"THE DWELLER ON THE THRESHOLD" *

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WHAT may seem a very fanciful phrase to many -- "the Dweller on the Threshold"--was used by Bulwer Lytton in his story of "Zanoni" to illustrate something which comes about in the life of every student who passes beyond the merely physical. The incident pictures an old Sage—not quite such an one as our Theosophical studies might lead us to imagine—who is Glyndon’s, the hero’s, teacher. Being about to start on a journey, he points to two vases which are left in the room and warns Glyndon not to open them, else certain consequences will be sure to follow. Glyndon, however, on finding himself alone gives way to his curiosity and opens the two vases. At first, he was filled with an intoxicating perfume that seemed to exhilarate and give him the feeling of greatest joyousness. After a while, this passed, and he began to see various forms, now vaguely and indistinctly, then more and more clearly, until each form seemed to take on a very threatening appearance, and all finally coalesced into one form which threatened him with injury and filled him with horror. This form was called the Dweller on the Threshold.

Now, let us understand each human being to be in the center of a circle, that circle containing a record of every experience through which we have passed and all knowledge heretofore gained, --a circle which defines our beginning and our progress. If we couple with this the idea that each life adds to the store of knowledge, and that each kind of knowledge, selfish or unselfish, is kept or keeps--by itself, we can see that within the circle there are, so to speak, zones, each one of these zones containing a particular kind of consciousness and composed of a particular kind of substance. These zones are at least seven in number. If, then, we are in the middle of all these zones, each one that surrounds us keeps us from the highest, the most perfect, the most spiritual zone of our nature; and, if we are to pass forward, even one step beyond the mere physical, we must go through that zone which is just beyond the physical, and in which the more evil, selfish elements of our nature and experience exist. We have to break into and pass through that zone in order to get to the higher zones of our being; but the only way we can break through it is by arousing it to action, by meeting it and transforming it. No being whatever, however good his ordinary expression of nature may be, must pass through that zone. A good man, going on a journey, has to take the path in the direction of his goal, no matter what the condition of that path. It may be muddy, but he must go through it.

So, with the student, as soon as he forms a great desire to go forward, and to understand himself--his powerful motive being to obtain all power, all possessions, that he may be the better able to help his fellow-men. At first, as he pushes on, he is very joyful in having found a solution to all the problems of life. Everything seems fair and pleasant, now; difficulties are not in his way; physical disabilities are patiently borne; he sees that all is not so bad as he would have thought. Then, he pushes a little farther forward, and he finds other things; he finds certain forces surrounding him, generated by himself, and beginning to awaken. For there are with every one of us dormant senses and dormant experiences which the present conditions of life and prevailing ideas of the time do not give the chance to operate. The moment our thoughts and mind are turned in a higher direction, however, the prevailing ideas begin to lose their force, and, with all our attention centered in another direction, the dormant senses and powers, as well as experiences, begin to make themselves felt. These influences, so strange to us, are sometimes discouraging; we do not know to what to refer them; but as we push on and on, they begin to take shape. For every experience has a form, else it could not remain as such, and we arouse its forces into action and give them life by directing our attention to them. The shape, into which the various forms seen by the earnest student finally
coalesce, varies with the student, as it follows the line of his family and of his likes—particularly, that of his dislikes. It may take the same shape each time with one student, or with another it may change each time. The form symbolizes whatever there is in our past Karma which is unbalanced. It has to be met; and, not only that, but as our own past Karma has to do with the collective Karma of the races through which we have come—more particularly of the race in which we now are—we not only arouse the individual, segregated Dwellers of our own zone, but everything analogous to them in our race or people. We have to meet our own ghosts as well as the ghosts of our people, and in conquering the denizens of our own outward zones, we help to raise up the whole Karma of the race to which we belong.

Theosophy teaches that man is a spiritual being, not physical at all; that the body itself is but a physical instrument drawn from the earth by the power of the indwelling man; that the mind is merely ideas held in regard to life, but the Spirit of man, the Knower, the Experiencer, is alone the true individual. That individual became an individual before this earth, or this solar system was, and he has, with the changing in matter, worked through the various condensations of substance down to the present plane. On each plane of substance he has acquired a consciousness and a set of senses and a body of that substance, all these acquired bodies, and all these planes of consciousness being continually with him, reacting upon him in the body as he acts upon them. Each physical life comprises but a very small portion of all the vast reservoir of experiences of the past, which as we push forward we help to reopen very hurriedly.

