

END OF LIFE ISSUES

WHAT SURVIVES AFTER DEATH?

from Robert Crosbie's *Universal Theosophy*

Day after day we are constantly confronted by the fact that we are all subject to death. No matter how we may live, whether our lives bring to us failure or the greatest possible success in the eyes of the world, death is there at the end. So sure as there is birth for us, so there is death. Each one knows that sooner or later death must be his portion; but what does he know of after-death? 'What, if anything, survives? Religions such as we have professed do not give us any information whatever on this most serious question; materialistic science presents us no solution; from neither religion nor science have we gained anything to rest upon when the great conqueror of all human bodies appears before us. Is there any hope in life that what we are doing may be of any value after death? Whether we can answer that question, or not, before death confronts us—the confronting of death will be there. The time will come.

If any solution to the problems presented by death exists, it must be perceptible during life to have any value for us as living human beings. It must be a reasonable solution, sufficiently evident to us as we now live, to convince us of the correctness of the solution. There must be clear evidence as to an understanding of the facts of life, before we may accept any explanation as to what must be after death. When we know the meaning of birth; when we know what we are working here in bodies for; when we know what all manifested life exists for—then, we may have an answer as to why we pass so few years in any one physical existence; we may know where are our friends, our parents, our grandparents, who lived as we are living but now are gone; we may know if life has ceased for them; and, then, if life can ever cease for us.

There is one fact of human existence which should guide us in our thinking—the fact of law, ruling in everything that we do. Is it not our knowledge, our perception of law that enables us to control the elements in nature? We control the various substances and elements by understanding the law of their operation. We know that the law of action and re-action prevails in nature; we recognize in nature the law of cause and effect. But do we not know that law rules in our very selves? We know there is a law under which the body grows from conception to birth, from birth to maturity, followed by gradual declination. Just as there is for man a cycle of birth, youth, manhood, decay and death, so there is a succession of events in nature, which we perceive to be a universal law. Morning, noon, and night are followed by morning again; spring, summer, autumn, and winter are followed by spring again. We ought then to be able to perceive that, as in nature our birth this time is but in orderly succession after previous death, so must we come again and again for a life-time on earth, as we come again and again to our day-times after the night. We must have passed through a great sweep of existence to have reached this present birth, but that must also have been the operation of law. The choice lies between law and chaos. There can not be law here and chaos there. All is under law; or, all is chaos. Our whole experience shows that law rules, and the conclusion becomes necessary that law rules in every thing and in every circumstance. Law, therefore, must rule on both sides of death.

But is this law enforced upon us by some powerful Being? If so, there is no hope whatever for us. And who are WE operating under this all-inclusive law? If we are mere bodies, we are small and restricted beings. If all the life there is, is what we feel and experience in our bodies, life amounts to nothing. Very little thought, however, will convince us that we are not our bodies. We

know that our bodies are under constant change from birth to the present time; constant change will go on until the cessation of these bodies; but we do not change. The same "I" was child, youth, young man, and older man. The identity has not changed at all through all the changes of body it has experienced. Nor are we our minds, as so many believe. Our minds are merely certain bundles of ideas in regard to life, and we must be greater than those minds because we can change them. Nor is there any imaginable limit to that changing.

No matter how much knowledge we may acquire, we can go on learning; no matter what kind of a mind we may have, we possess the illimitable power to go on increasing it. If one doubts the existence of anything greater than mind, he has but to see that the very fact of doubting—the expression of doubt—shows an act and purpose beyond the idea. We could utterly refuse to think, and still exist. We must look deeper for ourselves than the mind and the body. Both are but instruments which WE use. Then, what can we be? There is that in us which lives, which thinks, which is life itself, which garners all experience, which it self changes not at all. It is smaller than the small, as the ancients said; it is greater than the great. It can not be weighed nor measured. We can not say where it is and where it is not; and yet it is the one thing in us—our very selves—---which enables us to have any experience, any idea or combination of ideas. Call it Spirit, if you will. Call it Life. Call it Consciousness; for we well know that we can not have any experience unless we are conscious of it. The ancients said: "The Soul is the Perceiver, is Vision itself, pure and simple, and looks directly on ideas." Spirit sees the idea; actions flow from the ideas adopted. Our differences are in respect to mentality, in accordance with the kind and range of ideas; but we have all sprung from the same Source; we all have a common basis, a common essential nature, which is Spirit and Life itself.

