

Comments on Light on the Path

by Mabel Collins

I : "BEFORE THE EYES CAN SEE THEY MUST BE INCAPABLE OF TEARS."

IT should be very clearly remembered by all readers of this volume that it is a book which may appear to have some little philosophy in it, but very little sense, to those who believe it to be written in ordinary English. To the many, who read in this manner it will be -- not caviare so much as olives strong of their salt. Be warned and read but a little in this way.

There is another way of reading, which is, indeed, the only one of any use with many authors. It is reading, not between the lines but within the words. In fact, it is deciphering a profound cipher. All alchemical works are written in the cipher of which I speak; it has been used by the great philosophers and poets of all time. It is used systematically by the adepts in life and knowledge, who, seemingly giving out their deepest wisdom, hide in the very words which frame it its actual mystery. They cannot do more. There is a law of nature which insists that a man shall read these mysteries for himself. By no other method can he obtain them. A man who desires to live must eat his food himself: this is the simple law of nature -- which applies also to the higher life. A man who would live and act in it cannot be fed like a babe with a spoon; he must eat for himself.

I propose to put into new and sometimes plainer language parts of "Light on the Path"; but whether this effort of mine will really be any interpretation I cannot say. To a deaf and dumb man, a truth is made no more intelligible if, in order to make it so, some misguided linguist translates the words in which it is couched into every living or dead language, and shouts these different phrases in his ear. But for those who are not deaf and dumb one language is generally easier than the rest; and it is to such as these I address myself.

The very first aphorisms of "Light on the Path," included under Number I. have, I know well, remained sealed as to their inner meaning to many who have otherwise followed the purpose of the book.

There are four proven and certain truths with regard to the entrance to occultism. The Gates of Gold bar that threshold; yet there are some who pass those gates and discover the sublime and illimitable beyond. In the far spaces of Time all will pass those gates. But I am one who wish that Time, the great deluder, were not so over-masterful. To those who know and love him I have no word to say; but to the others -- and there are not so very few as some may fancy -- to whom the passage of Time is as the stroke of a sledge-hammer, and the sense of Space like the bars of an iron cage, I will translate and re-translate until they understand fully.

The four truths written on the first page of "Light on the Path," refer to the trial initiation of the would-be occultist. Until he has passed it, he cannot even reach to the latch of the gate which admits to knowledge. Knowledge is man's greatest inheritance; why, then, should he not attempt to reach it by every possible road? The laboratory is not the only ground for experiment; *science*, we must remember, is derived from *sciens*, present participle of *scire*, "to know," -- its origin is similar to that of the word "discern," "to ken." Science does not therefore deal only with matter, no, not even its subtlest and obscurest forms. Such an idea is born merely of the idle spirit of the age. Science is a word which covers all forms of knowledge. It is exceedingly interesting to hear what chemists discover, and to see them finding their way through the densities of matter to its finer forms; but there are other kinds of knowledge than this, and it is not every one who restricts his (strictly scientific) desire for knowledge to experiments which are capable of being tested by the physical senses.

Everyone who is not a dullard, or a man stupefied by some predominant vice, has guessed, or even perhaps discovered with some certainty, that there are subtle senses lying within the physical senses. There is nothing at all extraordinary in this; if we took the trouble to call Nature into the witness box we should find that everything which is perceptible to the ordinary sight, has something even more important than itself hidden within it; the microscope has opened a world to us, but within those encasements which the microscope reveals, lies a mystery which no machinery can probe.

The whole world is animated and lit, down to its most material shapes, by a world within it. This inner world is called Astral by some people, and it is as good a word as any other, though it merely means starry; but the stars, as Locke pointed out, are luminous bodies which give light of themselves. This quality is characteristic of the life which lies within matter; for those who see it, need no lamp to see it by. The word star, moreover, is derived from the Anglo-Saxon "stiran," to steer, to stir, to move, and undeniably it is the inner life which is master of the outer, just as a man's brain guides the movements of his lips. So that although Astral is no very excellent word in itself, I am content to use it for my present purpose.

The whole of "Light on the Path" is written in an astral cipher and can therefore only be deciphered by one who reads astrally. And its teaching is chiefly directed towards the cultivation and development of the astral life. Until the first step has been taken in this development, the swift knowledge, which is called intuition with certainty, is impossible to man. And this positive and certain intuition is the only form of knowledge which enables a man to work rapidly or reach his true and high estate, within the limit of his conscious effort. To obtain knowledge by experiment is too tedious a method for those who aspire to accomplish real work; he who gets it by certain intuition, lays hands on its various forms with supreme rapidity, by fierce effort of will; as a determined workman grasps his tools,

indifferent to their weight or any other difficulty which may stand in his way. He does not stay for each to be tested -- he uses such as he sees are fittest.

All the rules contained in "Light on the Path," are written for all disciples, but only for disciples -- those who "take knowledge." To none else but the student in this school are its laws of any use or interest.

To all who are interested seriously in Occultism, I say first -- take knowledge. To him who hath shall be given. It is useless to wait for it. The womb of Time will close before you, and in later days you will remain unborn, without power. I therefore say to those who have any hunger or thirst for knowledge, attend to these rules.

They are none of my handicraft or invention. They are merely the phrasing of laws in super-nature, the putting into words truths as absolute in their own sphere, as those laws which govern the conduct of the earth and its atmosphere.

The senses spoken of in these four statements are the astral, or inner senses.

No man desires to see that light which illumines the spaceless soul until pain and sorrow and despair have driven him away from the life of ordinary humanity. First he wears out pleasure; then he wears out pain -- till, at last, his eyes become incapable of tears.

