

## A Vision by Emma Hardinge Britten.

### A DARK SPHERE ON THE SPIRIT SIDE OF LIFE.

A PEER OF THE BRITISH REALM—HIS DESOLATE CONDITION IN THE SPIRIT-WORLD—THE SPIRIT-HOME OF SOME OF EARTH'S RICH ARISTOCRATS—SOME POTENT TRUTHS ILLUSTRATED.

It was sunset on Lake Ontario. I lay on a couch, to which indisposition had confined me for several hours, watching dreamily the fitful, changing hues of the sky, and the gorgeous reflection of its gold and purple glories on the tossing waters of its shining lake. Painters' canvas never yet displayed the wealth of coloring that the artists' sun then cast, like a mantle, over the evening scene. Each moment changing its glorious pageantry, it seemed as if the dying day called up from the world of infinite ideas this phantasmagoria of beauty, to teach me the loveliness of death when nature rules supreme, and the strong, the good and beautiful are passing away. Passing away! Yes, though the scene I looked upon was motion, life, in its fairest garb of loveliness, 'twas life going out; the lamp of day soon to be quenched in the solemn mystery of darkness, and that day's death.

Suddenly my wandering thoughts were fixed on one whom for years I had not seen, or scarcely thought upon. He was a man whom no description can fully represent to the inhabitants of the western continent, for he was of a class unknown in American experiences—a peer of the British realm; the elder brother of a wealthy, noble, and far-descended house, and a marked actor in that peculiar drama which is only played amongst the members of the British aristocracy.

You could not follow me, my American friends, were I to attempt for you a description of the stately earl and his peculiar

sphere of action; happy for you you cannot; for the sum of all is told when I translate his life in this: His birth, position, the law of primogeniture, and other specialties, had manufactured a rich nobleman and a capacious mind into a bad man, notorious for his enormous gallantries in public life, and his equally enormous tyranny in private life. This man had lived for self, and used time, talents, wealth, and station, for no other purpose than the gratification of self and selfish passions.

I presume he had never committed any act that could bring upon him the penalty of the law; but in Great Britain our courts of honor, chastity, and equity exist only in public opinion; and this pronounces verdict against the poor, never the rich; otherwise this great earl would scarcely have escaped a felon's fate.

In my youth I had known this man. I had often read Shakespeare to him, sang and played for him; and, despite some awe with which his singularly stately presence inspired me, I returned his regard for me with perhaps more of interest than the young and innocent generally yielded to him. My full understanding of his character was the revelation of after years. Since I have been in America, the journals of home have brought the intelligence of the great man's transit into "the land of rest."

I had become a believer in Spiritualism about a year; and then, as often since, had wondered why that spirit never sought communion with the girl who remembered him kindly, and with whom the dark shadows of wrong had never been associated. Still he came not. Sometimes I wondered whether "the great gulf" of scripture was not a truth, and the rich, bad man could not cross it.

This night my mind was full of him; and the spirit earl was the last normal thought I can recall, ere I entered that strange, dream-like state, baffling all description, which we so vaguely call the "trance."

I passed through what seemed many spheres of mist and gloom. They occupied much space, but gave me no other idea but that of traversing vast distances. At length I stood in a city of buildings, connected with each other, which seemed to be the destination to which my spirit's flight had been tending.

The experiences of the spirit can never be fully translated into human speech; hence I cannot attempt to describe, in the

language of matter, the inconceivable spaces through which I seemed to travel, nor the splendor with which I was surrounded. Eye hath not seen nor heart conceived of the beauty outwrought by the spirit, or of distances where infinity offers no horizon; but the character of the buildings I traversed I can at least describe.

They consisted of chambers, galleries, staircases, halls and corridors, furnished with all the gorgeous magnificence of oriental luxury.

Three points in my journey, however, were most remarkable. The first was the amazing and palpable darkness that filled these palaces, revealing clearly every color and shape, yet thick with an atmosphere of such dense blackness that I could taste it, suffocate in it, almost cut it; 'twas awful, overwhelming, stifling. 'Twas darkness visible, night incarnate.

