
THE WORD

VOL. 14.

NOVEMBER, 1911.

No. 2.

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HOPE AND FEAR.

HOPE rested at the gates of Heaven and looked in on the councils of the gods.

“Enter, oh wondrous being!” cried the celestial host, and tell us who you are and what you would of us.”

Hope entered. The air about her thrilled with lightness and a joy before unknown in Heaven. In her, beauty beckoned, fame held forth its crown, power offered its sceptre, and glimpses of all things to be desired opened to the gaze of the immortal throng. Supernal light issued from the eyes of Hope. She breathed rare fragrance over all. Her gestures raised the tides of life in joyous rhythm and outlined myriad forms of beauty. Her voice keyed up the nerves, sharpened the senses, made the heart beat gladly, gave new power to words, and it was sweeter music than that of the celestial choristers.

“I, Hope, was begotten and named by Thought, your father, and nurtured by Desire, Queen of the Underworld, and ruler of the middle regions of the universe. But though I was thus called into being by our immortal parent, I am pre-existent, parentless, and eternal as the great father of all.

I whispered to the Creator when the universe was conceived, and he breathed me into his being. At the incubation of the universal egg, I thrilled the germ and awakened its potential energies to life. At the gestation and fashioning of the worlds, I sang the measures of the lives and attended the limning of their coursings into forms. In modulated tones of nature I hymned the names of their Lord at the birth of beings, but they did not hear me. I have walked with the children of earth and in paeans of joy I have voiced the wonders and glories of Thought, their creator, but they did not know him. I have shown a bright path to Heaven and trilled the cadence of the way, but their eyes cannot perceive my light, their ears are not attuned to my voice, and unless the immortal fires descend on them to light the fuel I will give, their hearts will be empty altars, I shall be unknown and unperceived by them, and they will pass into that formlessness out of which they have been called, without achieving that for which they were destined by Thought.

“By those who have beheld me, I am never quite forgotten. In me, oh sons of Heaven, behold all things! With me you may rise beyond the vaults of your celestial sphere, and into glorious and unexplored heights as yet undreamed. But do not be deceived in me, else you will lose your poise, despair, and may fall into the lowest sinks of Hell. Yet, in Hell, in Heaven, or beyond, I shall be with you if you so will.

“In the manifested worlds, my mission is to spur all beings on to the unattained. I am deathless, but my forms shall die and I shall reappear in ever changing forms until the human race is run. In the lower manifested worlds I shall be called by many names, but few shall know me as I am. The simple shall praise me as their lode star and be guided by my light. The learned will pronounce me an illusion and condemn me to be shunned. I shall remain unknown in the lower worlds to him who has not found in me the unmanifest.”

Having thus addressed the gods enthralled, Hope paused. And they, unheeding her behests, arose as one.

“Come, most desired being,” each cried, “I claim you as my own.”

“Wait,” said Hope. “Oh, sons of the Creator! heirs of Heaven! he who claims me for himself alone least knows me as I am. Be not too hasty. Be guided in your choice by Reason, arbiter of gods. Reason bids me say: Behold me as I am. Do not mistake me for the forms in which I dwell. Else I am doomed by you to wander up and down the worlds, and you will be self-doomed to follow me and walk the earth in joy and sorrow in ever-recurring experience until you find me in purity of light, and return, redeemed with me to Heaven.’

“I speak of knowledge, blessedness, deathlessness, sacrifice, righteousness. But few of those who shall hear my voice will comprehend. They will instead translate me into the language of their hearts and in me will seek the forms of worldly wealth, happiness, fame, love, power. Yet, for the things they seek I shall urge them on; so that getting these and not finding what they seek, they will ever struggle on. When they fail, or seem to have attained yet fail again, I shall speak and they shall listen to my voice and begin their search anew. And ever shall they search and strive until they seek me for myself and not for my rewards.

“Be wise, immortals! Heed Reason, or you will conjure up my twin sister, Fear, as yet unknown to you. In her dread presence there is the power to empty and still your hearts as she hides me from your gaze.

“I have declared myself. Cherish me. Do not forget me. Here am I. Take me as you will.”

Desire awoke in the gods. Each saw in Hope naught but the object of his awakened desire. Deaf to Reason and charmed by the prize in view, they advanced and in tumultuous voices said:

“I take you Hope. Forever you are mine.”

With ardor each made bold to draw Hope to himself. But even as it seemed to him that he had won his prize, Hope fled. The light of Heaven went out with Hope.

As the gods made haste to follow Hope, an awful shadow fell across the gates of Heaven.

“Begone, foul Presence,” they said. “We seek Hope, and not a shapeless Shadow.”

In hollow breath the Shadow whispered:

“I am Fear.”

The stillness of Death settled down on all within. Space trembled as the whisper of the dread name re-echoed round the worlds. In that whisper moaned the misery of grief, wailed the accumulated sorrows of a world in pain and sobbed despair of mortals suffering relentless agonies.

“Come,” said Fear, “you have banished Hope and summoned me. I await you outside the gates of Heaven. Do not seek Hope. She is but a fleeting light, a phosphorescent glow. She quickens the spirit to illusive dreams, and those who are enthralled by her become my slaves. Hope is gone. Remain in your lonesome Heaven, gods, or pass the gates and be my slaves, and I shall drive you up and down through space in fruitless search of Hope, and you shall find her nevermore. As she beckons and you reach out to take her, you will find me in her stead. Behold me! Fear.”

The gods saw Fear and they trembled. Within the gates there was empty life. Outside all was dark, and the tremors of Fear rumbled on through space. A pale star twinkled and the faint voice of Hope sounded through the dark.

“Do not shun Fear; she is but a shadow. If you will learn of her she cannot harm you. When you have passed through and banished Fear, you will have redeemed yourselves, found me, and we shall return to Heaven. Follow me, and let Reason guide you.”

Even Fear could not hold back the immortals who listened to the voice of Hope. They said:

“It is better to wander in unknown realms with Hope than be in an empty Heaven with Fear at the gates. We follow Hope.”

With one accord the immortal host left Heaven. Outside the gates, Fear seized them and bore them down and made them to forget all else than Hope.

Driven by fear and wandering through dark worlds, the immortals came down to earth in early times and took up their abode with and disappeared among the mortal men. And Hope came with them. Long since, they have forgotten who they are and cannot, except through Hope, remember whence they came.

Hope flutters in the heart of youth, who sees in youth a rose-strewn pathway. The old and weary look back on earth for Hope, but Fear comes; they feel the weight of years and kind Hope then turns their gaze to Heaven. But when with Hope they look to Heaven, Fear holds their gaze and they do not see beyond the gateway, death.

Driven on by Fear, immortals walk the earth in forgetfulness, but Hope is with them. Some day, in the light which is found by purity of life, they will dispel Fear, find Hope, and will know themselves and Heaven.



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A Non-Profit Organization Established in 1950
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