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The Romance of the Soul

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THE ROMANCE OF THE SOUL

By

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London

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21 Cecil Court, Charing Cross Road, W.C. 2

1920

What am I? In my flesh I am but equal to the beasts of the field. In my heart and mind I am corrupt Humanity. In my soul I know not what I am or may be, and therein lies my hope.

O wonderful and mysterious soul, more fragile than gossamer and yet so strong that she may stand in the Presence of God and not perish!

"Though ye have lien among the pots, yet shall ye be as the wings of a dove." – *Psalm lxxviii. 13.*

By what means shall the ordinary man and woman, living the usual everyday life, whether of work or of leisure, find God? And this without withdrawing themselves into a life apart—a "religious" life, and without outward and conspicuous piety always running to public worship (though often very cross and impatient at home); without leaving undone any of the duties necessary to the welfare of those dependent on them; without making themselves in any way peculiar;—how shall these same people go up into the secret places of God, how shall they find the marvellous peace of God, how satisfy those vague persistent longings for a happiness more complete than any they have so far known, yet a happiness which is whispered of between the heart and the soul as something which is to be possessed if we but knew how to get it? How shall ordinary mortals whilst still in the flesh re-enter Eden even for an hour? for Eden is not dead and gone, but we are dead to Eden—Eden, the secret garden of enchantment where the soul and the mind and the heart live in the presence of God and hear once more "the voice of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day" (Gen. iii.).

It is possible for these things to come to us or we to them, and in quite a few years if we set our hearts on them. First we must desire; and after the desire, steady and persistent, God will give. And we say, "But I have desired and I do desire, and God does not give. Why is this?" There are two reasons for it. For one—are these marvellous things to be given because of one cry; for one petulant demand; for a few tears, mostly of self-pity, shed in an hour when the world fails to satisfy us, when a friend has disappointed us, when our plans are spoiled, when we are sick or lonely? These are the

occasions on which we mostly find time to think of what we call a better world, and of the consolations of God.

But let anyone have all that he can fancy, be carried high upon the flood-tide of prosperity, ambition, and success, and how much time will he or she give to Almighty God?— not two moments during the day. Yet the Maker of all things is to bestow His unspeakable riches upon us in return for two moments of our thought or love! Does a man acquire great worldly wealth, or fame, in return for two moments of endeavour?

"Ah," some of us may cry, "but it is more than two moments that I give Him; I give Him hours, and yet I cannot find Him." If that is really so, then the second reason is the one which would explain why He has not been found. A great wall divides us from the consciousness of the Presence of God. In this wall there is one Door, and one only, Jesus Christ. We have not found God because we have not found Him first as Jesus Christ in our own heart. Now whether we take our heart to church, whether we take it to our daily work, or whether we take it to our amusements, we shall not find Jesus in any one place more than another if He is not already in our hearts to begin with. How shall I commence to love a Being whom I have never seen? By thinking about Him; by thinking about Him very persistently; by comparing the world and its friendships and its loves and its deceits and its secret enviousnesses with all that we know of the lovely ways of gentle Jesus. If we do this consistently, it is impossible not to find Him more lovable than any other person that we know. The more lovable we find Him the more we think about Him, by so much the more we find ourselves beginning to love Him, and once we have learnt to hold Him very warmly and tenderly in our heart, then we are well in the way to find the Christ and afterwards that divine garden of the soul in which God seems to slip His hand under our restless anxious heart and lift it high into a place of safety and repose.

When for some time we have learnt to go in and out of this garden, with God's tender help we make ourself a dear place—a nest under God's wing, and yet mysteriously even nearer than this, it is so near to God. To this place we learn to fly to and fro in a second of time: so that, sitting weary and harassed in the counting-house, in

an instant a man can be away in his soul's nest; and so very great is the refreshment of it and the strength of it that he comes back to his work a new man, and so silently and quickly done that no one else in the room would ever know he had been there: it is a secret between his Lord and himself.

But the person who learns to do this does not remain the same raw uncivilised creature that once he or she was: but slowly must become quite changed; all tastes must alter, (all capacities will increase in an extraordinary manner), and all thoughts of heart and mind must become acceptable and pleasant to God.

