

TINGLEY,K The Wine of Life Chapter 3 Death and Rebirth**DEATH AND REBIRTH**

There is no danger that dauntless courage cannot conquer; there is no trial that spotless purity cannot pass through; there is no difficulty that strong intellect cannot surmount. For those who win onward, there is reward past all telling, the power to bless and serve Humanity. For those who fail there are other lives in which success may come. — H. P. Blavatsky

I — We Know that We are Deathless

Theosophy shows the glory and richness of what we call death and how pitiful a thing it is that we should mourn for the dead, of whose immortality our very memory of them is a token and a sign that we shall meet them again. We are outgrowing fast the old idea of a personal God, and with it must go the concept that a man's soul enters this world newly created from such a deity's hands. We grow towards knowledge that in the great economy of nature a soul born here comes as a guest out of far realms in eternity — a guest of whose past we know nothing but that it has lived through the ages and abides here for awhile and goes. Whither? When we brood on that which is immortal in ourselves the answer comes back to us out of the living silence, and we know that life is eternal and death but a stepping forth into larger fields of life.

When one we love is so released we are given an opportunity to realize the majesty of the higher law, whose manifestation then is so close to us, and to turn our thoughts from the impermanent to the permanent and away from all that holds us to our limitations. There is indeed that in us which is mortal and has no place in the eternity of things. It belongs to this present life only and must be thrown aside at last. But deep in our hearts we know that we are deathless and that within us are the starry light and the wonderful places where truth abides. The external and fascinating attachments which we hug most dearly will fade away, but this bright and inward knowledge will never desert us.

None should be so immersed in his personal concerns as to lose sight of the time when he, too, must take his place in the silence. Many, working against themselves, spend two-thirds of their time seeking knowledge from this writer or that, and following fads and fallacies and absurd teachings, so that when the hour comes for them to shuffle off this mortal coil, they are wholly unprepared for the new life nature has in store for them. But it is possible to live as the flowers do, welcoming death when it comes as a change one has expected but has never learnt to fear.

Indeed, we should live twice as long as we do could we but rid ourselves of the fear of it, perceive that death is a new birth, know that it is life, and realize that it is joy. Looking forward beyond the present moment, beyond the end of our days, to vast possibilities and an endless succession of opportunities, we would become aware that one life is not enough, that the soul could do justice neither to itself nor to the universal plan without the large experience of many. We might awake each morning in such self-forgetfulness that were death to visit us at noon-day we should accept it with as much gladness as we do the smiles of the sun. On rising and before sleep, and indeed through all our duties in the daytime, we could hold to the idea that the higher laws exist — that they brought us into life and will take us out of it in a way more merciful than we with all our planning could devise — and we could go forth at last with broad vision and deathless trust, feeling only the beneficent glory of the change.

For though a man is hanged, or dies in the depths of degradation, that compassionate law that is a part of our natures takes command at the passing. Whatever his mistakes may have been, or his ignorance or his sorrow, there is an hour or a moment of glorious victory in what to our eyes seems the tragedy of death. It comes to the dying man when he feels that he is being released and, stepping forth into the unknown, knows that he goes not unprotected, not without

companionship. For it is the knower, it is the great warrior, it is the eternal self that is there with him; and the soul arises in the power of its divinity and knows no fear or pain.

When the eyes were closed and the lips silenced, I have seen the light and beauty of a great illumination on the sweet faces of the dead. . . .

II — Passing into the World of Light

Though seemingly remote and unknowable, the higher law with resistless force guides man to the destiny he has carved for himself. As nature works in her unseen processes, so does the soul set free. Having gone forth it seeks its own, not at some point in space as the theologians teach, but in a condition in which, freed from the body, it may gain strength and knowledge: recalling in the silence its old victories until, having learnt the lessons they teach, it may put forth towards fresh experience and take up anew a tenement of flesh.

When we consider the mercy that comes to our rescue — cares for us in spite of ourselves, liberates the real self in us and allows it to move into the new life — we can soar above our worldly interests and enter into loftier activities of thought, realizing what a marvelous experience this change must be that brings such illumination to the imprisoned soul. Sorrow and tears come to us at a death only because we do not see the grander vistas of life, but have fashioned our minds in the dogmatism of the ages and let the habit of our ancestors rule us.

When a soul separates itself from the body, it does not immediately pass on. Its old surroundings hold it for awhile. It is aware of our pangs of bereavement, our mourning hinders its escape. The great onward march is before it. It is not what we knew here, but greater: all the limitations were from the brain-mind, which is dead. It would be forging upward, advancing and expanding. We do it wrong to hamper its flight. We should let it go free as the birds in the air, free as the law intended it should be. We should part with our loved ones without grief; with confidence, as though they were but going on a journey, watchful lest we drop our minds into a belief that there is death when it is only a rebirth that has occurred. Let our mental pictures be the reverse of sorrowful — bright with hope and music, beautiful with love and flowers — and I can almost see the departing soul sending back a benediction as it passes into the world of light.

