

LETTER 52.

February-March, 1954
Box 863, Johannesburg, S. Africa

My dear friends:

First of all I want to thank so many of you for such kind Christmas letters and greetings. I have got them all in a bundle and hope soon to reply to every one. I spent Christmas Day in my new home, almost the first home of my own I have ever had. It is a lovely room with a balcony over the Lodge Rooms in Johannesburg. All around me are my books and pictures. You may be surprised to hear that some of the books I have never yet had time to read properly. Now I will repair the omission. The pictures, which are mostly of angels and Saints, East and West, seem to speak to me in their own language. I feel very happy there I can tell you! I came after a long tour all round S. Africa again. Now I hope to remain "put" for at least a year, and write books.

I have just seen a very wonderful film, "The Conquest of Everest." It is really breath-taking in the beauty of its pictures in color, and more even in the almost horror of the slow ascent. Two things struck me very much. One was the generous team spirit which clearly inspired them all, and the other was the sublime courage which was theirs. Climbing mountains is something I could never dare. But what they did! You must see it to believe it. Some critics ask what is the good of doing things like that? I think it is a sublime object lesson in endurance and grit. When Mr. Mallory (whom I once heard lecture) and who died in the attempt, was asked why he wanted to do it he replied, "Because it is there." Some day such men will climb the heights of heaven "because it is there." Or, in the words of the Rig Veda, "no other way at all is there to go."

I have been thinking a great deal about life. I notice one very interesting phenomenon as one gets old. Our own divine Ego begins to synthesise life. A beautiful, all-over picture begins to form. I know what I want to do for ever and ever. I want to become one with life, and to understand it in all its permutations perfectly. I like the words of Professor Radhakrishnan, the most wonderful lecturer I ever heard, about life. "God is Life. Recognition of this fact is spiritual consciousness." Isn't that the same truth as the Gita voices when it says that, "He is the splendour of all splendid things, but also the gambling of the cheat?" And that, "Divine Knowledge erases all sin. Even if thou art the most sinful of all sinners, yet shalt thou cross over all sin by the raft of wisdom."

This is the best way to visualize God. So often we think of Him as something apart and different from His Universe, a sort of Church window Deity sitting up aloft in the heaven of our own thoughts. That is not God. God is instinct in every living thing, therefore, everything is to be treated with reverence and, if possible, understanding. God's Laws are the serene, majestic, never-changing Laws of Nature. We are in the hands of these Laws completely. But they always mean our final good. King David knew that, when convicted by the seer of sin, he said: "Let me now fall into the hand of the Lord....but let me not fall into the hand of man." I have often quoted to you the words of the Master K.H. to Mr. Judge: "draw on the breath of the great life throbbing in us all and let faith (which is unlearned knowledge) carry you through your life as a bird flies in the air-un-doubtingly."

One day I will describe to you a wonderful little book by Father de Caussade. He says God still speaks to men, to each one of us by the events of daily life, and to nations by cosmic happenings.

Now we will continue our discussion of the Voice of the Silence. "Before the Soul can see," it says, "fleshly eyes must be rendered blind to all illusion." This, to quote Sankaracharya, means the awakening of Viveka, or the spirit of Discernment, the glimpsing of the Eternal in the impermanent. Light on the Path has a similar statement: "Before the eyes can see they must be incapable of tears." Here again lies the growth of Viveka, the first Qualification for the Path. It does not mean the cessation of sympathy, but the elimination of all self-pity. We become incapable of any tears for ourselves, knowing that all life and its events are our friend and "shapes our ends, rough-hew them how we will." The man who does not know is continually trying to shape life to his own ideas and ends. The man who knows joyfully surrenders to God Who is Life that more perfect duty.

"Before the Soul can hear," goes on the book, "it has to become deaf to whispers as to roarings." This again is Viveka followed by Vairagya, Dispassion. Increasing spiritual discernment brings about a balanced, utterly dispassionate attitude to life. Thus echoes Lighton the Path, before the Soul can really hear it must have lost its sensitiveness, that is, its vivid, personal reactions to the events of life. Vivid personal reactions prevent the inner ear from becoming aware of the spiritual meaning of things and events. "Before the Soul can comprehend and may remember, she must unto the Silent Speaker be united." Here again is the great truth enunciated by the Egyptian Teacher, Thrice greatest Hermes, that spiritual knowledge is never taught from without, but arises spontaneously from within when the hour is ripe. "This Race of Men is never taught by Me, O Disciple, but when He willeth it, its memory is restored by God."

The source of true knowledge, wisdom, love and power lies within, in the eternal, safe keeping of our own diviner selves. All that we can do is to approach Him with love and humility, but continually, continually, taking the Kingdom of Heaven by storm, slowly growing the purity and discernment which will enable Him to unite this earthly self with Him and hereafter to "model us" according to His Will. "Then the Soul will hear, and will remember," and to this inner ear, at last, the eternal Voice of the Silence will speak.

"Give up thy life if thou wouldst live." Did not the Christ say the same? The little, personal, petty life, which yet is always ours, to be illuminated, uplifted, irradiated with the Light of the Spirit within. The spiritual life is the supremely natural life, heart of our hearts, mind of our minds, not something alien, unattractive, insipid. It is to be sought for its own sake alone, "not for the sake of our feet that shall tread the path to it." God is to be sought because He is true, is beautiful, is wonderful, not because we would be true and beautiful and wonderful. Sang the psalmist: "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from Thy Presence? If I ascend up into heaven, Thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me. The darkness and the light are both alike to Thee." I will end with a lovely little verse from the Sufi Scriptures I have just read.

"Oh God, if I worship Thee in fear of Hell, Burn me in Hell;
And if I worship Thee in hope of Paradise, Shut me out of Paradise;
But if I worship Thee for Thine own sake,
Withhold not then from me Thine Everlasting Beauty."

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Your affectionate friend,
CLARA CODD