

D E A T H

BY

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ONE of the things we have learnt from the intense study of nature is that behind every desire of man and of all living things there is some justification and some fulfilment. That whatever men have persistently longed for and desired has some reality. Nature does nothing uselessly. God implants in human hearts no desire however fantastic that has not fulfilment. Dreams in one generation become commonplace realities in the next. Look back a thousand years and read the dreaming literature of that period and now we have got beyond the dreams and live in the reality. Man is never satisfied. As fast as one desire is satisfied new desires spring from our mind. Man has always desired to live; he naturally hates death. There is a sadness connected with the last time he does anything. The last day at school; we may have longed to be free but when the last day comes we are sad. Always an element of sadness—last notes dying in the distance—sunset, and this is felt not only by men who write poetry but by all men. The old are just as desirous of life as the young, often more so, even though shut off and lonely with all they love gone; yet they want to live. Death is terrible. All are attracted to life for life is sweet to all. Our Lord in the Garden, a true man, shudders at the approach of death.

That desire that outlives all men, that desire for life has indeed fulfilment in eternal life. This isn't our life, we weren't meant for *this*, we don't fit in, we were made for another purpose. Scissors used to open sardine-tins will open them, but if they could speak they would say that they were not happy when used for such a purpose—they are not meant for that! We were made for something considerably better than this world; it would be terrible if we were only for this world, dreadful. If human beings were really contented they would die out, there would be no incentive. Man is driven always onward to find something better than he has got, and in a way we do; our homes are more comfortable, warmer than they used to be. Man is discontented because he was made for God. We put off, mistransplanting the desire at our heart. Bettering our temporal life never does satisfy.

Religious are not in this position: with us eternal life is consciously sought for. Conversion happens suddenly, sometimes perhaps early

in life, sometimes later. We realise as we never did before and say to ourselves: 'Why, this thing is going to pass!' We can almost see this working in the mind of St Paul: 'I reckon that the sufferings of this life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to come'—'For I am sure that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor might, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord'. This conversion makes you safe to measure things by their proper standard.

Nothing here really matters, nothing is lasting, it all goes, we can't lean upon anything here, in all is an element of decay. No one book helps me for many years; it used to but now we keep it from sentiment—foolish, isn't it? In help even from this person who used to help me there is a flaw; if I lean too heavily I am thrown off my balance. And yet we will not leave such things alone! Books—pictures—prayers—none of these things are eternal; growth is their nature and therefore necessarily decay. Life this side of death all holds an element of decay. The longer we cling the more entangled we are and the greater the pain at parting. *Austerity* comes in here, austerity born of a sense of eternal life. Austerity sits loose from life—everything is passing—God only is eternal. Hold God, everything else as a gift of God. Some people are possessed of their possessions. One cannot take a house in every way suitable because a sideboard he has cannot fit in. Give it up—it's holding you, not you it. You are one of its possessions, not it one of yours. It's all wrong, isn't it? Isn't it dreadfully evident too in our lives? Things once a help, now a hindrance. It *was sacred*, a gift of God, now God asks it back for it is blocking our path, harmful to us, but if it goes we are perfectly miserable. What is *anything* added to God? If you take God away you take *everything*.

Nothing else really matters except God. We sometimes think how nice it would have been to have known our Lord when he was upon earth, to have walked the fields with him, to have heard his voice, guessed that it was he in the distance by his walk. What advantage was it to the Apostles? They all failed, badly. 'It is expedient to you that I go'. Even the human nature of Christ was to them a hindrance. It is God's way of dealing with souls, the price of greatness. This life doesn't matter, eternal life matters very much indeed. Conversion matters: think of the saints. Only when it really means something to us does God enter into us in an absorbing way. It seems cruel the way the saints acted—severe, isn't it? They tell us St Jane Francis walked across the body of her son to go to the cloister; cruel, unnatural. Ah! but there must be *no* attachment, always a certain aloofness, realising that nothing here matters *very* much. Even the

