

Hurry

By Katharine Hillard

I have heard of a man who was born in a hurry, who lived in a hurry, who married in a hurry, who repented in a hurry — instead of at leisure, as so many do — who died in a hurry, and who went in a hurry — to another state of consciousness. His was undoubtedly an extreme case, and yet is not this element of hurry the curse of our Western civilization? What is it that reduces us to clamor for “rapid transit” as the crowning grace of life, and prevents our recognizing any element in a journey as superior to that speed? As the now-famous old Indian said: “We have all the time there is”: what, then, are we trying to secure? Nevertheless, how many people we all know, who enter a room as if borne on the wings of the whirlwind, who keep every particle of the atmosphere in a state of restlessness while they remain, whose brows are wrinkled with anxiety, whose voices are sharpened with care, and who, having fidgeted through a brief call, are borne away again in a tempest of haste!

Another class of people are always in a hurry because they are always behindhand. At some time or other they have lost a golden half-hour, and the rest of their life seems to be spent in its fruitless pursuit. I have a friend of this class who is always unpunctual, and who scatters the time of other people with most reckless prodigality. She explains her dilatoriness by saying that she is always so much interested in what she is doing now, that she forgets all about what she has to do next; an excuse more satisfactory to herself than to those who are waiting for her. And another disappoints people because she always tries to do the work of two hours in fifty-nine minutes, and never gets over the fond delusion that she will yet accomplish it. This is the vain hope that betrays most of us, I think, and is the cause of much of that nervous restlessness so generally charged to the much-abused American climate.

Yet there are those who live within its baneful influence, and are as unaffected by it as the dwellers on a mountain top are by the miasma of the valley far below. These are they who are in the world but not of it. Look at the clear and placid faces of the Sisters of charity, of the Society of Friends, of those whose pursuits keep them far from the madding crowd and its constant and harassing interruptions. There are certain people whose presence is a benediction, whose coming brings with it a sense of repose that rests the weary spirit and seems to lift one above the petty turmoil of the world. These people are never in a hurry. It is impossible to associate the word with their gracious presence. When they enter, the busy wheels of existence stop, and the whirr does not begin again till they depart. Somehow they have lifted us above our carking cares, and when they leave us we awake, bewildered, from a beautiful dream of peace. It is not that they are careless of time, for that would interfere with the convenience of others, but they manage to be its masters, not its slaves.

Behind the superficial aspects of our hurry, however, there must lie a deeper cause, and I think we find it in the element of Greed. The machinery of our modern civilization has Mammon for its stoker, and “making haste to be rich” for its watchword. All trade is corrupted by the money-getting instinct, and in the mad race for wealth the devil generally gets the foremost rather than the hindmost. Men are so absorbed in the pursuit of riches that they can give no thought to the cultivation of the mind or the elevation of the soul. Home represents to these galley-slaves of money only a dormitory where they may snatch a few moments of rest from their toil. Their sons follow the same routine; their daughters are carefully educated because it is the fashion, and when these young girls emerge into the world and look for the men they are to marry, what do they find? Men who have no time to think, much less to read, who snatch a few hours for a hasty courtship between the figures of a dance or the courses of a dinner, and then, as the brief honeymoon wanes, the inevitable gulf widens between the two and another tale of domestic unhappiness begins. For the fever born of greed spreads into every realm of life. It keeps the man grinding at the counting-house, it keeps the woman toiling over what she calls her “social duties”, born of the same greed for more prestige, more fine raiment, more display than her neighbors.

Nor is the desire for riches and social position the only form of greed; there are others more subtle, less objectionable on the face of them, but all, nevertheless, forms of desire for the advancement or aggrandizement of *self*, and all productive of what element of hurry which is the bane of modern existence. We, as Theosophists, profess to believe in reincarnation: but were it a *real* belief, it would, I think give us that wide and far-reaching conception of life which alone should have weight to calm our excitement, and to make us say with Walt Whitman:

“Whether I come to my own today, or in ten thousand or ten million years,
I can cheerfully take it now, or with equal cheerfulness I can wait;
My foothold is tenon’d and mortised in granite;
I laugh at what you call dissolution;
And I know the amplitude of time”.

That is the great lesson the doctrine of reincarnation should teach us, *to know the amplitude of time*. Why should we fume and fret because we are “not so far advanced” as some one else, not so highly developed as we think we ought to be, “desiring this man’s art and that man’s scope”? We are set in the midst of Eternity, not time, and are in a truer sense than perhaps Tennyson thought, “the heirs of *all* the ages”. These years of life that we cling to so fondly as they sweep past us are but insignificant portions of our existence, and each existence is but a lightning-flash across the dial of Eternity. All the phenomena of dreams and of hypnotic conditions teach us that time and space are illusions of this plane of consciousness which we call the waking plane, and that upon other planes all the relations of time and space are changed. We need to take this lesson to our hearts, then, of the uselessness of hurry, and, indeed, of its worse than uselessness. It is in the still liquid that the beautiful crystals form; the perturbed waters will bring forth nothing but idle foam. “Grow as the flower grows, unconsciously, but eagerly anxious to open its soul to the air”. But there must be no hurry, no eager desire for growth, or the longing is frustrated and “you harden by the forcible passion for personal stature”. And the *Light on the Path*, from which these words are taken, says further: “The peace you shall desire is that sacred peace which nothing can disturb, and in which the soul grows as does the holy flower upon the still lagoons”.