The next point of interest was the total absence of inhabitants; not a living thing was visible; and though in process of my wanderings, I seemed to traverse worlds, and to have occupied ages since my entrance, so death-like was the stillness, so terrible the awful quiet that I felt as if an eternity of pain would be very cheaply purchased by the sight of even an insect or a reptile; but the crowning fact of my strange experience was the effect of the scene on my own spirits. At first I was affected by a profound melancholy, but as I proceeded this deepened into a despair so hopeless that memory, and even the sense of pain, at last fled. At certain stages of my pilgrimage, the gloom and solitude produced in my mind the most agonizing longing for light, air, and companionship; but even the energy to frame a wish at length abandoned me, and though sensible of a dim possibility, by powerful exercise of will, of summoning aid to my side, I lost at last the faculty even of suffering, and wandered on, seemingly for years, centuries, ages, a living annihilation, an incarnation of hopeless woe.

God, angels, life, worlds, all were nothing to me; I was in eternity and endless death!

The most distinct memory I can now retain was a vague wonder as to whether I was thus suffering for expiation of my own sins, or learning by horrible experience the condition of others.

I think that the amount of energy expended even in this effort at reflection opened up a new phase in my dreadful pil-

grimage, for it was answered by the tones of a sweet, bell-like voice, whose low but clear intonations seemed wafted from the immeasurable distance of some far-off world. It said: "You are now in the Spirit-homes of earth's rich dead, Emma; here dwell the Dives of earth, who, men say, die so very rich; here they live in the splendors they loved, the wealth they adored, and surrounded by the idols they made and worshiped.

"Your sufferings, Emma, are theirs in the realization of the life for which they sold themselves; and now you may judge the value of the coin for which the cold-hearted and selfish rich man sells his soul.

"How like you the exchange?"

I shuddered and wept bitterly for the insane rich of earth. "Where are they?" I murmured.

"Everywhere," replied the voice. "Myriads move around you, and wander and feel as you do, but none see the others, or you; it is the condition of entrance to the spheres of self-love, that the eye shall behold naught but self, realize no other existence. They toiled in earth-life to attain this state; here they reap the harvest they have sown."

"But this darkness," I cried. "Oh, for the light, for but one ray of the blessed sunlight! Why cannot the sun of heaven penetrate these awful abodes?"

"And so it does, child. Here, as everywhere else, is heaven, and light and sun; but where are the eyes that can behold it? If heaven be not within us, in vain we seek it elsewhere. If our eyes are ever turned in upon self, they are blind to all besides. From the soul's center goes forth the true light or darkness of the land of souls."

"Oh, that I could see but one of the inhabitants of this doleful region," I thought, and with the wish came its instant gratification; for, raising my eyes, I beheld the form of a living being approaching me. At first the delight of seeing a thing of life again impelled me to rush toward it, but the singularity of the figure, and its evident incapacity to perceive me, arrested my steps and I stood watching, with curious interest, my new companion. The figure was that of a very, very old man; indeed, to judge by his wrinkled face and withered aspect, he might have been the sole surviving wreck of centuries.

His height could not have exceeded that of a child of four

years, and the garments that hung in threadbare folds around his shrunken form were a world too wide for the poor anatomy they covered, and yet I knew this pitiful little figure bore the evidence of decrease rather than natural deformity, and that his present childish dimensions had come from the shrinking of a once mighty form of manhood.

Yes, I knew this, not only from the revealment of his past, which each spirit bears about, engraved on the unmasked soul, but because I could trace in those withered features and that diminished shape, the wreck of the once proud, stately earl, whom in former days I had looked upon as the *beau ideal* of aristocratic manhood.

Oh, how terrible it was to behold him thus! His face wore an expression of unutterable grief, but withal a look of mild resignation and hopeless regret, that pierced my very soul. Slowly and feebly he passed on without regarding me, but as he neared me, and ere he finally disappeared, I heard him sigh. Oh, heaven! how he sighed, and what a world of bitter memories, useless regrets, and wasting sorrow came sobbing on the air, laden with the sigh of that suffering soul!

Ah, me! It was indeed the breath of a wailing spirit; the gnashing of teeth, and "outer darkness."

With his departure, even the interminable solitudes of his home seemed more tolerable; but again I heard the sweet cadence of my invisible angel's voice chiming in my ear:

"Yes, Emma, it is he, even Lord ———. You wonder at the strange transfiguration which death has wrought on the splendid peer; but ask yourself the size of his soul when its earthly mask was rent off, and his spirit appeared with its one grain of ideality, and that, all self. Emma, yon pigmy has grown by suffering, since his entrance here, from an almost invisible monad to the size you just beheld. Yes, Emma, self was all that existed in the great man's soul, and self is but one spark in the divine unity of illimitable fires that must all burn in perfection and harmony, ere the central sun of soul is fully unfolded.