This is a truism, although I know perfectly well that it will meet with a vehement denial from many who are in sympathy with thoughts which spring from the inner life. *To see with the astral sense of sight* is a form of activity which it is difficult for us to understand immediately. The scientist knows very well what a miracle is achieved by each child that is born into the world, when it first conquers its eyesight and compels it to obey its brain. An equal miracle is performed with each sense certainly, but this ordering of sight is perhaps the most stupendous effort. Yet the child does it almost unconsciously, by force of the powerful heredity of habit. No one now is aware that he has ever done it at all; just as we cannot recollect the individual movements which enabled us to walk up a hill a year ago. This arises from the fact that we move and live and have our being in matter. Our knowledge of it has become intuitive.

With our astral life it is very much otherwise. For long ages past, man has paid very little attention to it -- so little, that he has practically lost the use of his senses. It is true, that in every civilization the star arises, and man confesses, with more or less of folly and confusion, that he knows himself to be. But most often he denies it, and in being a materialist becomes that strange thing, a being which cannot see its own light, a thing of life which will not live, an astral animal which has eyes, and ears, and speech, and power, yet will use none of these gifts. This is the case, and the habit of ignorance has become so confirmed, that now none will see with the inner vision till agony has made the physical eyes not

only unseeing, but without tears -- the moisture of life. To be incapable of tears is to have faced and conquered the simple human nature, and to have attained an equilibrium which cannot be shaken by personal emotions. It does not imply any hardness of heart, or any indifference. It does not imply the exhaustion of sorrow, when the suffering soul seems powerless to suffer acutely any longer; it does not mean the deadness of old age, when emotion is becoming dull because the strings which vibrate to it are wearing out. None of these conditions are fit for a disciple, and if any one of them exist in him it must be overcome before the path can be entered upon. Hardness of heart belongs to the selfish man, the egotist, to whom the gate is for ever closed. Indifference belongs to the fool and the false philosopher; those whose lukewarmness makes them mere puppets, not strong enough to face the realities of existence. When pain or sorrow has worn out the keenness of suffering, the result is a lethargy not unlike that which accompanies old age, as it is usually experienced by men and women. Such a condition makes the entrance to the path impossible, because the first step is one of difficulty and needs a strong man, full of psychic and physical vigor, to attempt it.

It is a truth, that, as Edgar Allan Poe said, the eyes are the windows for the soul, the windows of that haunted palace in which it dwells. This is the very nearest interpretation into ordinary language of the meaning of the text. If grief, dismay, disappointment or pleasure, can shake the soul so that it loses its fixed hold on the calm spirit which inspires it, and the moisture of life breaks forth, drowning knowledge in sensation, then all is blurred, the windows are darkened, the light is useless. This is as literal a fact as that if a man, at the edge of a precipice, loses his nerve through some sudden emotion he will certainly fall. The poise of the body, the balance, must be preserved, not only in dangerous places, but even on the level ground, and with all the assistance Nature gives us by the law of gravitation. So it is with the soul, it is the link between the outer body and the starry spirit beyond; the divine spark dwells in the still place where no convulsion of Nature can shake the air; this is so always. But the soul may lose its hold on that, its knowledge of it, even though these two are part of one whole; and it is by emotion, by sensation, that this hold is loosed. To suffer either pleasure or pain, causes a vivid vibration which is, to the consciousness of man, life. Now this sensibility does not lessen when the disciple enters upon his training; it increases. It is the first test of his strength; he must suffer, must enjoy or endure, more keenly than other men, while yet he has taken on him a duty which does not exist for other men, that of not allowing his suffering to shake him from his fixed purpose. He has, in fact, at the first step to take himself steadily in hand and put the bit into his own mouth; no one else can do it for him.

The first four aphorisms of "Light on the Path," refer entirely to astral development. This development must be accomplished to a certain extent -- that is to say it must be fully entered upon -- before the remainder of the book is really intelligible except to the intellect; in fact, before it can be read as a practical, not a metaphysical treatise.

In one of the great mystic Brotherhoods, there are four ceremonies, that take place early in the year, which practically illustrate and elucidate these aphorisms. They are ceremonies in which only novices take part, for they are simply services of the threshold. But it will show how serious a thing it is to become a disciple, when it is understood that these are all ceremonies of sacrifice. The first one is this of which I have been speaking. The keenest enjoyment, the bitterest pain, the anguish of loss and despair, are brought to bear on the trembling soul, which has not yet found light in the darkness, which is helpless as a blind man is, and until these shocks can be endured without loss of equilibrium the astral senses must remain sealed. This is the merciful law. The "medium," or "spiritualist," who rushes into the psychic world without preparation, is a law-breaker, a breaker of the laws of super-nature. Those who break Nature's laws lose their physical health; those who break the laws of the inner life, lose their psychic health. "Mediums" become mad, suicides, miserable creatures devoid of moral sense; and often end as unbelievers, doubters even of that which their own eyes have seen. The disciple is compelled to become his own master before he adventures on this perilous path, and attempts to face those beings who live and work in the astral world, and whom we call masters, because of their great knowledge and their ability to control not only themselves but the forces around them.

The condition of the soul when it lives for the life of sensation as distinguished from that of knowledge, is vibratory or oscillating, as distinguished from fixed. That is the nearest literal representation of the fact; but it is only literal to the intellect, not to the intuition. For this part of man's consciousness a different vocabulary is needed. The idea of "fixed" might perhaps be transposed into that of "at home." In sensation no permanent home can be found, because change is the law of this vibratory existence. That fact is the first one which must be learned by the disciple. It is useless to pause and weep for a scene in a kaleidoscope which has passed.