Pulsating in the very air and in the silence about us are the prayers of the dying who passed into the unknown in the great pressure and agony of war. Those who died upon the battle-fields, looking out on the carnage and pain: did they not die with a question in their hearts — as to God, as to life, as to the meaning of all they had suffered? I think they asked and waited for an answer, and waited in vain until they had made the change. And when they moved forth from their wrecked bodies, and found the light dawning and the veil lifting, the answer came: their own souls gave them the answer, the divine law revealed it to them. Man's divinity was made known to them, and his evolution through rebirth, and the path he travels that leads to perfection.

The aftermath of the battle was the glorious moment for them, when they glimpsed in the change from those slaughter-laden scenes a vista none of us can see. Going out from their wounds and suffering they sought the Light. They learned the secrets of death and many of the meanings of life and felt the infinite law near at hand. They will live again: reborn again, strengthened through their crucifixions, chastened in their struggles. They are now at rest in the immensity of space; for nature prepares a state of rest for us all where the soul looks back over the closed life and sits in judgment on its actions and omissions, and where it has the opportunity to prepare a golden beginning for the life next to come. This is my consolation when I meet those sad hearts who have lost their loved ones and are questioning.

III — The Urge of the Inner Divinity

There is a wonderful unity after the change. The dead are with us in a very real sense: they know our thoughts and feelings, and respond. In the essence of our spiritual natures, in the silent places of our hearts where the deepest and tenderest memories abide, a real communication takes place: not by words, not by table rappings, not by visions. The immortal being has gone forth — having shaken off the burden of the flesh and the strain of material life, it is soaring through the beyond — and we should not seek to call it back for the sake of our curiosity or heartaches.

Life is eternal. The soul exists after death as the sun after its setting; we ought not to feel that we have suffered loss. Though ears hear not and eyes see not and no outward proof remains to comfort our hearts, there is that within which should tell us that in the inner life we are bound eternally to those we truly love. Anything that was true in their lives — anything uplifting that held them to us — still lives. We have with us now and always whatever was noblest and best in them: the memory of their example, the aroma of their highest aspirations.

All that belongs to us is ours forever. The bonds that link us to sister or brother, mother or father, husband or wife, child or sweetheart, were not made for nothing: to think so would be to insult the divine law. Somewhere, somehow, someday, we shall be grouped again with the absent ones we love. For we live through a lifetime, and sleep; and then are reborn and return and return. Consider the growth of the trees, that at first are green and beautiful and then gradually change and die down. There is that in them which governs their life — an intangible mystery and the essence of being. They are all in its keeping and because of it will grow green again, and be beautiful with blossoms again, and again will die down.

And how can man find his heritage without opening to his thought vistas in the universal, and bringing within his mind's vision knowledge of the immortality and the divinity of man? Let him seek aid of his imagination here, for imagination is the bridge between the intellectual and the spiritual. As the miner digs within the ground and works with the conviction that gold is hidden beneath, and pushes on with energetic perseverance in spite of all discouragements; or as an artist takes up his brush and at first begins to work with his hands, not mentally conscious of what he is going to do but, because of an inward urge and the love of the true and beautiful working within him and the hope to grow and the will to serve humanity, he feels his way into his work and opens doors into the inner chambers of his being, and those creative artistic powers which belong to the divine side of our human nature begin to live in him: *so must we seek for the god within ourselves*, the Man within the man, the immortal within the mortal.

I do not believe there is a human being who has never felt the urge of that inner divinity. It may have touched him only for a moment or a day, but sometime surely he has known that glowing warmth in his mind which made all things peace and hope there, and made life joy for him and truth real.

We have all had yearnings in our hearts that have never been satisfied and ideals we have strived towards and never attained. Great poets, musicians, thinkers, who achieve mightier things than their brain-minds alone could conceive of, are proofs of an old experience of the soul and suggestions of what divine possibilities lie latent in us. I never hear a great singer but I think: if intelligence and aspiration, training and the musical temperament, have accomplished all this, how much richer and diviner will be the tones when full knowledge is attained of the god within. With rare exceptions, I have never gone into a picture gallery and taken delight in the grand conceptions of the artists, but I also mourned inwardly because, even with the greatest, the inspiration comes but here and there. They catch glimpses of truth but do not fathom its depths. Their vision is momentary, a flash from the soul intermittently, in and out, and disappearing: the kingly balance is lacking which makes possible an even advance, majestic, with never retrogression nor veilings of the light, nor shadows over truth eternal.