"Until then true life does not even begin. Judge, then, of the size of yon embryonic spirit, when first it shook off the clods of earth to stand revealed, not for name, lineage, wealth, nor station, but just for its worth, no more."

"Alas!" I cried, "teach us, angelic guide, though suffer-

ing be the road, and blood and tears the baptism, teach us how to live so that at last we may cast off our earthly burdens, and enter upon our spiritual inheritance, full-grown spirits, men and women souls."

"Hard is the path of riches, strong the pleadings of self, ruinous the crushing weight of uncurbed passion," replied my guide. "These with the sophistic lull of custom, and overweening devotion to the things of earth, that minister only to earthly loves, have dwarfed many such souls as his, and shrunk up the blossoms of genius and intellect, until these doleful spheres are thick with worlds of people of whom you man is a type."

"Their destiny," I murmured; "O, send me not away comfortless!"

"Despair, remorse, regret; then penitence, submission, such deep humility as shone upon that man's piteous face, are theirs. Then, becoming once again as little children, the morning of a new life shall dawn for them, and glorious will be the evening that shall close their day of labor, and see them, as they should be, full-grown spirits, and heirs of the everlasting kingdom, where earth with its baser nature never enters."

The pale moon was full and high, and the vault of heaven thick with flowers, when I again, with natural vision, looked on the face of earth.

Perhaps, after so solemn a lesson as that of the past hour, the action may appear grotesque and unworthy, but it was nevertheless irresistible, and consisted in springing from my couch, opening my portemonnaie and (though its contents would never, I think, in its most plethoric condition, prove a temptation to any one), pouring them upon the floor, trampling them beneath my feet, and crying aloud to the mighty power in whose hands poor, tempted souls are passion-tossed, or "stayed in perfect peace," to "lead me not into temptation," and deliver me from the evil of my own soul.

For many and many a day after this, I esteemed my poverty a privilege; it was long before I could dare to speculate, even with necessary foresight, upon any arrangements that required me to calculate upon the possession of money; dreadful, awful, tyrannical, soul-corrupting money! Though I believe I shall never, in this respect, be tempted beyond the need of

the bare day's provision, yet still do I remember my vision of warning with an awe that forever comments on the fatal truth, "How hardly shall a rich man enter into the kingdom of heaven!"

I do not love to think or speak of this vision; my soul is pained to be assured of its truth; to know that about me are the dreadful "homes of the selfish rich;" that in the invisible world of which earth, sky, suns and systems are full, are eternally pacing the unresting feet of the solitary worshippers of self, in their hideous loneliness, their frightful penance for the gratification of their souls' idolatries!

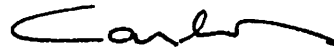
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"Oh, what is death? 'Tis a fleeting breath—  
A simple but blessed change;  
'Tis rending a chain, that the soul may gain  
A higher and broader range.  
Unbounded space is its dwelling-place  
Where no human foot hath trod,  
But everywhere doth it feel the care  
And the changeless love of God.  
Oh, then, though you weep when your loved ones sleep,  
When the rose on the cheek grows pale,  
Yet their forms of light, just concealed from sight,  
Are only behind the veil."—*Doten.*

9/7/2011

I would like to make a comment on this story. I think this is a wonderful story written unfortunately by someone with a religious mind. The continuation of life is real and is based on Natural laws having nothing to do with religion. Heaven is not a place but a state of mind. I also would like to say that poverty is not a privilege. Anyone who lives a decent and diligent life, using all his intelligence, will not live in poverty. It is not money that corrupts the soul. Money is simply a means whereby an individual can do either good or evil. A very wealthy individual can use his money to improve the lives of millions. It is the attachment to material things, selfishness, and disregard for the welfare of others that drove this man to the condition he is in the spirit world. The writer says here: "lead me not into temptation," and deliver me from the evil of my own soul." To that I say: You are the master of your own destiny. The individual himself is the only one who can lead himself into temptation; the individual himself is the only one who can deliver himself from evil.

This is however a great story that illustrates to us the end-result of our actions when we live self-centered lives.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carly", with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.