

IMMORTALITY

From this tale, Callicles, which I have heard and believe, I draw the following inferences:—Death, if I am right, is in the first place the separation from one another of two things, soul and body; nothing else. And after they are separated they retain their several natures, as in life; the body keeps the same habit, and the results of treatment or accident are distinctly visible in it: for example, he who by nature or training or both was a tall man while he was alive, will remain as he was, after he is dead; and the fat will remain fat; and so on; and the dead man who in life had a fancy to have flowing hair, will have flowing hair. And if he was marked with the whip and had the prints of the scourge, or of wounds in him when he was alive, you might see the same in the dead body; and if his limbs were broken or misshapen when he was alive, the same appearance would be visible in the dead. And in a word, whatever was the habit of the body during life would be distinguishable after death, either perfectly, or in a great measure and for a certain time. And I should imagine that this is equally true of the soul, Callicles; when a man is stripped of the body, all the natural or acquired affections of the soul are laid open to view.—PLATO, *Gorgias*.

IMMORTALITY.

I.

I MOVED. remote from fear and pain
The white worms revelled in my brain.
Who travelled live may travel dead ;
The soul's no tenant of the head.
They had hanged my body by the neck ;
Bang went the trap. A little speck
Shot idly upon consciousness
Unconscious of the head's distress
When with dropped jaw the body swung
So queer and limp ; the purple tongue
Shooting out swollen and awry.
Men cheered to see the poisoner die.
Not he ! He grinned one visible grin,
The last ; then, muffled in his sin,
He lived and moved unseen of those
Nude souls that masquerade in clothes,
Confuse the form and the sensation,
And have the illusion, incarnation.
I bore myself. Death was so dull.
The dead are strangely beautiful
To the new-comer ; it wears off.

II.

They told me I was damned. The Shroff¹
Gave me ten dollars Mex. (For ease

¹ Money-changer. Mexican dollars were long the sole currency on the Chinese coast.

Of English souls the dead Chinese
Are taxed) to pay my way in hell.
On one pound sterling one lives well.
For luxuries are cheaply paid
Since Satan introduced Free Trade ;
And necessaries—woe is me!—
Are furnished to the damned soul free.

III.

God's hell, Earth's heaven, are not so far.
Dinner brought oysters, caviar,
Anchovies, truffles, curried rabbit
(Bad for the apoplectic habit),
While ancient brandy and champagne
Washed down the dainties. Once again
I seemed to haunt the Continental.
A saucy little elemental
Flitted across ; I heard it sneer ;
"You won't get water, though, I fear."
That's hell all over. Good-bye, greens,
Water, cold mutton, bread, and beans!
They feed us well, like gentlemen,
On chilis, seasoned with cayenne.
Worse, one must finish every course.
'S truth, I had rather eat boiled horse!

IV.

My first friend was an agéd monk.
He fed on rice and water. Sunk
His cheeks and cold his blood. You see
The fool was a damned soul like me ;

He had starved himself on earth in hope
In heaven to banquet with the Pope,
With God and Christ on either hand
And all the angels' choral band
Playing sweet music. O the fool
To treat earth as a baby's school!
In hell one lives as one is wont.
Punch said to would-be bridegrooms: Don't!
Might I advise the same to those
Shapeless and senseless embryos
Who seek to live? Yes, God is wise
Enough to set a snare for lies
As well as truths. The soul content
On earth in his own element
Will be content from flesh released.
But he who strives to be a beast
Or strives to be a god; would gain
Long bliss for a few hours of pain,
Or struggles for no matter what,
Continues. I would rather not.

V.

That puzzle's grief I did not share
Because on earth I did not care.
I met a grave philosopher—
Had sought most nobly not to err
Probing God's Nature. See his lobes
Swell with hell's torment! Still he probes
The same fool's problem. I explain
The simple state of things in vain.

He chose to study God, and die in it.
He made his bed, and he must lie in it.