It is a very well-known fact, one with which Bulwer Lytton dealt with great power, that an intolerable sadness is the very first experience of the neophyte in Occultism. A sense of blankness falls upon him which makes the world a waste, and life a vain exertion. This follows his first serious contemplation of the abstract. In gazing, or even in attempting to gaze, on the ineffable mystery of his own higher nature, he himself causes the initial trial to fall on him. The oscillation between pleasure and pain ceases for -- perhaps an instant of time; but that is enough to have cut him loose from his fast moorings in the world of sensation. He has experienced, however briefly, the greater life; and he goes on with ordinary existence weighted by a sense of unreality, of blank, of horrid negation. This was the nightmare which visited Bulwer Lytton's neophyte in "Zanoni"; and even Zanoni himself, who had learned great truths, and been entrusted with great powers, had not actually passed the threshold where fear and hope, despair and joy seem at one moment absolute realities, at the next mere forms of fancy.

This initial trial is often brought on us by life itself. For life is after all, the great teacher. We return to study it, after we have acquired power over it, just as the master in chemistry learns more in the laboratory than his pupil does. There are persons so near the door of knowledge that life itself prepares them for it, and no individual hand has to invoke the hideous guardian of the entrance. These must naturally be keen and powerful organizations, capable of the most vivid pleasure; then pain comes and fills its great duty. The most intense forms of suffering fall on such a nature, till at last it arouses from its stupor of consciousness, and by the force of its internal vitality steps over the threshold into a place of peace. Then the vibration of life loses its power of tyranny. The sensitive nature must suffer still; but the soul has freed itself and stands aloof, guiding the life towards its greatness. Those who are the subjects of Time, and go slowly through all his spaces, live on through a long-drawn series of sensations, and suffer a constant mingling of pleasure and of pain. They do not dare to take the snake of self in a steady grasp and conquer it, so becoming divine; but prefer to go on fretting through divers experiences, suffering blows from the opposing forces.

When one of these subjects of Time decides to enter on the path of Occultism, it is this which is his first task. If life has not taught it to him, if he is not strong enough to teach himself, and if he has power enough to demand the help of a master, then this fearful trial, depicted in Zanon, is put upon him. The oscillation in which he lives, is for an instant stilled; and he has to survive the shock of facing what seems to him at first sight as the abyss of nothingness. Not till he has learned to dwell in this abyss, and has found its peace, is it possible for his eyes to have become incapable of tears.

II: "BEFORE THE EAR CAN HEAR, IT MUST HAVE LOST ITS SENSITIVENESS."

The first four rules of "Light on the Path" are, undoubtedly, curious though the statement may seem, the most important in the whole book, save one only. Why they are so important is that they contain the vital law, the very creative essence of the astral man. And it is only in the astral (or self-illuminated) consciousness that the rules which follow them have any living meaning. Once attain to the use of the astral senses and it becomes a matter of course that one commences to use them; and the later rules are but guidance in their use. When I speak like this I mean, naturally, that the first four rules are the ones which are of importance and interest to those who read them in print upon a page. When they are engraved on a man's heart and on his life, unmistakably then the other rules become not merely interesting, or extraordinary, metaphysical statements, but actual facts in life which have to be grasped and experienced.

The four rules stand written in the great chamber of every actual lodge of a living Brotherhood. Whether the man is about to sell his soul to the devil, like Faust; whether he is to be worsted in the battle, like Hamlet; or whether he is to pass on within the precincts; in any case these words are for him. The man can choose between virtue and vice, but not until he is a man; a babe or a wild animal cannot

so choose. Thus with the disciple, he must first become a disciple before he can even see the paths to choose between. This effort of creating himself as a disciple, the re-birth, he must do for himself without any teacher. Until the four rules are learned no teacher can be of any use to him; and that is why "the Masters" are referred to in the way they are. No real masters, whether adepts in power, in love, or in blackness, can affect a man till these four rules are passed.

Tears, as I have said, may be called the moisture of life. The soul must have laid aside the emotions of humanity, must have secured a balance which cannot be shaken by misfortune, before its eyes can open upon the super-human world.

The voice of the Masters is always in the world; but only those hear it whose ears are no longer receptive of the sounds which affect the personal life. Laughter no longer lightens the heart, anger may no longer enrage it, tender words bring it no balm. For that within, to which the ears are as an outer gateway, is an unshaken place of peace in itself which no person can disturb.

As the eyes are the windows of the soul, so are the ears its gateways or doors. Through them comes knowledge of the confusion of the world. The great ones who have conquered life, who have become more than disciples, stand at peace and undisturbed amid the vibration and kaleidoscopic movement of humanity. They hold within themselves a certain knowledge, as well as a perfect peace; and thus they are not roused or excited by the partial and erroneous fragments of information which are brought to their ears by the changing voices of those around them. When I speak of knowledge, I mean intuitive knowledge. This certain information can never be obtained by hard work, or by experiment; for these methods are only applicable to matter, and matter is in itself a perfectly uncertain substance, continually affected by change. The most absolute and universal laws of natural and physical life, as understood by the scientist, will pass away when the life of this universe has passed away, and only its soul is left in the silence. What then will be the value of the knowledge of its laws acquired by industry and observation? I pray that no reader or critic will imagine that by what I have said I intend to depreciate or disparage acquired knowledge, or the work of scientists. On the contrary, I hold that scientific men are the pioneers of modern thought. The days of literature and of art, when poets and sculptors saw the divine light, and put it into their own great language -- these days lie buried in the long past with the ante-Phidian sculptors and the pre-Homeric poets. The mysteries no longer rule the world of thought and beauty; human life is the governing power, not that which lies beyond it. But the scientific workers are progressing, not so much by their own will as by sheer force of circumstances, towards the far line which divides things interpretable from things uninterpretable. Every fresh discovery drives them a step onward. Therefore do I very highly esteem the knowledge obtained by work and experiment.