Our days and nights afford an illustration of the fact that we can let the body go, that we can depart from the body, and still exist. While we are awake in the day-time, we act outwardly through the organs of the body which serve to transmit and receive impressions. At night, these activities are stilled, and it is said that we sleep. But how may we know we are conscious during those hours of the night? Because when we awake, we can say, "I dreamed," and there is no question as to our identity in the dream. We were conscious, too, of having all the senses; we had, apparently, the powers of motion. Notwithstanding the dormant condition of the body in that state we call deep sleep, we were still acting, living, conscious beings. It may not be difficult to conceive that, during the greater portion of the night's rest passed in what is known as "dreamless slumber" of the body, we are conscious; that our action is of a higher and finer kind than in waking-life; that it is possible for us to keep a conscious hold on that action—to bring back into this brain of ours, which we are using during the day-time, the memory of every act on every inner plane of being. The soul—the Real Man—with all his past experiences is fully awake when the body is asleep. The night-time of the soul is the day-time of the body. It is only in exceptional cases, however, that a human being knows that he is conscious all the time; that Consciousness can never by any possibility cease. Yet each one can see for himself that if Consciousness ever ceased, there would be no possibility of its ever beginning again. We can see continuing consciousness in the fact that we are able to take up, each day in our life, the work of the day and days before.

Theosophy is presented for the purpose of showing that this full consciousness in the day-time, in operation through the body, is possible to every man. If we had that consciousness, what would death mean to us? It would mean no more than sleep. Death would mean merely a letting go of the body which had become useless to us. We should know that death could never touch us any more than sleep reaches us; that as our consciousness is continuous, whether the body is asleep or awake, so when the body dies, there is no cessation for us.

What, then, survives after death? The man himself, with all his tendencies, with all his experience. The Thinker, the Soul, is what survives, is what can never be extinguished, can never itself suffer, can never be involved, is always of its own nature, no matter what conditions a man may become involved in for the time being. Conditions, whether of joy or suffering, must have an ending; but the One who enjoys, the One who suffers, the One who feels, changes not at all. That which survives is our very selves—all that we call ourselves—the self who wakes, who dreams, who enjoys, who goes into different states, through all the worlds. Let us say that this life is a dream in which we have our sufferings and our joys. When we awake, we shall have other experiences, but it is that something permanent in us which takes to itself of each and every experience; coming into any field of operation, it gathers experience according to the tendencies which itself has engendered on that plane of being. Thus man has no other experience on earth save that which is his very own, save that which he has made part of his action on this earth. The law of action and reaction, of cause and effect, sowing and reaping is, then, his own law.

What is it that survives? WE survive, as conscious beings, with all the powers of perception, with all that we have ever gained, and thus shall it ever be. There is no cessation for us. Bodies wear out in one life, as we know, when they are no longer capable and useful. Would we in wisdom wish to continue in such bodies? No: the soul demands a better instrument. We tear down the old house to build a better one—or it may be a worse one, we might remember. If we are selfish, if we work for this body alone, if we are against our fellow beings, then, in a body we shall have the reaction from our selfish action. This is law, and not sentiment. It is not the doings of our fellow men that we are suffering from, but the evil we have sown, coming back and pressing with its full weight against us. Not until man assumes his birthright and realizes that the whole course of evolution is the working out of the laws of justice, will he take the first step forward in true progress, which leads to conscious immortality.