Nor does this quietude necessarily involve idleness. “Without haste” but also “without *rest*” is the watchword of the stars, and the elimination of hurry does not imply inactivity. It is always better to do three things well than to do thirty things badly, and if we wish to purge our lives of the element of hurry, we must take as our rule two golden maxims: Never to try to do more in a day that we can do *well*; and when sure we can accomplish a thing in half an hour, always to allow ourselves forty minutes. Then we are able to move serenely through the bustle of life, and although each day we seem to have accomplished very little and to have relinquished very much, at the end of many days we shall find that on the whole we have done more and have done it better than when grasped with both hands at the hedge-flowers, and tore away few blossoms and many thistles.

For, indeed, much of our hurry arises from an overwhelming sense of our own importance. We are too sure that if *we* are not on the spot everything will go wrong; that the work will not be properly done unless we direct it; that no one else can conduct a certain difficult transaction, or fill with any sort of satisfaction our own vacant place. But some turn of fate compels us to step aside, and lo! the wheels of the universe manage to roll on just as well as if we had been there. Let us, then, lay this lesson also to our hearts — there never was a man yet whose place could not be filled, and we shall have plucked another fruitful seed of hurry from our lives. A hundred years at least before Columbus discovered America, the “Good Counsel” of Geoffrey Chaucer was given to the world, and part of that good counsel read:

“Paine thee not each crooked to redress;
In trust of her that turneth as a ball;
Great rest lieth in little business.”

And Shakespeare’s keen insight recognized the root of much of our striving when he made Pembroke say:

“When workmen strive to do better than well,
they do confound their skill in covetousness.” [King John, iv,2]

In that very delightful book containing the philosophy of Cho-nang-tsu, the Chinese mystic, there is a chapter called "Autumn Floods", wherein the Spirit of the River converses with the Spirit of the Ocean, and confesses that having seen the ocean he at last realizes the existence of something far greater than himself. To which the Spirit of the Ocean replied: "Now that you know your own insignificance, I can speak to you of great principles. . . . Dimensions are limitless; times is endless. Conditions are not invariable; terms are not final. Thus the wise man looks back into the past, and does not grieve over what is far off, nor rejoice over what is near, for he knows that time is without end".

In a deeper sense, then, than was even in the thought of the wise old Indian, "we have all the time there is", and when once the idea of reincarnation shall have become a living reality to us, it will give us a sense of the fulness of time that nothing else can impart. For when we realize that we are not obliged to learn all the lessons of earthly existence in one brief life, a terrible urgency is lifted from our souls, and we can afford to wait, while we also serve.

Nor is the least of our serving the making of that atmosphere of repose which shall benefit the souls of others as well as our own. What is that element of hurry and unrest that makes life in our great cities so intolerable but the effect of each one's contribution to the general whirlwind surrounding us? There is nothing more contagious than haste, and the mere fact of seeing a wild necessity for hurry imprinted on the face of every one else almost inevitably inspires us with a feeling that we must hurry too. Watch, the crowd leaving a ferry-boat, for example, and see the outer fringe of men and boys leap from the deck and tear up the pier as though they were rushing from a sinking ship. But no sooner are they fairly beyond the gates than they settle down into a saunter, and prove, in nine cases out of ten, to be people who have more time than they know what to do with. None the less, this fictitious hurry of theirs has infected their neighbors, and they too have been swept away in the wild rush. If we walk through the bustling streets of lower New York on a weekday, we feel how strong is the effect in its atmosphere of all this element of greed that drives the wheels of business and makes men hasten to and fro as if each trivial errand were of the most vital importance. Go through the same streets on a Sunday, and you will feel the peace that settles upon those empty spaces as soon as the human element is withdrawn. No village green is more tranquil.

If, then, it is our fault that the atmosphere of city-life is so full of hurry, it is our privilege to be able to make it less so. If we can surround ourselves with a sphere of serenity, we shall tranquilize those around us, and from them the sense of repose will spread to others. Not very long ago I heard a lady say, "If I could look as serene and happy as all the Theosophists do, I should be willing to join the Society at once". So we may take heart of grace, and feel that even as a nucleus of *repose* the Theosophical Society may hope to accomplish something.

And as a nucleus for the promotion of universal brotherhood, it should accomplish much more in the same direction. For the idea of universal brotherhood is based upon the conviction of our spiritual unity, and as the *Vedas* say: "To him who knows that all things are one with the Supreme Spirit, what room can there be for delusion, or what room for sorrow?" With the sense of separation from others killed out, there can be no more striving to excel our other selves, but realizing that in the truest sense we are all members of one body, we rejoice in their advancement as our own, and in our gains as theirs also. And knowing that in the light of Eternity a century is as insignificant as a second, we learn that time is to be measured, not by the revolutions of the sun and moon, but by the growth of our souls. As Carlyle has said, in words that cannot be too often quoted: "Thee curtains of Yesterday drop down, the curtains of Tomorrow roll up; but Yesterday and Tomorrow both *are*. . . . With God, as it is a universal *Here*, so is it an everlasting *Now*".

The conviction of our unity in spirit with each other and with the Divine, that unity upon which rests the

true basis of universal brotherhood, and the “Knowledge of the amplitude of time”, are, then, the pillars upon which we should rear the structure of our lives. “To whatever object the inconstant mind goeth out, thou shouldst bring it back and place it upon the Spirit.” says the *Bhagavad-Gita*. “For supreme bliss surely cometh to him whose mind is thus at peace.” And this is the real meaning of that beautiful verse of Isaiah: “Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee”.

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