But intuitive knowledge is an entirely different thing. It is not acquired in any way, but is, so to speak, a faculty of the soul; not the animal soul, that which becomes

a ghost after death, when lust or liking or the memory of ill deeds holds it to the neighborhood of human beings, but the divine soul which animates all the external forms of the individualized being.

This is, of course, a faculty which indwells in that soul, which is inherent. The would-be disciple has to arouse himself to the consciousness of it by a fierce and resolute and indomitable effort of will. I use the word indomitable for a special reason. Only he who is untameable, who cannot be dominated, who knows he has to play the lord over men, over facts, over all things save his own divinity, can arouse this faculty. "With faith all things are possible." The skeptical laugh at faith and pride themselves on its absence from their own minds. The truth is that faith is a great engine, an enormous power, which in fact can accomplish all things. For it is the covenant or engagement between man's divine part and his lesser self.

The use of this engine is quite necessary in order to obtain intuitive knowledge; for unless a man believes such knowledge exists within himself how can he claim and use it?

Without it he is more helpless than any driftwood or wreckage on the great tides of the ocean. They are cast hither and thither indeed; so may a man be by the chances of fortune. But such adventures are purely external and of very small account. A slave may be dragged through the streets in chains, and yet retain the quiet soul of a philosopher, as was well seen in the person of Epictetus. A man may have every worldly prize in his possession, and stand absolute master of his personal fate, to all appearance, and yet he knows no peace, no certainty, because he is shaken within himself by every tide of thought that he touches on. And these changing tides do not merely sweep the man bodily hither and thither like driftwood on the water; that would be nothing. They enter into the gateways of his soul, and wash over that soul and make it blind and blank and void of all permanent intelligence, so that passing impressions affect it.

To make my meaning plainer I will use an illustration. Take an author at his writing, a painter at his canvas, a composer listening to the melodies that dawn upon his glad imagination; let any one of these workers pass his daily hours by a wide window looking on a busy street. The power of the animating life blinds sight and hearing alike, and the great traffic of the city goes by like nothing but a passing pageant. But a man whose mind is empty, whose day is objectless, sitting at that same window, notes the passers-by and remembers the faces that chance to please or interest him. So it is with the mind in its relation to eternal truth. If it no longer transmits its fluctuations, its partial knowledge, its unreliable information to the soul, then in the inner place of peace already found when the first rule has been learned -- in that inner place there leaps into flame the light of actual knowledge. Then the ears begin to hear. Very dimly, very faintly at first. And, indeed, so faint and tender are these first indications of the commencement

of true actual life, that they are sometimes pushed aside as mere fancies, mere imaginings.

But before these are capable of becoming more than mere imaginings, the abyss of nothingness has to be faced in another form. The utter silence which can only come by closing the ears to all transitory sounds comes as a more appalling horror than even the formless emptiness of space. Our only mental conception of blank space is, I think, when reduced to its barest element of thought, that of black darkness. This is a great physical terror to most persons, and when regarded as an eternal and unchangeable fact, must mean to the mind the idea of annihilation rather than anything else. But it is the obliteration of one sense only; and the sound of a voice may come and bring comfort even in the profoundest darkness. The disciple, having found his way into this blackness, which is the fearful abyss, must then so shut the gates of his soul that no comforter can enter there nor any enemy. And it is in making this second effort that the fact of pain and pleasure being but one sensation becomes recognizable by those who have before been unable to perceive it. For when the solitude of silence is reached the soul hungers so fiercely and passionately for some sensation on which to rest, that a painful one would be as keenly welcomed as a pleasant one. When this consciousness is reached the courageous man by seizing and retaining it, may destroy the "sensitiveness" at once. When the ear no longer discriminates between that which is pleasant or that which is painful, it will no longer be affected by the voices of others. And then it is safe and possible to open the doors of the soul.

"Sight" is the first effort, and the easiest, because it is accomplished partly by an intellectual effort. The intellect can conquer the heart, as is well known in ordinary life. Therefore, this preliminary step still lies within the dominion of matter. But the second step allows of no such assistance, nor of any material aid whatever. Of course, I mean by material aid the action of the brain, or emotions, or human soul. In compelling the ears to listen only to the eternal silence, the being we call man becomes something which is no longer man. A very superficial survey of the thousand and one influences which are brought to bear on us by others will show that this must be so. A disciple will fulfil all the duties of his manhood; but he will fulfil them according to his own sense of right, and not according to that of any person or body of persons. This is a very evident result of following the creed of knowledge instead of any of the blind creeds.

To obtain the pure silence necessary for the disciple, the heart and emotions, the brain and its intellectualisms, have to be put aside. Both are but mechanisms, which will perish with the span of man's life. It is the essence beyond, that which is the motive power, and makes man live, that is now compelled to rouse itself and act. Now is the greatest hour of danger. In the first trial men go mad with fear; of this first trial Bulwer Lytton wrote. No novelist has followed to the second trial, though some of the poets have. Its subtlety and great danger lies in the fact that in the measure of a man's strength is the measure of his chance of passing

beyond it or coping with it at all. If he has power enough to awaken that unaccustomed part of himself, the supreme essence, then has he power to lift the gates of gold, then is he the true alchemist, in possession of the elixir of life.