The man who has not yet begun to seek God—that is to say, has not even commenced to try and learn how to live spiritually, but lives absorbed entirely in the things of the flesh—is a spiritual savage. To watch such a man and his ways and his tastes is to the spiritual man the same thing as when a European watches an African in his native haunts, notes his beads, his frightful tastes in decorations, foods, amusements, habits, and habitations, and, comparing them with his own ways, says instantly that man is a savage. This proud European does not pause to consider that he himself may be inwardly what the savage is—quite dark; that to God's eyes his own ways and tastes are as frightful as those of the African are to himself. What raises a man above a savage is not the size of his dining-room, the cut of his coat, the luxuries of his house, the learned books that adorn his bookshelves, but that he should have begun to learn how to live spiritually: this is the only true civilising of the human animal. Until it is commenced, his manners and his ways are nothing but a veneer covering the raw instincts of the natural man—instincts satisfied more carefully, more hiddenly, than those of the African, but always the same. There is little variety in the lusts of the flesh; they are all after one pattern, each of its kind, follow one another in a circle, and are very limited.

It is not the clay of our bodies fashioned by God which makes some common and some not. It is the independent and un-Godlike thoughts of our hearts and minds which can make of us common, and even savage, persons. The changing of these thoughts, the harmonising of them, and, finally, the total alteration of them, is the work in us of the Holy Spirit. By taking Christ into our hearts and

making for Him there a living nest, we set that mighty force in motion which shall eventually make for us a nest in the Living God. For Jesus Christ is able (but only with our own entire *willingness*) to make us not only acceptable to God, but delightful to Him, so much so that even while we remain in the flesh He would seem not to be willing to endure having us always away from Him, but visits us and dwells with us after His own marvellous fashion and catches us up to Himself.

To begin with, we must have a set purpose and *will* towards God. In the whole spiritual advance it is first we who must make the effort, which God will then stabilise, and finally on our continuing to maintain this effort He will bring it to complete fruition. Thus step by step the spirit rises—first the effort, then the gift. First the will to do—and then the grace to do it with. Without the willing will God gives no grace: without God's grace no will of Man can reach attainment. God's will and Man's will, God's love and Man's love—these working and joining harmoniously together raise Man up into Eternal Life.

* * *

God is desirous of communicating Himself to us in a Personal manner. In the Scriptures we have the foundation, the basis, the cause and reason of our Faith laid out before us; but He wills that we go beyond this basis, this reasoning of Faith into experience of Himself. For this end, then, He fills us with the aching desire to find and know Him, to be filled with Him, to be comforted and consoled by Him, to discover His joys. He fills us with these desires in order that He may gratify us.

By being willing to receive and understand as only through the medium of the *written* word we limit God in His communications with us. For by the Holy Ghost He will communicate not by written word but by personal touching of love brought about for us by the taking and enclosing of Jesus Christ within the heart not only as the Written Word, the Promise and Hope of Scripture, but as the Living God.

For this end inward meditation and pondering are a necessity.

* * *

How is it that we so often find great virtue, remarkable charity and patience amongst persons who are yet not conscious of any direct contact with God? They have never known the pains of repentance, neither have they known the sublime joys of God. Are these the ninety-and-nine just persons needing no repentance? Instinctively, and almost unconsciously, they hold to, and draw upon, the Universal Christ – or Spirit of Righteousness; but they have not laid hold of nor taken into themselves that Spirit of the Personal Christ, whom Christians receive and know through Jesus. He is the Door into the unspeakable joys of God. What are these joys of God? They are varying degrees of the manifestation and experience of *reciprocal Divine Love*.

What is the true aim of spiritual endeavour – an attempt at personal and individual salvation? Yes, to commence with, but beyond that, and more fully, it is the attempt to comply with the exquisite Will of God; and the general and universal improving and raising of the consciousness of the whole world. Yet this universal improvement must take place in each individual spirit in an individual manner. There are those who would deny to individuality its rights, claiming that the highest spirituality is the total cessation of all individuality; yet this would not appear to be God's view of the matter, for in the most supreme contacts of the soul with Himself He does not wipe out the consciousness of the soul's individual joy, but, on the contrary, to an untenable extent He *increases* it. And Jesus teaches us that life here is both the means and the process of the gradual conformation of the will of Man to the will of God, and our true "work" is the individual learning of this process. But this cultivation of our individuality must not be subverted to the purpose of the mere gain of personal advantage, but because of the heartfelt wish to conform to the glorious will of God. The failure of the human will to run in conjunction with the Divine will is the cause, as we know, of all sin. In the friction of these opposing wills, forces baneful to Man are generated.