Sacraments are not essential. You can't hear Mass: what a terrible thing, isn't it? Is it? You have *God* and that is all that matters. If we have really got *God* nothing matters; for if we have him we are really rich. Is there any poverty where he is? We *can* forget, things distract us here, life is terribly distracting. The other world is eternal; *this must go*. So often the human, dying, failing things hold our hearts, but remember every single human being and created thing must go. Miserable creatures, we are trusting outward things, not resting on *God*. Our Lord came to teach us to do the will of his Father. 'I came to do the will of my Father'. 'Didst thou not know I must be about my Father's business?' 'I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do'. 'It is consummated'. The Father's will. Other things he lets go. He noticed Simon's slight, and feels it when everyone is against him; humanly he is hurt but beneath it is his hold on *God*. He was a king, not in a political sense but of all hearts. His reign is for all time, for ever. 'Have confidence, I have overcome the world'. 'But you are going to die, be jeered at by all—you conquer the world?' He is not judging by outside signs but by things divine. *This is the essence of religious life.*

We believe, we know, we live on the edge of eternity. What pains you, saddens you in life? things in time? what are you agitated about? We hold on to such petty things and they must all pass. *Hold on to God*. We should pledge ourselves to *God*, know *him*, not anybody else, not ourselves. Are you trying to? Can you honestly say you know *God*, that you make an effort, do you think you have really taken much trouble? You love other people; they will pass; if you love *God* that will not fail you—'nor height nor depth, nor any other creature'. All sorts of catastrophes and shadows will fall across your path but no creature can separate you from *God*. Your heart, never disturbed, will be at peace.

The eternity of our life is the *one thing* that matters. You have to give up your work—does it matter? 'When thou wast young thou didst gird thyself and didst walk where thou wouldst. But when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands and another shall gird thee and lead thee whither thou wouldst not.' Very hard. Is it hard? Why is it hard? *God only matters*. It is hard to be dependent on others, it hurts my pride. Yes, pride, vanity hurt. Ah! that's it! *God only matters*, his knowledge and love. See the joy of the saints, they weren't cast down, they were resting on *God*, he carried them and their hearts were at peace. 'Follow me.'

All things are passing, *God only* to the end. The Holy Ghost teaches us: 'It is expedient for *you* that I go'. All the thrill and charm of his human presence must go, the Holy Ghost can only come when that has gone. Mere feelings did help but must pass and

are hindrances if we hold to them. God wants us for himself. Don't rest in the gift but on him the giver. 'None else but thee, Lord.' Immense faith, abiding hope, eternal love. Sunshine or shadow, all are good for him. Conscious of God under all, we are poor but possessing all things. We should make the thought of eternal life something that steadies us; it enables us to put our hands down below everything and grip the hands of God. Faith helps us, hope helps us, Love—the Holy Ghost helps us, shows us life eternal. We are professed on our deathbed, this all passes, God never changes. God will be always with us even in the valley of the shadow of death. God fills *all* the world. There are not two worlds, but one world; and God fills the world and our heart.

THE SPEECH OF ANGELS

BY

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IN a previous study concerning knowledge after death, we saw that men are the lowest of all intelligent beings, the infants of the spiritual universe. In this life knowledge has to be presented to us pictorially through the senses, for like children we need our crayons and our blocks.

We need them no less for expression. We not only look at pictures, but paint them. We respond to the music of life by striking its chords. No matter how profoundly spiritual the thought of the mystic, he must convey it, if at all, by lips and hands and images drawn from the material world about him.

This being so, how shall we view the life and speech of angels? We know them to be, not unions of spirit and matter, but purely spiritual beings. These intricate bodily organisms of ours are totally unnecessary to them, for angelic knowledge goes behind all colour, sound and texture to the inner nature of created things. This kind of knowledge is at present a closed book to us, although a book that death must open.

We should not suppose, however, that the glory and splendour of the earth and sky mean nothing to an angel. Scripture tells us that at creation the morning stars praised God together, and the sons of God made joyful melody. Angels, even more than men, marvel at the universe, but they do not approach it through sight and sound. Their mode of knowledge lies within, just as all their life is beyond the veil of the senses.