VI.

After my dinner I debate
(Urged to the task by habit's Fate)
The project of a poisoning.
In hell one finds that everything
Is easy. Poison to my hand ;
A cunning potion cool and bland
Fit to administer the draught :—
How like old times ! I nodded, laughed,
Poisoned my neighbour, a young girl
Sent here for marrying an earl.
Of course she did not die. But then
On earth I never killed my men ;
They only die whom one forgets.
Remember that each action sets
Its mark still deeper in the mind !

VII.

O piteous lot of humankind
Whose history repeats itself !
Dinner is cleared by gnome and elf ;
I pay the bill, take Baal's receipt,
And stroll off smoking. Soon I meet
The fairest foulest whore that burns.
High feeding pays : desire returns.
She willing (for a copper rin)¹
For any ecstasy of sin

¹ Japanese coin worth a small portion of a penny.

Gaily embraces me. A room
Starts up in the half-light, half-gloom,
Perfectly purposed for debauch.
In mirrors shines a wicked nautch,
And on the floor Hawaian belles
Rave in a hula-hula¹—Hell's!
Fragonard, Rops, had lined the walls
with wild indecent bacchanals,
And bawdy photographs attest
The Devil's taste to be the best.

VIII.

I did not sleep at all: but she:—
O face of deathless agony!
O torture of hell's worm, to wrest
From peace that miserable breast!
Me, me she strikes in mid-delight
Staggered and shattered at the sight,
The moment that she slept. I laughed
Thereat: the bowl I idly quaffed
Was nectar: she amused me, so.
You see, my friend, I did not know.
I also slept at morn. Then, then,
A low voice whispered in the den:
“Lucky young fellow! Brave and clever!
This sort of thing goes on for ever.”

IX.

On earth I dreaded impotence,
Age, death. You see, I had no sense.

¹ The indecent dance of the South Seas.

Best be an old man ere you die ;
They wish insensibility,
So are their pains the duller. Hell
Is managed infinitely well
From the peculiar standpoint of
A god who says that he is Love.

X.

That was the poet Crowley's point.
I think *his* nose is out of joint ;
He bet on justice being done ;
And here—it's really rather fun !—
The unlucky devil devil-spurred
Writes, climbs, does Yoga like a bird ;
Just as he was before he "died,"
The ass is never satisfied.
He has only been here forty days,
And has already writ six plays,
Made eight new passes, one new peak,
Is bound to do two more this week,
And as for meditation! Hard he
Soars from Dhyana to Samadhi ;
Writes wildly sloka after sloka,
Storms the Arupa-Brahma-Loka,
Disdains the mundane need of Khana,
Slogs off, like Buddha, to Nibbana :—
Poor devil!

XI.

One thing makes me weep
He was wise one way, and scorned sleep.
Wherefore he sleeps not, does not hear
That still small dreadful voice of fear.
Therefore he realizes not
That this is his eternal lot.
Therefore he suffers not at all.

XII.

Luckier is he than one, a small
Wild girl, whose one desire on earth
Was to—be blunt with it!—give birth
To children. Here she's fairly in it!
Pumps out her fourteen babes a minute ;
Her (under chloroform) the voice
Bids to be gleesome and rejoice :
“No sterile God balks *thine* endeavour.
This sort of thing goes on for ever.”

XIII.

I was a humorous youth enough
On earth ; I laughed when things were rough.
Therefore, I take it, now in Hades
The funny side of things—and ladies—
Engages my attention. Well!
You know enough of life in Hell.
I was an altruist, my brothers !
My life one long kind though for others :
For me six maidens wear the willow :—

Poisoning is a peccadillo.
Hence I'm disposed to give advice,
Simple, if possibly not nice ;
Shun life ! an awkward task and deep.
But if you cannot, then—shun sleep !

(Suppose I thus had prophesied,
Gone to my wife to bed, and died !)