It is at this point of experience that the occultist becomes separated from all other men and enters on to a life which is his own; on to the path of individual accomplishment instead of mere obedience to the genii which rule our earth. This raising of himself into an individual power does in reality identify him with the nobler forces of life and make him one with them. For they stand beyond the powers of this earth and the laws of this universe. Here lies man's only hope of success in the great effort; to leap right away from his present standpoint to his next and at once become an intrinsic part of the divine power as he has been an intrinsic part of the intellectual power, of the great nature to which he belongs. He stands always in advance of himself, if such a contradiction can be understood. It is the men who adhere to this position, who believe in their innate power of progress, and that of the whole race, who are the elder brothers, the pioneers. Each man has to accomplish the great leap for himself and without aid; yet it is something of a staff to lean on to know that others have gone on that road. It is possible that they have been lost in the abyss; no matter, they have had the courage to enter it. Why I say that it is possible they have been lost in the abyss is because of this fact, that one who has passed through is unrecognizable until the other and altogether new condition is attained by both. It is unnecessary to enter upon the subject of what that condition is at present.

I only say this, that in the early state in which man is entering upon the silence he loses knowledge of his friends, of his lovers, of all who have been near and dear to him; and also loses sight of his teachers and of those who have preceded him on his way. I explain this because scarce one passes through without bitter complaint. Could but the mind grasp beforehand that the silence must be complete, surely this complaint need not arise as a hindrance on the path. Your teacher, or your predecessor may hold your hand in his, and give you the utmost sympathy the human heart is capable of. But when the silence and the darkness comes, you lose all knowledge of him; you are alone and he cannot help you, not because his power is gone, but because you have invoked your great enemy.

By your great enemy, I mean yourself. If you have the power to face your own soul in the darkness and silence, you will have conquered the physical or animal self which dwells in sensation only.

This statement, I feel, will appear involved; but in reality it is quite simple. Man, when he has reached his fruition, and civilization is at its height, stands between two fires. Could he but claim his great inheritance, the encumbrance of the mere animal life would fall away from him without difficulty. But he does not do this, and so the races of men flower and then droop and die and decay off the face of the earth, however splendid the bloom may have been. And it is left to the individual to make this great effort; to refuse to be terrified by his greater nature,

to refuse to be drawn back by his lesser or more material self. Every individual who accomplishes this is a redeemer of the race. He may not blazon forth his deeds, he may dwell in secret and silence; but it is a fact that he forms a link between man and his divine part; between the known and the unknown; between the stir of the market place and the stillness of the snow-capped Himalayas. He has not to go about among men in order to form this link; in the astral he *is* that link, and this fact makes him a being of another order from the rest of mankind. Even so early on the road towards knowledge, when he has but taken the second step, he finds his footing more certain, and becomes conscious that he is a recognized part of a whole.

This is one of the contradictions in life which occur so constantly that they afford fuel to the fiction writer. The occultist finds them become much more marked as he endeavors to live the life he has chosen. As he retreats within himself and becomes self-dependent, he finds himself more definitely becoming part of a great tide of definite thought and feeling. When he has learned the first lesson, conquered the hunger of the heart, and refused to live on the love of others, he finds himself more capable of inspiring love. As he flings life away it comes to him in a new form and with a new meaning. The world has always been a place with many contradictions in it, to the man; when he becomes a disciple he finds life is describable as a series of paradoxes. This is a fact in nature, and the reason for it is intelligible enough. Man's soul "dwells like a star apart," even that of the vilest among us; while his consciousness is under the law of vibratory and sensuous life. This alone is enough to cause those complications of character which are the material for the novelist; every man is a mystery, to friend and enemy alike, and to himself. His motives are often undiscoverable, and he cannot probe to them or know why he does this or that. The disciple's effort is that of awakening consciousness in this starry part of himself, where his power and divinity lie sleeping. As this consciousness becomes awakened, the contradictions in the man himself become more marked than ever; and so do the paradoxes which he lives through. For, of course man creates his own life; and "adventures are to the adventurous" is one of those wise proverbs which are drawn from actual fact, and cover the whole area of human experience.

Pressure on the divine part of man re-acts upon the animal part. As the silent soul awakes it makes the ordinary life of the man more purposeful, more vital, more real, and responsible. To keep to the two instances already mentioned, the occultist who has withdrawn into his own citadel has found his strength; immediately he becomes aware of the demands of duty upon him. He does not obtain his strength by his own right, but because he is a part of the whole; and as soon as he is safe from the vibration of life and can stand unshaken, the outer world cries out to him to come and labor in it. So with the heart. When it no longer wishes to take, it is called upon to give abundantly.

"Light on the Path" has been called a book of paradoxes, and very justly; what else could it be, when it deals with the actual personal experience of the disciple?

To have acquired the astral senses of sight and hearing; or in other words to have attained perception and opened the doors of the soul, are gigantic tasks and may take the sacrifice of many successive incarnations. And yet, when the will has reached its strength, the whole miracle may be worked in a second of time. Then is the disciple the servant of Time no longer.

These two first steps are negative; that is to say they imply retreat from a present condition of things rather than advance towards another. The two next are active, implying the advance into another state of being.

III: "BEFORE THE VOICE CAN SPEAK IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MASTERS."

Speech is the power of communication; the moment of entrance into active life is marked by its attainment.

And now, before I go any further, let me explain a little the way in which the rules written down in "Light on the Path" are arranged. The first seven of those which are numbered are sub-divisions of the two first unnumbered rules, those with which I have dealt in the two preceding papers. The numbered rules were simply an effort of mine to make the unnumbered ones more intelligible. "Eight" to "fifteen" of these numbered rules belong to this unnumbered rule which is now my text.

