

Agamemnon is a comic figure.

When Daddy goes a-hunting he does not always bring home a deer. Sometimes he meets a diplocodus, and does not come home at all. Then, what do the tribe do? They squat and hug their empty bellies. There is no laughter. There is one long wail. There is no food, and the man that used to get it has been eaten alive. This is no joke, no joke at all. Presently the wail becomes articulate; some one recounts the heroic deeds of the dead hunter. How skilful he was! How cunning! How swift and strong! How accurately he swung the axe! And now "he is gone on the mountain, he is lost to the forest!" He died fighting heroically against enormous superiority of force . . . and so on. Anyhow, he's dead, and we're without food, and what can we do but weep? It is a tragedy!

Just so; that is the definition of tragedy. The primitives of the next tribe probably are laughing to split their sides. Their hunter has brought in a wild bull, and they are having a glorious time. "And that fool across the valley who fancied himself so at hunting went out after rabbits and got a diplocodus — ha! ha! ha!"

It is all a question of our sympathies. The event described is always the same. Whether it is a tragedy or a comedy depends on the point of view. The Agamemnon is a tragedy for the family man; for the young sport who wants to beat him out of his wife and his kingdom, it is a romantic comedy.

So when we come to consider plays about Hecuba and other people that in no wise concern us personally, we judge by our own sympathies, and laugh or cry accordingly. Thus the sympathy of mankind has been secured, in the case of the crucifixion, for the figure of Jesus, so we call the story a tragedy. We have been told to identify him with Everyman, who is doomed to suffer a barbarous death sooner or later. It is the same with the stories of the murders of Osiris and of Hiram. (Footnote: Observe, dear brother, the hunter's ritual in this last story; the stationing of the hunters, and the way they head off the game in turn.)

In other words, man began to think of himself no longer as a hunting animal, but as a victim. In the second stage of human thought, man is the sufferer. (Compare William James, and his remarks on the once-born and the twice-born.) Man has begun to fear Nature, to wail over his own fate symbolically in lamenting the deaths of the great heroes of the past. It no longer seems funny to us to adorn a man as a God, and eat him, for that is just what life is doing to all of us.

To recover the comic spirit, therefore, we must acquire a new view of death.

## II.

In certain previous essays of the writer it has been pointed out that desire or love must be held to include such phenomena as chemical change. All true acts of love produce or consume energy in some form, that we have explosive disintegrations and violently rapid oxidations which disengage heat, light, electricity, and other forms of matter and of motion — regard them as you please — which are (on the surface) of a different order of Nature to the ingredients of the operation. Similarly, by putting the right pair of featherless bipeds together, there are explosions and emotion, poetry, perhaps spiritual growth, as well as the phenomenon which is obviously of the same order — a baby.

In all such acts, chemical or physiological, there is a true transmutation, therefore, and we may class these things as genuinely partakers of the Ineffable Mystery of Godliness. In mere admixture we do not get this transmutation. Mix hydrogen and oxygen; they remain the same; nothing at all happens. Combine them and you get not only a transformation of the very nature of the molecules, but numerous physical phenomena — flame, heat, moisture — which were not there before.

Now let us take another issue. All conscious, self-willed motion implies life, and, all such motion being accompanied with chemical change and (as Buddha insisted) with the partial disintegration of the individual, we must define life as something quite beyond the crude conception which is usually formed of it. Every true phenomenon, whether it be the haemoglobin-oxyhaemoglobin-carboxhaemoglobin cycle in the blood, or the changes in the brain which we call philosophy from a consideration of their effects, may be thought of as a form of copulation, atom seeking atom, and producing molecule, just as woman seeks man and produces offspring. Now every such act of copulation involves the death of the partakers. True, the hydrogen can be recovered from the water; ultimate simplicities are in some sort immortal, but (again we quote Buddha) all complexities perish and are not recoverable in their integrity. We cannot suppose that by recombining the recovered hydrogen and oxygen into water each atom in the original water will find the self-same mate. We cannot recover the father in the child, though we may perceive many traces of him; and the persistence of the father himself is due to the fact that only a minute percentage of his life is used in the production of the child. His quintessence vivifies any amount of other matter and transmutes it to his likeness; this is the Alchemical miracle, to produce some such process in the mineral kingdom. If one possessed the quintessence of gold, the unknown 'seed of gold,' that which makes gold gold and not silver, it might impregnate other elements and make them grow into its own nature. This at least was the theory evolved by the fathers of chemistry, and (I doubt not) will be the practice of their descendants in a year not distant.

Now, to return, since every copulation may be considered as involving death, we may say (at the risk of appearing to convert an A proposition) that every death may be considered as a form of copulation. The chemical changes of disintegration are in no way distinguishable from those of life. We cannot call one set synthesis and the other analysis, even. We merely make a false distinction on account of the fact that our personal prejudices are involved . . . just as we were in doubt whether to laugh or to cry at the Agamemnon.

Now, it is to be noted that certain people take the sexual view of death. To this day the peasants in some parts of Greece regard the death of an individual as his marriage to that deity, Artemis or Aphrodite, to whom he was most devoted during life. Mohammed taught that death was the key to the enjoyment of the Hur al' Ayn. Even in Christian mysticism we find the death of the saint equivalent to his marriage with the Saviour. We are "waiting for the Bridegroom." In fact, this idea is almost universal in all true religion. (Buddhism, an exception, is more a philosophy than a religion.)

Now, we have no means of telling what occurs in the "soul" at the time of death. Whatever may be the approaches to the pylon, we have no evidence with regard to the Door itself. But