There is an aphorism which says that Karma may be retarded by certain actions, and that it may also be hastened; that it is hastened by the power of a vow. So, when the individual pledges himself to go forward, to reach further and further into his true spiritual nature, he brings Karma to pass which would not come, perhaps, for many lives in the ordinary course; he awakens all the denizens about him—elemental forces, tendencies, germs which are awaiting their fruition. By bringing them into operation, by bringing new powers into action, he meets his Karma more hastily; he sets loose a very real force. So, the “Dweller on the Threshold” is a very real thing, and something which we all must meet, whether we begin now or wait for a thousand incarnations. We cannot do other than pass that way—over the threshold of the accumulated evil of the past. For it is absolutely impossible for any man to escape his Karma. Each within his own sphere he dwells. Around him are all those effects produced by himself in past ages, as well as in the present, and until he breaks through that evil with which he has surrounded himself, he can never have that power which belongs to sages and to saviors; the strength and power of his motives must be tested thoroughly before he can emerge into the higher zones of his being.

Now, there came into the world in this very generation the great philosophy of Theosophy, brought and given by those who knew it. As soon as those to whom it was given began to study, to try to force themselves along the path trodden by all sages, the Dweller on the threshold of the time was awakened. Many, many have been the failures in the name of Theosophy. The great science has been mutilated in thousands of ways, so that the general public does not know that there is an exact record left by Those who brought it. That knowledge exists; the way to obtain the activity of the inner nature is right before us; the doors are never closed to anyone; but, no one other than ourselves, however powerful, can ever arouse the necessary action from within to take the step. Each one must see the necessity for the step; each step must be seen to be the step by the one who takes it. The divine spark within the human breast desires space in which to burn. It cannot be cramped, or constrained. But we do constrain it by thinking we are our physical bodies; by thinking we can be saved by the efforts of others, by laying our sins on others, by believing knowledge can be conferred upon us by others. These ideas are our dwellers, for they stand in the way of our getting a true perception. Enmeshed in action and reaction, we are unable to turn our minds in the true direction. The mission of Theosophy was to arouse the real man from this sleep of ages,—a sleep in which he dreams, acting with the powers of his own nature and creating shape after shape; some dreams—nightmares, and
none leading to the real goal. Not until the divine spark within us has struck fire from the light of other lights who have passed beyond our stages will we take the true step out of what is for so many the vale of misery and death.

Our Dweller is about us all the time. Everything which conflicts with good is an operation of that dweller. Everything which prevents us from taking those steps which we can see would be the better ones for us to take is a dweller. We have about us on every hand influences from our fellow men which make it most difficult for us to take and keep that step which in our better moments seems the very best. Their thoughts and acts tend to re-inforce our Dweller. The greatest Dweller we have is doubt, suspicion, fear; lack of faith. These are outward exhibitions of the Dweller, and the first influences which we feel. These dwellers have to be conquered. We must have absolute faith; absolute faith in our power to learn, and an unbounded confidence in that which is being taught us. For, if we are told that there is a science of life, a knowledge of all the laws of life, is there any pursuit more worthwhile than finding out whether the statement is a truth or lie? Surely, there is none. In a few years this small physical life will be gone. What will we have learned from it; how shall we have profited by it? Shall we overcome enough of the Dweller now to enable us to take the step with greater force in the future, or shall we drift and accumulate those forces which forever stand in our way until we take the step? The whole of humanity will be driven to it someday, if only after aeons and aeons of suffering from wrong courses taken.

A wide and wonderful field is open to every human being. All that he would like to know he may know. All that exist before him as mysteries can be cleared up. All powers that reside in nature, in every one of its departments, can be his; but, ONLY, when he sees that he is a part of the great Whole; when he feels that never could he use a power of any kind for any personal selfish purpose, but would lay all his possessions at the feet of his fellow men, for their benefit; ONLY then, can the best and highest in him operate. Nothing selfish, nothing related to the mere body, or its preservation, or one’s comfort, or the pursuits of one’s own desires can ever open the doors; nothing but the determination to go forward, to become one of Nature’s saviors, to work for the progress of all beings in the universe will open the doors. No creed will save us. No belief will save us; no mere being good from our own personal point of view; no reforming from this, that, or the other thing in order to be “saved.” Nothing but a knowledge of our own natures and the determining to put that knowledge into active practical use for the benefit of others, not ourselves; ONLY that will kindle the flame that now burns so dimly while we are in the body.

The "Dweller on the Threshold" is with us. Shall we break away, break through that plane where he dwells? Can we be determined enough to go through all those trials that must be ours by our thought and action of the past, and all those which our fellow men have placed about us? Are we strong enough to take the step?

by Robert Crosbie
HAS such a being any existence? Has anyone ever seen it? Are there many or several, and has it any sex? Such are the questions asked by nearly all students who read theosophical books. Some of those who all their life believed in fairies in secret and in the old tales of giants, have proceeded to test the question by calling upon the horrid shade to appear and freeze their blood with the awful eyes that Bulwer Lytton has made so famous in his "Zanoni." But the Dweller is not to be wooed in such a way, and has not appeared at all, but by absolute silence leads the invoker to at last scout the idea altogether.