As I have said, these rules are written for all disciples, but for none else; they are not of interest to any other persons. Therefore I trust no one else will trouble to read these papers any further. The first two rules, which include the whole of that part of the effort which necessitates the use of the surgeon's knife, I will enlarge upon further if I am asked to do so. But the disciple is expected to deal with the snake, his lower self, unaided; to suppress his human passions and emotions by the force of his own will. He can only demand assistance of a master when this is accomplished, or at all events, partially so. Otherwise the gates and windows of his soul are blurred, and blinded, and darkened, and no knowledge can come to him. I am not, in these papers, purposing to tell a man how to deal with his own soul; I am simply giving, to the disciple, knowledge. That I am not writing, even now, so that all who run may read, is owing to the fact that super-nature prevents this by its own immutable laws.

The four rules which I have written down for those in the West who wish to study them, are as I have said, written in the ante-chamber of every living Brotherhood; I may add more, in the ante-chamber of every living or dead Brotherhood, or Order yet to be formed. When I speak of a Brotherhood or an Order, I do not mean an arbitrary constitution made by scholiasts and intellectualists; I mean an actual fact in super-nature, a stage of development towards the absolute God or Good. During this development the disciple encounters harmony, pure knowledge, pure truth, in different degrees, and, as he enters these degrees, he finds himself becoming part of what might be roughly described as a layer of

human consciousness. He encounters his equals, men of his own self-less character, and with them his association becomes permanent and indissoluble, because founded on a vital likeness of nature. To them he becomes pledged by such vows as need no utterance or framework in ordinary words. This is one aspect of what I mean by a Brotherhood.

If the first rules are conquered, the disciple finds himself standing at the threshold. Then if his will is sufficiently resolute his power speech comes; a two-fold power. For, as he advances now, he finds himself entering into a state of blossoming, where every bud that opens throws out its several rays or petals. If he is to exercise his new gift, he must use it in its two-fold character. He finds in himself the power to speak in the presence of the masters; in other words, he has the right to demand contact with the divinest element of that state of consciousness into which he has entered. But he finds himself compelled, by the nature of his position, to act in two ways at the same time. He cannot send his voice up to the heights where sit the gods till he has penetrated to the deep places where their light shines not at all. He has come within the grip of an iron law. If he demands to become a neophyte, he at once becomes a servant. Yet his service is sublime, if only from the character of those who share it. For the masters are also servants; they serve and claim their reward afterwards. Part of their service is to let their knowledge touch him; his first act of service is to give some of that knowledge to those who are not yet fit to stand where he stands. This is no arbitrary decision, made by any master or teacher or any such person, however divine. It is a law of that life which the disciple has entered upon.

Therefore was it written in the inner doorway of the lodges of the old Egyptian Brotherhood, "The laborer is worthy of his hire."

"Ask and ye shall have," sounds like something too easy and simple to be credible. But the disciple cannot "ask" in the mystic sense in which the word is used in this scripture until he has attained the power of helping others.

Why is this? Has the statement too dogmatic a sound?

Is it too dogmatic to say that a man must have foothold before he can spring? The position is the same. If help is given, if work is done, then there is an actual claim -- not what we call a personal claim of payment, but the claim of co-nature. The divine give, they demand that you also shall give before you can be of their kin.

This law is discovered as soon as the disciple endeavors to speak. For speech is a gift which comes only to the disciple of power and knowledge. The spiritualist enters the psychic-astral world, but he does not find there any certain speech, unless he at once claims it and continues to do so. If he is interested in "phenomena," or the mere circumstance and accident of astral life, then he enters no direct ray of thought or purpose, he merely exists and amuses himself

in the astral life as he has existed and amused himself in the physical life. Certainly there are one or two simple lessons which the psychic-astral can teach him, just as there are simple lessons which material and intellectual life teach him. And these lessons have to be learned; the man who proposes to enter upon the life of the disciple without having learned the early and simple lessons must always suffer from his ignorance. They are vital, and have to be studied in a vital manner; experienced through and through, over and over again, so that each part of the nature has been penetrated by them.

To return. In claiming the power of speech, as it is called, the Neophyte cries out to the Great One who stands foremost in the ray of knowledge on which he has entered, to give him guidance. When he does this, his voice is hurled back by the power he has approached, and echoes down to the deep recesses of human ignorance. In some confused and blurred manner the news that there is knowledge and a beneficent power which teaches is carried to as many men as will listen to it. No disciple can cross the threshold without communicating this news, and placing it on record in some fashion or other.

He stands horror-struck at the imperfect and unprepared manner in which he has done this; and then comes the desire to do it well, and with the desire thus to help others comes the power. For it is a pure desire, this which comes upon him; he can gain no credit, no glory, no personal reward by fulfilling it. And therefore he obtains the power to fulfil it.

The history of the whole past, so far as we can trace it, shows very plainly that there is neither credit, glory, nor reward to be gained by this first task which is given to the Neophyte. Mystics have always been sneered at, and seers disbelieved; those who have had the added power of intellect have left for posterity their written record, which to most men appears unmeaning and visionary, even when the authors have the advantage of speaking from a far-off past. The disciple who undertakes the task, secretly hoping for fame or success, to appear as a teacher and apostle before the world, fails even before his task is attempted, and his hidden hypocrisy poisons his own soul, and the souls of those he touches. He is secretly worshiping himself, and this idolatrous practice must bring its own reward.

The disciple who has the power of entrance, and is strong enough to pass each barrier, will, when the divine message comes to his spirit, forget himself utterly in the new consciousness which falls on him. If this lofty contact can really rouse him, he becomes as one of the divine in his desire to give rather than to take, in his wish to help rather than be helped, in his resolution to feed the hungry rather than take manna from Heaven himself. His nature is transformed, and the selfishness which prompts men's actions in ordinary life suddenly deserts him.

