

ETERNAL LIFE

By Nicholas Roerich.

In his book, "Fear in the face of death in primitive religion", George Fraser quotes the wise words of the Omaha tribe about death: "No one can avoid death, and no one must fear death, since it is unavoidable." Likewise the ancient Mayans calmly said, "I go to rest." If we remember the words of Socrates before his departure, before draining the cup of poison, or the thoughts of Plato about death and even Epicurus, not to speak of the lofty attitude towards this act in the teachings of India, we see the same reasoned wise attitude towards death as if it were an alteration of existence. We see the same realisation of eternal life which is so clearly enjoined by the sacred Covenants.

Meanwhile in the confused minds of the West, particularly in the 18th and 19th centuries, when negation laid its dark path, we see a sort of animal terror in the face of the natural change of existence. Even recently the intellectual de Sevigné expressed herself: "Death is so fearful, that I hate life more for the reason that it leads to death, rather than for the thorns with which the path of life is sown." The idea of death poisoned life for Alphonse Daudet, Zola, Goncourt, Maupassant and other apparently fearless and broad thinkers.

At the same time among people living close to nature, the word death is not generally employed. They say "he has departed" or "he has passed away", that he has terminated this expression of existence. People in contact with nature are in contact with the basic teachings of truth: people, being made natural thinkers, likewise naturally understand the significance of the change of being. Fear of death it would seem could arise only in malefactors, who darken their consciousness with crimes and international wrongdoing. It can be fully understood that each traitor fears such a striking change of existence. Indeed within himself he realises that he is being plunged not into non-existence, but into some other form of existence. If in his present existence he has overburdened his heart with quantities of dark purposes and

actions, then indeed he does not know if it will be easy for him in some conditions unknown to him. Doing unworthy deeds yesterday, man tries to avoid responsibility for them tomorrow. Such terror at the unavoidable passage into the unknown world is fully understandable in people who have darkened their earthly existence with heinous deeds either material or mental. Surely it is not necessary to repeat again, that thought will be even more potent than word or muscular movement.

Does it not seem strange that, along with criminal beings, certain apparently broad thinkers have also fallen into animal terror before a change of existence? One would like to know if they easily changed their earthly homes. Perhaps while on this earth some of them were not easily moved about. It is well-known that some people believe that they can create and think only in their familiar domestic environment. Each unusual surrounding already hinders them in expressions of their creativeness. But surely it would seem that precisely diverse impressions and unforeseen experiences and dangers must sharpen our thinking, resourcefulness, and boldness. According to courageousness you can form an opinion about many other qualities of a man. But of course courage is tested not by sitting by the stove, but there where conflict is encountered with the elements, with darkness, and with all ignorance.

Each one has had occasion to see people who at the tranquil dinner table employed the boldest speech, but when found face to face with those dangers about which they just now were speaking so bombastically, they showed themselves in a completely different light. Probably if one speaks with these people about death they will generally say, why speak about such terrible subjects. This means that they doubt in the goal-fittedness of the universe, with all the striking inspiring changes of existence. They ought to have heard enough about the fact that everything is found to be in motion. It would seem that the newest discoveries demonstrate sufficiently the fullness of space, and for all that they are

frightened at such a significant and solemn passage into a world new for them. Even for trivial earthly journeys they will make their wills, not because they are exceptionally solicitous of someone, but because for them this act is bound inseparably with the fear of death.

People, not religious, during thought about death, hasten away from the completion of rituals. When, in their opinion, the danger has passed, they are first to relate a blasphemous anecdote. In the magazine, "Twentieth Century", Professor A.R. Wadia, among some very interesting opinions about the ideas and realities of the twentieth century, says: "The world is losing the sense of religious values. In its revolt against petrified creeds and meaningless labels, it runs the danger of throwing out the baby along with the bath water. In its suspicion of religions, it is apt to be blind to what Religion means and stands for." Thus correctly, the professor, who is very well-read, judges and refers carefully to the higher values. In reality, to use the current saying, already many babies have been poured out with the bath water. But of course among these lightminded outpourings, humanity has cast out precisely that which could strengthen it in creativeness both material and mental.

He who knows about eternal life by that very fact knows also his joyous responsibility for each action, mental and muscular. In prayers is introduced this great significance of the words "eternal life". He who thinks upon this, understands that life is always multiform, both in the horizontal and vertical sense. Even according to primary physical laws he understands that each minute everything is altered and never arrives again at the former state. In this movement is contained the greatest creative generosity. And how joyful and beneficent the obligation, to participate according to one's strength in this all-inclusive creativeness!

Rousseau observes: "He who affirms that he meets death calmly and without fear is simply a liar". Why the great writer Rousseau took it upon himself to speak for all humanity must be because he himself must have been afraid of death. Indeed this act goes beyond the limits of the commonplace and therefore it must be met with a

special heart-tranquility. This consciousness will be indeed far from the so-called calmness before the taking of daily food or any everyday action. But precisely in a particular inspired tranquility of the great change of existence will be a very real magnanimity which always goes together with wisdom. ~~xxx~~

The Apostle said clearly and briefly: "We do not die, but are changed". Here in a few words is contained the attestation of eternal life. And you remember the words of the Bhagwadgita about the unchangeableness and eternity of Being. In all ages, in all parts of the world eternal life has been solemnly and triumphantly confirmed. It means there must have been some unnatural, violent fear to lead humanity into such an ignorant understanding of the act of change of existence. At the same time people begin to speak about life on other planets about which only recently even notable astronomers merely shrugged their shoulders. We remember, how for such affirmations Flammarion was threatened with loss of scientific standing and with being placed in the class of amateurs. But already now the best scientific authorities refer far more cautiously to such recognitions of eternal life.

Indeed such a basic concept may be perceived only in affirmation. Each ignorant doubt imposes on this clear affirmation well-nigh incurable cleavages. It is deplorable to see, when intelligent thinkers fear death and with that infect the ignorant masses. Why are they not imbued with that luminous knowledge which composed the most ancient wisdom, confirmed by the best thinkers of all ages? In accordance with the best you too arrive at the best.

Remember, the country of culture fulfills the fundamental covenant of the Beautiful, expressed by the poets of antiquity: "Os homine sublime dedit coelumque tueri" -- I gave to man a lofty forehead that he should perceive the heaven.

With an exalted covenant the Bhagvat Gita confirms the multiformity of creation: "By whatever path you come to Me, by that path shall I bless thee."

Be blessed the Eternal Labor, Eternal Ascent.