But this same inquirer then studies theosophical books with diligence, and enters after a time on the attempt to find out his own inner nature. All this while the Dweller has waited, and, indeed, we may say, in complete ignorance as yet of the neophyte's existence. When the study has proceeded far enough to wake up long dormant senses and tendencies, the Dweller begins to feel that such a person as this student is at work. Certain influences are then felt, but not always with clearness, and at first never ascribed to the agency of what had long ago been relegated to the lumber-room of exploded superstitions. The study goes still farther and yet farther, until the awful Thing has revealed itself; and when that happens, it is not a superstition nor is it disbelieved. It can then never be gotten rid of, but will stay as a constant menace until it is triumphed over and left behind.

When Glyndon was left by Mejnour in the old castle in Italy, he found two vases which he had received direction not to open. But disobeying these he took out the stoppers, and at once the room was filled with intoxication, and soon the awful, loathsome creature appeared whose blazing eyes shone with malignant glare and penetrated to Glyndon's soul with a rush of horror such as he had never known.

In this story Lytton desired to show that the opening of the vases is like the approach of an enquirer to the secret recesses of his own nature. He opens the receptacles, and at first is full of joy and a sort of intoxication due to the new solutions offered for every problem in life and to the dimly seen vistas of power and advancement that open before him. If the vases are kept open long enough, the Dweller of the Threshold surely appears, and no man is exempt from the sight. Goodness is not sufficient to prevent its appearance, because even the good man who finds a muddy place in the way to his destination must of necessity pass through it to reach the end.

We must ask next, WHAT is the Dweller? It is the combined evil influence that is the result of the wicked thoughts and acts of the age in which any one may live, and it assumes to each student a definite shape at each appearance, being always either of one sort or changing each time. So that with one it may be as Bulwer Lytton pictured it, or with another only a dread horror, or even of any other sort of shape. It is specialized for each student and given its form by the tendencies and natural physical and psychical combinations that belong to his family and nation.

Where, then, does it dwell? is the very natural inquiry which will follow. It dwells in its own plane, and that may be understood in this manner.
Around each person are planes or zones, beginning with spirit and running down to gross matter. These zones extend, within their lateral boundaries, all around the being. That is to say, if we figure ourselves as being in the center of a sphere, we will find that there is no way of escaping or skipping any one zone, because it extends in every direction until we pass its lateral boundary.

When the student has at last gotten hold of a real aspiration and some glimmer of the blazing goal of truth where Masters stand, and has also aroused the determination to know and to be, the whole bent of his nature, day and night, is to reach out beyond the limitations that hitherto had fettered his soul. No sooner does he begin thus to step a little forward, than he reaches the zone just beyond mere bodily and mental sensations. At first the minor dwellers of the threshold are aroused, and they in temptation, in bewilderment, in doubt or confusion, assail him. He only feels the effect, for they do not reveal themselves as shapes. But persistence in the work takes the inner man farther along, and with that progress comes a realization to the outer mind of the experiences met, until at last he has waked up the whole force of the evil power that naturally is arrayed against the good end he has set before him. Then the Dweller takes what form it may. That it does take some definite shape or impress itself with palpable horror is a fact testified to by many students.

One of those related to me that he saw it as an enormous slug with evil eyes whose malignancy could not be described. As he retreated - that is, grew fearful - it seemed joyful and portentous, and when retreat was complete it was not. Then he fell further back in thought and action, having occasionally moments of determination to retrieve his lost ground. Whenever these came to him, the dreadful slug again appeared, only to leave him when he had given up again his aspirations. And he knew that he was only making the fight, if ever he should take it up again, all the harder.

Another says that he has seen the Dweller concentrated in the apparent form of a dark and sinister-looking man, whose slightest motions, whose merest glance, expressed the intention and ability to destroy the student's reason, and only the strongest effort of will and faith could dispel the evil influence. And the same student at other times has felt it as a vague, yet terrible, horror that seemed to enwrap him in its folds. Before this he has retreated for the time to prepare himself by strong self-study to be pure and brave for the next attack.

These things are not the same as the temptations of Saint Anthony. In his case he seems to have induced an hysterical erotic condition, in which the unvanquished secret thoughts of his own heart found visible appearance.

The Dweller of the Threshold is not the product of the brain, but is an influence found in a plane that is extraneous to the student, but in which his success or failure will be due to his own purity. It is not a thing to be dreaded by mere dilettanti theosophists; and no earnest one who feels himself absolutely called to work persistently to the highest planes of development for the good of humanity, and not for his own, need fear aught that heaven or hell holds.

Eusebio Urban, Path, December, 1888