism usually given to a pledged disciple is that of fulfilling the duties immediately to hand with the same subtle mixture of enthusiasm and indifference as the neophyte would imagine himself able to feel when he had grown to the size of a ruler of worlds and a designer of destinies. This rule is to be found in the Gospels and in the Bhagavad Gita. The immediate work, whatever it may be, has the abstract claim of duty, and its relative importance or non-importance is not to be considered at all. This law can never be obeyed until all desire of comfort is forever destroyed. The ceaseless assertions and re-assertions of the personal self must be left behind forever. They belong as completely to the character of this world as does the desire to have a certain balance at the bank, or to retain the affections of a loved person. They are equally subject to the change which is characteristic of this world; indeed, they are even more so, for what the neophyte does by becoming a neophyte is simply to enter a forcing house. Change, disillusionment, disheartenment, despair will crowd upon him by invitation; for his wish is to learn his lessons quickly. And as he turns these evils out they will probably be replaced by others worse than themselves – a passionate longing for separate life, for sensation, for the consciousness of growth in his own self,

141

will rush in upon him and sweep over the frail barriers which he has raised. And no such barriers as asceticism, as renunciation, nothing indeed which is negative, will stand for a single moment against this powerful tide of feeling. The only barrier is built up of new desires. For it is perfectly useless for the neophyte to imagine he can get beyond the region of desires. He cannot; he is still a man; Nature must bring forth flowers while she is still Nature, and the human spirit would loose its hold on this form of existence altogether did it not continue to desire. The individual man cannot wrench himself instantly out of that life of which he is an essential part. He can only change his position in it. The man whose intellectual life dominates his animal life, changes his position; but he is still in the dominion of desire. The disciple who believes it possible to become selfless in a single effort, will find himself flung into a bottomless pit as the consequence of his rash endeavour. Seize upon a new order of desires, purer, wider, nobler; and so plant your foot upon the ladder firmly. It is only on the last and topmost rung of the ladder, at the very entrance upon Divine or Mahatmic life, that it is possible to hold fast to that which has neither substance or existence.

The first part of "Light on the Path" is like a chord in music; the notes have to be struck together though they must be touched separately. Study and seize hold of the new desires before you have thrust out the old ones; otherwise in the storm you will be lost.

Man while he is man has substance and needs some step to stand on, some idea to cling to. But let it be the least possible. Learn as the acrobat learns, slowly and with care, to become more independent. Before you attempt to cast out the devil of ambition – the desire of something, however fine and elevated, outside of your self, – seize on the desire to find the light of the world within your self. Before you attempt to cast out the desire of conscious life, learn to look to the unattainable or in other language to that which you know you can only reach in unconsciousness. In knowing that your aim is of this lofty character, that it will never bring conscious success, never bring comfort to you, that it will never carry you in your own temporary personal self to any haven of rest or place of agreeable activity, you cut away all the force and power of the desires of the lower astral nature. For what avail is it, when these facts have been once realised, to desire separateness, sensation or growth?

142

The armour of the warrior who rises to fight for you in the battle depicted in the second part of "Light on the Path," is like the shirt of the happy man in the old story. The king was to be cured of all his ills by sleeping in this shirt; but when the one happy man in his kingdom was found, he was a beggar, without care, without anxiety – and shirtless. So with the divine warrior. None can take his armour and use it, for he has none. The king could never find happiness like that of the careless beggar. The man of the world, however fine and cultivated he may be, is hampered by a thousand thoughts and feelings which have to be cast aside before he can even stand on the threshold of occultism. And, be it observed, he is chiefly handicapped by the armour he wears, which isolates him. He has personal pride, personal respect. These things must die out as the personality recedes. The process described in the first part of "Light on the Path," is one which takes off that shell, or armour, and casts it aside forever. Then the warrior arises, armourless, defenseless, offenseless, identified with the afflicters and the afflicted, the angered and the one that angers; fighting not on any side, but for the Divine, the highest in all.

by an unknown author, thought to be H.P. Blavatsky. Lucifer, February, 1888

From Theosophical Articles & Notes, published by Theosophy Company, Los Angeles, USA

<http://www.phx-ult-lodge.org/Theo.%20Articles&Notesl.htm>