Or again in music one hears the glorious measures, the divine rhythms and harmonies — and then the drop, the wavering and the change; and the strained mental effort becomes audible. It is all unfinished business and but a partial manifestation of the god in man: long and many lives would not be enough to bring us to the heights of consciousness ordained.

We are in our highest parts immortal. Our path extends into eternity — we are eternally growing, eternally advancing — and in the course of time by the laws of our being must attain perfection. Look out over this limitless ocean of possibilities, into the infinity of unending life; behold a constant moving forward, a superb everlasting effort towards ever grander ideals, a gradual elimination of every doctrine and idea that impedes the growth of the soul.

The human mind has not allowed itself a large enough view of life. The education we have had for so many ages has trained us to look at things superficially. We live in a little corner of ourselves and shut our eyes to the universal. How many a great thinker, weighed down by the incessant struggle for existence until his high ideals were forgotten, has lost his way through the loneliness of life; how many a great composer has died in the infancy of his efforts overburdened with the difficulties of the material plane and spiritually starved; how many a great artist has been shut away from the noblest development of his genius: and all for lack of knowledge of the brightness, the power, the lofty destiny of the human soul!

IV — Sowing and Reaping Seeds of Life

The small mind may say, "I have had more than enough of life; I do not want to live again." But this is no better than cowardice and the attitude of the man who would sit down and neglect his duties and responsibilities and forget them. Belief in reincarnation inspires us to stand on our feet and hold our shoulders back and our heads high in superb confidence, because of the divinity of man.

To come into a nearness to eternal things we must have life after life, experience on experience. We must have known all sorrow and heartache, all agony and despair: it is the pressure of these things that is bringing us slowly to our own, so that we may find within our hearts at last the knowledge that passeth understanding, the peace that shall abide with us by night and in the daytime, through all eternity, and no less in our griefs than in our joys.

When you are overburdened with sorrow, heartsick to find the meaning of it all, and a moment comes when you move away from your mourning and close the doors on the past, and quiet and inward feelings arise in you — study them, watch them well. You may find evidence then of the mercy of the higher law and the compassionate friendliness at the heart of being.

There is no such thing as chance: divine law governs us. The ills a man causes he can cure, and the seeds of the conditions that oppress us now were sown by us in former lives. You may be suffering and in ill health, and have in memory no time when in this life you set in motion the currents of physical decay and prepared for yourself the trials you are undergoing. Is there no bright promise for you, can you not find new strength to meet life each morning, in the knowledge that as you are reaping that which you have sown, so you shall reap that which now you are sowing?

Were a man to die tomorrow in the belief that we live but this once, when death had come he would find himself enlightened and out in the great blue of hope. For to the soul in its passing, when the lips are already mute and the mind seems unconscious, a sure and certain knowledge comes. It understands how unreal the life just past has been, and that all its activities here were unfinished business. Memory for awhile is vivid and strong, spiritual light is thrown upon the path ahead, revelations come of what might have been and what yet is to attain. And the soul cries out for a larger opportunity, that in the light of the experience it has gained it may begin again — correct old mistakes, make fresh efforts, build anew with understanding.

And with the aspiration comes the answer: in the divine economy endless opportunities are accorded.

V — The Brightness Beyond Death

All have had intuitions of the brightness beyond death, but we fail for the most part to hold fast to them. We remember our limitations and the world's beliefs and slip back into the old grooves of thought. Yet we might feel our immortality always, performing our daily duties in supremest trust, with fear and unrest laid aside and peace laid hold of in their stead: each one a light onto himself through this knowledge, influencing the world, momently banishing fear from human minds.

I was in the park the other day, tired and seriously disturbed by the many discouraging types of humans I had seen. But occasionally, on a pathway over the hills, I would meet a child or parties of children, and there was always something about them that told me of the inner life. They had gathered flowers and were carrying them in their arms and loving them in a way no older folk do. They felt the nearness, the beauty and sympathy of nature; their consciousness of self was lost in superb enjoyment of the greatness outside of themselves, and the silent angel, the divine companion, shone in their faces.

In all countries you find the children in springtime out in the wilds gathering flowers. They have not to be told to go — of their own impulse they seek the haunts of nature; and this is because they are growing souls, and the soul can find room close to nature to breathe and grow as it cannot among the disturbing forces of our artificial life. And I thought as I saw them: how easy it would be for all humanity if we only would take time from the material things to live in the world of beauty and joy; to gather the flowers that bloom from the inner nature and the breathing, pulsating life of eternity. The first step is to eliminate fear.

Let us move out into the light of thought and trust life confidently! Let us rest in the knowledge that the law is mercy; and it shall show us in our waking and our sleeping moments that the old idea of death is a farce and that what seemed a monster waiting to destroy us is a benediction and the working out of our destiny.