IV: "BEFORE THE VOICE CAN SPEAK IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MASTERS, IT MUST HAVE LOST THE POWER TO WOUND."

Those who give a merely passing and superficial attention to the subject of occultism -- and their name is Legion -- constantly inquire why, if adepts in life exist, they do not appear in the world and show their power. That the chief body of these wise ones should be understood to dwell beyond the fastnesses of the Himalayas, appears to be a sufficient proof that they are only figures of straw. Otherwise, why place them so far off?

Unfortunately, Nature has done this and not personal choice or arrangement. There are certain spots on the earth where the advance of "civilization" is unfelt, and the nineteenth century fever is kept at bay. In these favored places there is always time, always opportunity, for the realities of life; they are not crowded out by the doings of an inchoate, money-loving, pleasure seeking society. While there are adepts upon the earth, the earth must preserve to them places of seclusion. This is a fact in nature which is only an external expression of a profound fact in super-nature.

The demand of the neophyte remains unheard until the voice in which it is uttered has lost the power to wound. This is because the divine-astral life* is a place in which order reigns, just as it does in natural life. There is, of course, always the center and the circumference as there is in nature. Close to the central heart of life, on any plane, there is knowledge, there order reigns completely; and chaos makes dim and confused the outer margin of the circle. In fact, life in every form bears a more or less strong resemblance to a philosophic school. There are always the devotees of knowledge who forget their own lives in their pursuit of it; there are always the flippant crowd who come and go -- of such, Epictetus said that it was as easy to teach them philosophy as to eat custard with a fork. The same state exists in the super-astral life; and the adept has an even deeper and more profound seclusion there in which to dwell. This place of retreat is so safe, so sheltered, that no sound which has discord in it can reach his ears. Why should this be, will be asked at once, if he is a being of such great powers as those say who believe in his existence? The answer seems very apparent. He serves humanity and identifies himself with the whole world; he is ready to make vicarious sacrifice for it at any moment -- *by living not by dying for it*. Why should he not die for it? Because he is part of the great whole, and one of the most valuable parts of it. Because he lives under laws of order which he does not desire to break. His life is not his own, but that of the forces which work behind him. He is the flower of humanity, the bloom which contains the divine seed. He is, in his own person, a treasure of the universal nature, which is guarded and made safe in order that the fruition shall be perfected. It is only at definite periods of the world's history that he is allowed to go among the herd of men as their redeemer. But for those who have the power to separate themselves from this herd he is always at hand. And for those who are strong enough to conquer the vices of the personal human nature, as set forth in these four rules, he is consciously at hand, easily recognized, ready to answer.

*Of course every occultist knows by reading Eliphas Levi and other authors that the "astral" plane is a plane of unequalized forces, and that a state of confusion necessarily prevails. But this does not apply to the "divine astral" plane, which is a plane where wisdom, and therefore order, prevails.

But this conquering of self implies a destruction of qualities which most men regard as not only indestructible but desirable. The "power to wound" includes much that men value, not only in themselves, but in others. The instinct of self-defense and of self-preservation is part of it; the idea that one has any right or rights, either as citizen, or man, or individual, the pleasant consciousness of self-respect and of virtue. These are hard sayings to many; yet they are true. For these words that I am writing now, and those which I have written on this subject, are not in any sense my own. They are drawn from the traditions of the lodge of the Great Brotherhood, which was once the secret splendor of Egypt. The rules written in its ante-chamber were the same as those now written in the ante-chamber of existing schools. Through all time the wise men have lived apart from the mass. And even when some temporary purpose or object induces one of them to come into the midst of human life, his seclusion and safety is preserved as completely as ever. It is part of his inheritance, part of his position, he has an actual title to it, and can no more put it aside than the Duke of Westminster can say he does not choose to be the Duke of Westminster. In the various great cities of the world an adept lives for a while from time to time, or perhaps only passes through; but all are occasionally aided by the actual power and presence of one of these men. Here in London, as in Paris and St. Petersburg, there are men high in development. But they are only known as mystics by those who have the power to recognize; the power given by the conquering of self. Otherwise how could they exist, even for an hour, in such a mental and psychic atmosphere as is created by the confusion and disorder of a city? Unless protected and made safe their own growth would be interfered with, their work injured. And the neophyte may meet an adept in the flesh, may live in the same house with him, and yet be unable to recognize him, and unable to make his own voice heard by him. For no nearness in space, no closeness of relations, no daily intimacy, can do away with the inexorable laws which give the adept his seclusion. No voice penetrates to his inner hearing till it has become a divine voice, a voice which gives no utterance to the cries of self. Any lesser appeal would be as useless, as much a waste of energy and power, as for mere children who are learning their alphabet to be taught it by a professor of philology. Until a man has become, in heart and spirit, a disciple, he has no existence for those who are teachers of disciples. And he becomes this by one method only -- the surrender of his personal humanity.