From its very earliest commencement in childhood our system of education is based upon wrong ideas. With little or no regard to God's plans Man lays out his own puny laws and ambitions and teaches them to his young. We are not taught that what we are here for is above all and before all to arrive at a sense of personal connec-

tion with God, to identify ourselves with the spiritual while still in the flesh. On the contrary, we are taught to grow shy, even ashamed, of the spiritual! and to regard the world as a place principally or even solely in which to enjoy ourselves or make a "successful career."

Children are taught to look eagerly and mainly for holidays and "parties"; grown men and women the same upon a larger and more foolish scale, and always under the terribly mistaken belief that in spiritual things no great happiness is to be found, but only in materialism: yet very often we find the greatest unhappiness amongst the wealthiest people.

Happiness! happiness! We see the great pursuit of it on every side, and no truer or more needful instinct has been given to Man, but he fails to use it in the way intended. This world is a Touchstone, a Finding-place for God. Whoever will obey the law of finding God from this world instead of waiting to try and do it from the next, he, and he only, will ever grasp and take into himself that fugitive mysterious unseen Something which — not knowing what it is, yet feeling that it exists — we have named Happiness.

But how commence this formidable, this seemingly impossible task of finding God in a world in which He is totally invisible? To the "natural" or animal Man God is as totally hidden and inaccessible as He is to the beasts of the field; yet encased within his bosom lies the soul which can be the means of drawing Man and God together in a glorious union. "I have known all this from my childhood," we cry, "and the knowledge of it has not helped me one step upon my way."

Then try again, and reverse your method, for hitherto you have been beseeching gifts from God, asking for gifts from Jesus, and have *forgotten to give*. Give your love to Jesus, give *Him* a home, instead of asking Him to give you one. Give your heart to God, *set it upon Him*.

What is keeping you back? You are afraid of what it will entail; you are afraid of what God will demand of you; those words "For-sake all, and follow Me" fill you with something like terror. I cannot leave my business, my children, my home, my luxuries, my games, my dresses, my friends! Neither need you but, knowing this initial

agony of mind, Christ said it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle (the name of an exceedingly narrow gate into Jerusalem) than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.

What does it mean to "set the heart" upon something? We say, "I have set my heart on going to see my son," "I have set my heart on doing so-and-so," but this does not mean that in order to accomplish it we must wander homeless and lonely until the day of achievement. No; but we set our heart and mind upon eventually accomplishing this wish, we shape all our plans towards it, we give it the first place. This is what God asks us to do; to give Him the first place. We need not go to Him in rags: David and Solomon were immensely wealthy, Job was a rich man; but we must eventually think more of Him than we do of our dress, more of Him than we do of our business, more of Him than we do of lover, friend, or child. Many well-minded people are under the impression that such love for an Invisible Being is a total impossibility. Yet the great commandment stands written all across the face of the heavens—"Thou shalt love Me with all thy heart and mind and soul and strength." Are we then to suppose that God asks the impossible of His own creatures, that He mocks us? No; for when we desire He sends the capacity, and day by day sends us the power to reach this love through Jesus Christ. There is included in the words "Give us this day our daily bread," the bread of the soul, which is Love.

Divine Love commences in us in a very small way, as a very feeble flicker, for we are very feeble and small creatures. But God takes the will for the deed, and the day comes when suddenly we are filled with true love, as a gift. This is indeed the second baptism, the baptism of fire, the baptism of the Holy Ghost; then at last the great wall which has hitherto divided our consciousness from God goes down in its entirety, never again to rise up and divide us. This is the mighty work of Jesus Christ.

Though this is not our work, still we have had the earnest will, the longing desire; we have made continually, perseveringly, our tiny, often futile, efforts to please and place Him first, and though perhaps almost all were failures, He has counted every one to us for righteousness.

