

My dear friends,

I have just come back from the fifth International Congress of the T.S. at Salzburg, Austria. It was truly one of the most wonderful occasions of a lifetime. There were 1200 of us present from 47 different countries, and we filled one of the most beautiful halls I have ever seen. There was an enormous platform, on which sat at the beginning and the end, representatives of the 47 national societies. There was even a delegate from Persia, or Iran as it is now called, and he told me that there were 20 Theosophists in Iran. Behind the big platform were quite enormous long windows and round the hall descending galleries.

We began and ended with the prayers of the religions. The evenings were devoted to concerts, etc. The Mayor of Salzburg invited us all to a special concert in the Mozart Hall. I believe Mozart was born in Salzburg. We cheered him like anything so he looked very pleased. Another evening the young people of Salzburg gave us an exhibition of peasant singing and dancing. The young men had on the traditional shorts and the young women the pretty peasant dress. They thumped the floor a great deal and now and then let off loud hoots. At the last dance they invited members of the audience to join in, so John Coats and some others went up on the platform and danced round with the young people. One night Mr. Perkins showed us pictures of Adyar, and another night Fritz Kunz showed us pictures of the development of a chicken inside an eggshell. The mornings and afternoons were devoted to serious lectures. They were all translated by interpreters, sentence by sentence. To begin with into German, later into French. Among the speakers were not only Sri Ram but also Rukmini and Radha, Sri Ram's daughter, and Geoffrey Hodson, Mr. Slater, Mr. Perkins, Miss Joy Mills, Miss Zahara and others. There were smaller lectures and different chairmen too. I had Bhagirati, Sri Ram's wife, as mine. She told the audience that she first met me when she was a girl of seventeen, so I told how Mary Neff and I taught her to play tennis.

The closing meeting was on the Friday morning with a speech by John Coats and Sri Ram. So came to an end a quite wonderful and splendid occasion, and I am truly thankful that I could be there, but no doubt it is my last great gathering, for I am now getting so old. I remember many years ago, when I was in Adyar, an Indian fortune-teller told me that I would live to be very old and go about with a stick. Well, the stick stage has not yet arrived!

One of my correspondents has asked me to talk about "duty." There are two Sanscrit words that have become familiar to Western ears, the words Karma and Dharma. I was once on a London bus when the conductor slipped and gave himself a bad knock. "There, that's my Karma," he said. I was so surprised. Everyone knows what Karma means. To put it in modern scientific terminology, "action and reaction, equal and opposite." Perhaps Dharma is not quite so familiar. H.P.B. in the Secret Doctrine describes it thus: "It is man who plans and creates causes, and Karmic law adjusts the effects which adjustment is not an act, but is universal harmony, tending ever to resume its original position, like a bough which, bent too forcibly, rebounds with corresponding vigour." (S.D. II, 319)

Perhaps Dharma is not quite so familiar. The Sanscrit means "that which is to be held." I think it means all that which by our past actions we have acquired a liability. For instance, if we have married someone we owe them a certain "duty." If we have an old parent dependent upon us we do not evade that Dharma. Annie Besant writes: "Dharma is a wide word, primarily meaning the essential nature of a thing -- that which makes it to be what it is externally, hence the law of its being -- its duty."

Sometimes people evade or throw off a clear duty. I once knew a woman who left her poor husband to feed the children and to put them to bed because, she said, she was going to study occultism and become an occultist. Of course she was going the very wrong way about it. H.P.B. says that the first duty of every occultist is to do his duty by every duty, and that one should never throw over one's plain duty to pursue what we imagine to be a higher vocation. That is plain selfishness, and it is only No. 1 and its desires, even very exalted ones, that stand between ourselves and union with all life.

I also know couples where one of them refuses any marital duties because they want to be occultists. But when they married they took on a certain duty. It cannot be thrown over. According to an old Indian tradition a man lived the life of a Brahma-chari, that is a celibate, whilst young and studying. Then he married, as a duty to the State, and as he approached old age, if his wife agreed, he could abandon an ordinary life and enter upon the life of a Sanyasi, or contemplative.

Then there is the care of the aged. They looked after us when we were tiny and helpless, so it is only fair that we should look after them when they are old and feeble. I remember a Swede telling me of a wonderful custom they had in Sweden. Every Christmas time the members of his community would gather and consider who should take care of the old people in the village. For years his parents had an old lady living with them, taken on in this way.

Of course there is another aspect to this question. The duties must be duties which we clearly recognise ourselves, not ones which other people think we should shoulder. In "At the Feet of the Master" the Master K.H. is very clear on this point. He says: "Because you try to take up higher work, you must not forget your ordinary duties, for until they are done you are not free for other service. You should undertake no new worldly duties but those which you have already taken upon you, you must perfectly fulfill -- all clear and reasonable duties which you yourself recognise, that is, not imaginary duties which others try to impose upon you. If you are to be His you must do ordinary work better than others, not worse; because you must do that also for His sake."

We all have to beware a little of busybodies who know better than we do ourselves what we should do. I have stated before that such people, being the true originators of the deed, to them comes back in future lives the Karmic result. I think the sense of duty also extends towards animals and plants. A neglected garden, a semi-starved pet, are not the evidence of a true aspirant. One of the four great qualifications for Initiation is Mumukshatva -- union with all life. When that great spiritual consciousness is born in a man his own ego disappears. It no longer matters to him what that little centre of consciousness is experiencing. His whole soul is filled with the desire for the welfare and happiness of every living thing. I will put it in the lovely words of an ancient Upanishad: "Our fore-fathers, desiring the welfare of the world, attained liberation." It is quite a good idea to throw oneself overboard if one can. Or at least to regard it dispassionately. The Master M. once told Mr. Judge, to learn to look on himself as he would look on a complete stranger, and not to be led into anxiety or remorse. Anxiety and remorse diminish the flow of pranic life to the man. Remorse means storing some of that force in the past. So the Voice of the Silence tells the aspirant to kill in himself all memory of past experience. We all make many mistakes since we are all rather underdeveloped. We can all remember times when we might have been kinder or more understanding. But there is nothing meritorious about mourning forever about it. The Master K.H. once said that the only repentance which was worth while was the resolve never to do it again.

Then there is the flow of life in the other direction, needless anxiety. I think very sensitive people tend to become chronic worriers. Perhaps I am one myself! C.W.L. was a person who never worried. He was very homely about it. He would quote the old saying about not crossing bridges before you got to them and also the one about it being all the same ten years hence. "Well," he would say, "if it is all the same then, it is all the same now."

Goodbye for the moment, -- your affectionate friend,

Clara M. Codd.

From your secretary: October 10 is Miss Codd's 90th birthday, in case you'd like to know!