For the voice to have lost the power to wound, a man must have reached that point where he sees himself only as one of the vast multitudes that live; one of the sands washed hither and thither by the sea of vibratory existence. It is said that every grain of sand in the ocean bed does, in its turn, get washed up on to the shore and lie for a moment in the sunshine. So with human beings, they are driven hither and thither by a great force, and each, in his turn, finds the sunrays

on him. When a man is able to regard his own life as part of a whole like this he will no longer struggle in order to obtain anything for himself. This is the surrender of personal rights. The ordinary man expects, not to take equal fortunes with the rest of the world, but in some points, about which he cares, to fare better than the others. The disciple does not expect this. Therefore, though he be, like Epictetus, a chained slave, he has no word to say about it. He knows that the wheel of life turns ceaselessly. Burne Jones has shown it in his marvelous picture -- the wheel turns, and on it are bound the rich and the poor, the great and the small -- each has his moment of good fortune when the wheel brings him uppermost -- the King rises and falls, the poet is *feted* and forgotten, the slave is happy and afterwards discarded. Each in his turn is crushed as the wheel turns on. The disciple knows that this is so, and though it is his duty to make the utmost of the life that is his, he neither complains of it nor is elated by it, nor does he complain against the better fortune of others. All alike, as he well knows, are but learning a lesson; and he smiles at the socialist and the reformer who endeavor by sheer force to re-arrange circumstances which arise out of the forces of human nature itself. This is but kicking against the pricks; a waste of life and energy.

In realizing this a man surrenders his imagined individual rights, of whatever sort. That takes away one keen sting which is common to all ordinary men.

When the disciple has fully recognized that the very thought of individual rights is only the outcome of the venomous quality in himself, that it is the hiss of the snake of self which poisons with its sting his own life and the lives of those about him, then he is ready to take part in a yearly ceremony which is open to all neophytes who are prepared for it. All weapons of defense and offense are given up; all weapons of mind and heart, and brain, and spirit. Never again can another man be regarded as a person who can be criticized or condemned; never again can the neophyte raise his voice in self-defense or excuse. From that ceremony he returns into the world as helpless, as unprotected, as a new-born child. That, indeed, is what he is. He has begun to be born again on to the higher plane of life, that breezy and well-lit plateau from whence the eyes see intelligently and regard the world with a new insight.

I have said, a little way back, that after parting with the sense of individual rights, the disciple must part also with the sense of self-respect and of virtue. This may sound a terrible doctrine, yet all occultists know well that it is not a doctrine, but a fact. He who thinks himself holier than another, he who has any pride in his own exemption from vice or folly, he who believes himself wise, or in any way superior to his fellow men, is incapable of discipleship. A man must become as a little child before he can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

Virtue and wisdom are sublime things; but if they create pride and a consciousness of separateness from the rest of humanity in the mind of a man, then they are only the snakes of self re-appearing in a finer form. At any moment

he may put on his grosser shape and sting as fiercely as when he inspired the actions of a murderer who kills for gain or hatred, or a politician who sacrifices the mass for his own or his party's interests.

In fact, to have lost the power to wound, implies that the snake is not only scotched, but killed. When it is merely stupefied or lulled to sleep it awakes again and the disciple uses his knowledge and his power for his own ends, and is a pupil of the many masters of the black art, for the road to destruction is very broad and easy, and the way can be found blindfold. That it is the way to destruction is evident, for when a man begins to live for self he narrows his horizon steadily till at last the fierce driving inwards leaves him but the space of a pin's-head to dwell in. We have all seen this phenomenon occur in ordinary life. A man who becomes selfish isolates himself, grows less interesting and less agreeable to others. The sight is an awful one, and people shrink from a very selfish person at last, as from a beast of prey. How much more awful is it when it occurs on the more advanced plane of life, with the added powers of knowledge, and through the greater sweep of successive incarnations!

Therefore I say, pause and think well upon the threshold. For if the demand of the neophyte is made without the complete purification, it will not penetrate the seclusion of the divine adept, but will evoke the terrible forces which attend upon the black side of our human nature.

V: "BEFORE THE SOUL CAN STAND IN THE PRESENCE OF THE MASTERS, ITS FEET MUST BE WASHED IN THE BLOOD OF THE HEART."

The word soul, as used here, means the divine soul, or "starry spirit."

"To be able to stand is to have confidence"; and to have confidence means that the disciple is sure of himself, that he has surrendered his emotions, his very self, even his humanity; that he is incapable of fear and unconscious of pain; that his whole consciousness is centered in the divine life, which is expressed symbolically by the term "the Masters"; that he has neither eyes, nor ears, nor speech, nor power, save in and for the divine ray on which his highest sense has touched. Then is he fearless, free from suffering, free from anxiety or dismay; his soul stands without shrinking or desire of postponement, in the full blaze of the divine light which penetrates through and through his being. Then he has come into his inheritance and can claim his kinship with the teachers of men; he is upright, he has raised his head, he breathes the same air that they do.

But before it is in any way possible for him to do this, the feet of the soul must be washed in the blood of the heart.

The sacrifice, or surrender of the heart of man, and its emotions, is the first of the rules; it involves the "attaining of an equilibrium which cannot be shaken by personal emotion." This is done by the stoic philosopher; he, too, stands aside and looks equably upon his own sufferings, as well as on those of others.

In the same way that "tears" in the language of occultists expresses the soul of emotion, not its material appearance, so blood expresses, not that blood which is an essential of physical life, but the vital creative principle in man's nature, which drives him into human life in order to experience pain and pleasure, joy and sorrow. When he has let the blood flow from the heart he stands before the Masters as a pure spirit which no longer wishes to incarnate for the sake of emotion and experience. Through great cycles of time successive incarnations in gross matter may yet be his lot; but he no longer desires them, the crude wish to live has departed from him. When he takes upon him man's form in the flesh he does it in the pursuit of a divine object, to accomplish the work of "the Masters," and for no other end. He looks neither for pleasure nor pain, asks for no heaven, and fears no hell; yet he has entered upon a great inheritance which is not so much a compensation for these things surrendered, as a state which simply blots out the memory of them. He lives now not in the world, but with it; his horizon has extended itself to the width of the whole universe.