We may at all times be asking ourselves, "But how shall I know the will of God, how shall I please Him, how shall I know what Christ would wish me to do or to think?" There is one test more sure than any other, which is to ask oneself, "Would Jesus have done just this?" and the answer will come from the inward of us instantaneously. But before we can use this test we must have made a careful study of Scripture and also have begun the habit of inward personal intimacy with Jesus Himself. So immense is the bounty of God to the creature that truly and persistently wills and endeavours to please Him, so great are the rewards of that creature for its tiny work that it is as though a child should scratch bare ground with its little spade and reap a harvest of sweet flowers as magic gifts. In this way it is that we find actually fulfilled in ourselves the lovely words of the prophet, "the desert shall blossom like the rose."

The great initial difficulty that surely most of us feel is how to come into personal contact with this Jesus Christ, and to know which are the first steps that we should take to bring about this contact. They are just those same steps that we use to come to a nearer understanding of and greater intimacy with any persons we are desirous of making friends with. We commence by thinking about them, by arranging to spend time in their companionship; and the more we think about them and the more time we spend with them if they are very attractive people, the more we feel in sympathy with them. Form, then, the habit of making for brief instants a mental picture of the Saviour. Note the exquisite tenderness of His hands, so instantly ready to save and heal; note the calm strength and the great love in His countenance, walk beside Him down the street, join His daily life, learn to become familiar with Him as Jesus—what would He do, how would He look, what would His thoughts be? To feel sympathetically towards a person is to take one of the most important steps towards friendship. How many of us stop in the rush of our daily amusements, interests, and work to sympathise with Christ? Most probably, if we think of Christ at all, it is to feel that He ought to sympathise with us! Now Christ not only sympathises with but ardently loves us, and our failure to receive the comfort and help of this love is due to our failure in returning to Him these same feelings of sympathy and

love and friendship. We are not reciprocal, but perpetually ask and never give.

It is only by returning love to Christ that we are able to receive the benefits of His love for us. His mighty power and help flows around but not through us until we place ourselves in individual and direct contact with Him, until we make that mysterious inward and spiritual connection with Him which can be achieved only through a personal love for Him.

Again and again we may cry out, "But how love the invisible?" Christ is invisible, but for all that, he is not unknown. We all of us know Him. But we do not give ourselves time or opportunity to know Him sufficiently well. What hours, months, years, we devote to making and knowing our friends; yet a few moments a day are more than enough for most of us to spend in becoming more intimate with the only Friend whom it is worth our while to make.

"But life is so busy I have no time," you say. What of those hours spent in the train, those moments spent waiting for an appointment, that half-hour taken for a rest, but which is not a rest because of the rushing inharmonious turmoil of your thoughts? No one is so restful to think of as Jesus. Every single quality that we most admire, trust, and love is to be found in Jesus Christ. The only reason of our failure to love Him more ardently than any human being we know is that we do not think enough about Him.

How much offended we should be if anyone dared to say to us, "You are not a Christian." We all consider ourselves Christians as a matter of course; but why this certainty, what reason can we give? Many would say, "I keep the Commandments, and I am baptised in Christ's name." But Christianity is not an act done by hands, it is a life, and the Jews keep the Commandments even more strictly than we and are not Christians. The mere fact of believing that Christ once lived and was crucified is not enough. The Jews and also the Mahommedans believe that He lived and was crucified.

What is then necessary? That we believe that He is indeed the Son of God, the Messiah, the Saviour; for if He was no more than a holy man, by what means has He power to save us more than Moses has power to save us?

The true inward knowledge that Christ is God comes not by nature to any man, but by gift of God—which gift must be earnestly sought, striven, prayed for, and desired: this faith is the very coming to God by which we are saved. If we are not yet in this faith that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, then we are neither Jew, Mahommedan, nor Christian, but wanderers without a fold, and without a Shepherd; longing, and not yet comforted.

How do we come by this joy of the personal loving of God, this Romance of the Soul brought to sensible fruition whilst still in the flesh?

Is it a gift? Yes. Is it a gift because of some merit of goodness on our part beyond the goodness of other persons who are without it, though striving? No. Is it because of some work for God that we do in this world, charitable or social? No. Is it, then, nothing but an arbitrary favouritism on His part? No. Is it a sagacity or cleverness, a height of learning, a result of close study? No.

It is simply and solely a certain and particular obedient attitude of heart and mind towards God of the nature of a longing—giving, a grateful outgoing thinking towards Him, continually maintained, and a heart invitation to, and a receiving of Jesus Christ into ourselves.

Our part is to maintain this obedient tender-waiting, giving and receiving attitude under all the circumstances of daily life, and Christ with the Holy Ghost will then work the miracle in us.

But so difficult is this attitude to maintain that we are totally unable to do it without another gift upon His part—Grace. The whole process from first to last is gift upon gift, and that because first of our belief and desire, and then of our continually remembering that to receive these gifts we have a part to play which God will not dispense with. For an illustration let us turn to the artist and his sitter. The sitter does not produce the work of art, but must maintain his attitude: if he refuses to do this, the work of the artist is marred and even altogether foiled. So with Christ and His Divine Art in bringing us to our Father—by not endeavouring to maintain our right attitude we foil His work. God would seem to give us that which we seek and ask for, and no more. Great ecclesiastics, theologians, philosophers who sought and desired Him with the intelli-

gence, seeking for knowledge, for pre-eminence of spiritual wisdom, were not given as an addition to their learning this exquisite fire and balm of love. Those who desired of Christ the healing of the body received that, and we are not told they received anything further. So also with the woman at the well: "If thou hadst asked," Christ said to her, "I would have given thee of the water of Life." Without we ask for and receive this gift of Love we hang to God by Faith only.

What is true religion, what is that religion by which we shall feel *wholly satisfied*? It is to have Christ recognised, known, adored, and living in the soul. This is the New Life within us, this is the New Birth. The first proofs of the power of this New Life in us is the victory over all the lower passions, victory over the animal "that once was ourself"! A victory so complete that not only do we cease to desire those former things or be troubled by them but we no longer "respond" to that which is base, even though we be brought into visual contact with such things as would formerly have inevitably excited at least a passing response in us. Can any man free himself in such a manner from his own nature? Common sense forbids us imagine it. It is then a Living Power within us, slowly transforming us to higher levels, from the fleshly to the spiritual, and shaping us to meet the purity of God. And such is the tender consideration of this Power for our weakness that while we are learning to give up these baser pleasures He teaches us the higher pleasures of the soul—we are not left comfortless. So in our earlier stages we may have many very wonderful ecstasies which later are altogether dispensed with, and indeed are eventually not desired by the soul, or even the more greedy heart and mind, which all now ask and desire one favour only—to be on earth in continual fellowship with Christ Jesus and ever able to enter into the love of God. To be without this glorious power of entering Responsive Love of God, to be cut off from this, is the great and only fear of the soul. This fear it is which holds the soul and the creature towards God both day and night lest by the least forgetfulness or wrongful attitude they should lose Him or displease Him.

All these changes no man can bring about for himself—they are accomplished for him by the Holy Spirit; but this he can and *must* do for himself, invite Sweet Jesus into his heart and enthrone Him

there as Ruler. This once accomplished, that mysterious monitor within us commonly known as "Conscience" grows until it attains an excessive sensitiveness which penetrates the minutest acts of life and the deepest recesses of heart and mind. It becomes inexorable, it demands instant and complete obedience. Because of it relations with other persons undergo a drastic change. Complete, instant, entire forgiveness for every offence is demanded, and at last even a momentary annoyance must be effaced; no matter how great the cause of annoyance, it must be effaced in the same instant as that in which it crosses the mind, for a single adverse thought eventually proves as injurious to the Spirit as a grain of sand is to the eyes.

The petty human aims, the smallness of all our former standards, the instinct for "retaliation" must all be overcome, laid upon one side—a slow task of much humiliation to the creature, revealing to it its own smallness and vanity and its own extraordinary ineffectiveness of self-control, its puny powers over itself: nothing short of an absolute self-conquest is aimed at and demanded by this inward monitor—the Soul. With what profound veneration for and recognition of the power of God does the regenerated creature think of those alterations in its own nature which, after long strivings, are eventually given it by God, and of those alterations not yet stabilised because not yet gifts, but only on the way to perhaps becoming gifts—that is to say, still only where the power of the creature itself has been able to raise them: for of these last it may invariably be said that to-day we may feel serene security and to-morrow fall and fail—and this in the very meanest way!

We see on every side men and women who try to fill an emptiness, a wanting that they feel within themselves, by every sort of means except the only one which can ever be a permanent success. Women devote themselves to lovers, husbands, children, dress, society, and dogs; men to business, ambition, the racecourse, folly, drink, games, and arts. Are any of these persons truly happy, truly satisfied in all their being? No, and they descend to old age surrounded by the dust of disillusionment. Lonely and soon forgotten by the hungry pleasure-seeking crowd, such persons pass from this world, and the most their friends have to say is that they have gone to a better one. But have they? For the mere fact of shedding the flesh does not bring us any nearer to God. On the contrary, the

shedding of the flesh increases appallingly the difficulty of the soul in finding God. This world is the very place in which we can most easily and quickly get into communication with God. To think that the mere act of dying improves our character and takes us to heaven is a delusion of the Enemy—it is living here which can fit us and carry us to heaven; and we have no great distance to travel either, for heaven is a state of consciousness, and by entering that state of consciousness we become united and connected with such degrees of heaven as the flesh is able to bear, though these degrees fall infinitely short of those required by the soul: hence the fearful hungering and longing of the soul to depart from the flesh. If we do not find Christ whilst we are here, when we cast off the flesh we enter a bewildering vortex of a life of terrible intensity and great solitude. We are aware of nothing but Self, are tormented by Self with its forever unsatisfied longings, and by the *impossibility of achieving any other Self*. In this intensity of self-tormenting loneliness the soul feels to gyrate, and all that she knows of that which is outside of this Self is the sound of the rushing of invisible things, for she is blind. Without the light of this world and without the light of Christ. The joys of space are not open to her, only the dark and lonely horrors of it: she is in an incalculably greater state of isolation from God than here in this world! The remedy for all this lies here; let no one think he can afford to wait to find this remedy until after he leaves this world, for then his chance is gone, and who is able to foretell when it will return? What can be more beautiful, more happy, than to find this remedy, to find the only Being who loves us as much as we love ourselves! the gentle, tender, gracious, all-sufficing Christ; that all-mighty ever-giving Christ who yearns over and longs for us—what madness is it that prevents us seeking Him?

All of us would seem to have two personalities: we are the repentant and the unrepentant Magdalene and daily change from one to the other. But true repentance cannot come before love: if we think we repent before we love, then it is no more than a repentance of the mind, which says to itself, "I must stand well with God because of my future well-being." Where love comes first we get the repentance of the heart, which works this way in us—we love Jesus a little, we love Him more and more, and because of this love increasing to real warmth we suddenly perceive the frightful offences

we have committed against this sweet love, and instantly the heart melts and breaks and we are shaken to our depths that we have ever grieved our Holy Lover. This is true repentance—no anxious fears for our own future, but love grieving and agonised for its offences. Such repentance as this pierces to the deepest recesses of the heart and mind, and leaves upon them a deep indelible mark, changing all the aims of our life, and is the beginning of all joys in Christ Jesus. Let us aim therefore not first at repentance, but first at love. A little love to Jesus given many times a day as we walk or wait or work, if only at first said by the lips with desire for more warmth, after a while we shall find ourselves giving it from the heart; then the Divine Seed has begun to grow because we have watered it.

If the natural man were asked, "What is life? what is it to live?" he would reply, "It is to eat, drink, laugh, love, and have pleasure or pain: to hear, see, touch, taste and smell, and to be conscious that I do all these things." Yet this consciousness is but a tiny speck of consciousness, and some mysterious voice within the deeply-thinking man tells him that this is so. But how uncover a further consciousness? This is the secret of the soul.

To pass from one form of consciousness to another—this is to increase life fifty, a hundred, a thousand times according to the degrees of consciousness we can attain. These degrees would seem to be irrevocably limited because of the mechanical actions of heart and breathing, which automatic actions become suspended or seriously interfered with in very high states of consciousness. When first these very great expansions of consciousness take place, the creature is under strong conviction that the soul has left the body—that it has gone upon some mysterious journey—this because of several reasons. The first is because of a certain persistent sound of rushing; the second is because of the sense of living at tremendous speed, in a manner previously altogether unknown and totally undreamed of, in which the senses of the body have no concern whatever and are completely closed down; thirdly, on returning from this "journey" we are not immediately able to exact obedience from the body, which remains inert and stiffly cold and suffers distress with too slow breathing. But reason demands, "How is it possible that the soul should leave the body and the body not die? and also