

820
ARTHUR, H.
1895

PYTHAGOREAN FANCIES.

Cu

BY H. ARTHUR.

In: The Canadian Magazine, V - 1895 - p.184-192

I—A DAY-DREAM OF IMMORTALITY.

A GENERAL belief must have a foundation in fact. Who has not heard of the wide-spread traditions, among all races, of a deluge, and of the argument therefrom in favor of the ark, or of the curious precocity of children, who utter thoughts they can hardly have derived from their surroundings, but seem like reminiscences of a former life?

The writer had some coins melted in a crucible, and poured into an ingot mould. On the paper-weight before him, the old coats of arms are traceable; the image and superscription is not quite effaced. Is it more difficult for the soul to retain consciousness of a prior incarnation, after passing through the alembic of the tomb, than for minted metal to keep the impress of the die after seething in the furnace of the smelter?

Dreaming thus of the analogies of the material and immaterial worlds—quasi verities, sophistries, I know not what—a shape stood there before me of a man with whom on such subjects I had oftentimes conversed. As I had known him he appeared, not with unearthly pallor, diaphanous drapery or flowing beard, but with clear complexion and the warm, fresh color of life, though his body had long been resting in an honored grave. His well-fitting dress showed the familiar bright strip of ribbon in the lapel, which testified to the enlightened appreciation of his attainments by a foreign government.

"I was just thinking, Chevalier," said I, "of your theory that the earth and all the worlds are living organisms. You were fond of saying that the subterranean drainage channels of

the waters are like veins in other animate beings, and that metals are even now being sorted out from their solutions and deposited in certain layers, even as flesh and bone are being created and re-created in the organic bodies all around us."

"You are still busy upon the old problem," he replied. "I knew it, for I see the impress of recent as well as former thoughts upon your brain. They are like assorted photographs, and though you can only examine them one by one, I perceive them all—an interesting panorama."

Our conversation began thus easily. I felt no wonder, no alarm. Indeed, I should have greeted him in life with more effusiveness, and taken the visit less as a matter of course.

"I must rejoice," he quietly continued, "in my power of observation and perception. I no longer merely think; I know. How I enjoy the expansion of view that dawns upon me!"

This seemed a little eerie, so I roused myself and asked if he had found fresh proofs to support his theory of a living world. Only now did I become conscious that I was conversing with a soul no longer tied to mortal elements, and I muttered something about evidence—what evidence of his old views could he now advance?

"Evidence," he smiled, "I want no evidence. I perceive; I am convinced; I know. Nothing seems to be; it is. My fancies, then, are now, in great part, facts."

I began to wonder why I was thus honored with an interview; but before I could frame my question—"Will power," he broke in, as if anticipating me—"will power is the

secret, first, last, and forever—the will of the unnumbered beings of which you consist and by which you are moved. You are not one; you are an innumerable family of atoms, whose lives are never extinguished, whose loves are sempiternal.”

“Fine words,” I thought. “You always liked sonorous vocables. But what on earth or in limbo can you mean by the loves of a molecule?”

“Just what’s meant,” said he, “by the love, affection, wish, affinity—call it what you will—of human beings. Do not the particles of iron that escape in fumes from factory chimneys find their way, by their volition, to mines, with other iron particles dissolved out of decaying mosses or become discrete by other means? There are, there must needs be, many stages in their journey, in which Time scarcely counts at all, but in the end they will be reunited in another bed of iron ore. From the ocean, that huge reservoir of all the salts, the various layers of land are, like sponges, soaking up seas of water, each choosing for assimilation its fitting element. Gold and silver are the chosen metals now which perhaps influence men, those parasites upon the surface of the globe, who think themselves all puissant, yet are no more than a sort of *acarus* upon its crust. Thus does the earth feed upon and constantly recreate or reconstitute itself. Thus does life ever seek out like, and affinity rule the universe as well as the lives of men.”

“You speak depreciatingly of men,” quoth I. “That is curious, for you did not lack for honors while among us. And how do you like being a disembodied soul?”

“I cannot tell,” was the unexpected answer. “This is my first experience of the sensation. I can see, that is, I infer and know from your brain, that I have been some years separated from you, but the intervening years are blank. Nothing is further from facts, than the com-

mon ideas about disembodied spirits. Can you really think it possible that a spirit sleeps or rests, hears, sees, smells, feels or tastes? that, without organs, it moves, speaks, exercises force? You think, perhaps, you are now seeing a shape and hearing a familiar voice. It is to you an illusion; you believe you see and hear, but it is the stuff that dreams are made of. No spirit, among spirits, can need or take work or repose; it must think on, think ever. Thus it must become or be omniscient, or, at least, all-knowing along its allotted lines, if there be a limitation; even as the space between the lines which enclose an angle is infinite in one direction. Can such a spirit be possible, apart from Deity? No. The soul must become an inseparable part of the divine essence; and what it must become, it has always been and is. Thus, all spirit can be but one. For a time, matter enthrals some portions, or, rather, emanations of the spirit are materialized. This function of the divine essence is called life, the inscrutable object of which who knows? When kindly death ends the existence of a being whose pains and weakness have made life undesirable, not only does the bond of unity between soul and body end, but sentient existence, by which I mean that consciousness of being called independence, ends for both.”

“How then came you here, you metaphysical thing?” I at once enquired, though, I suppose, I did not speak aloud, but thought I spoke.

“You are brusque,” he said. “Let me proceed. I did not say existence would not recommence. There is a sum of spiritual essence as there is of matter. If you light a match the carbon burns, but in time it will return to be another pine, another saw-log, another match. So, too, with what I must call the particles of soul. Some will be wedded to or cause to be formed another body in another cycle, while in a great cycle, like that referred to by Cicero in his *Dream of*

Scipio, there will again be a very similar soul,—in short, the same spirit in a similar body: that is, a Resurrection."

"Your pardon, friend," I cried. "How then come you here, the same in speech and figure as a dozen years ago, and similar in thought? The single cycle cannot be so short; the cycle of cycles must be almost an eternity!"

"Quite true," quoth he. "You remember Virgil,—

*'Has omnes ubi mille rotam volvere per annos
Lerneum ad flumen Deus evocat agmine magno.
Scilicet immemores supera ut convexa revisant,
Rursus et incipiant in corpora nulle reverti.'*

"The bard well knew that a thousand years had to elapse before the souls wanted to return from hell to upper air. Am I here by my own wish? No, by yours. Your thoughts about my theories set up something like a point of crystallization, and, as in a chemical solution, a crystal forms, so on your thoughts my spiritual being has renewed itself. A few moments ago I was not; you have re-created me. I am; I think; I remember; I know. I am possessed of the knowledge of the present and the past, but I know that in a few moments I shall cease to be. Your wandering mind will no longer be a centre of compulsion, and no such combination of events as that which has permitted me for the time to exist again to you and to myself will ever recur."

"Is this, then," I asked, "the promised immortality?"

"Immortality?" he cried. "How often must I repeat that all things are immortal; that immortality is but a phase of life, as life is but a phase of immortality. Does not the weed whose seeds are scattered to the winds again live, again feel the spring breeze fan its tender leaves, again unfold its petals to the sun, ripen its seeds, and thus forever endure? Is not all life

transmitted thus, ever nearing perfect adaptations? Ask the biologist if even his microscopic cells, ever sub-dividing, are not immortal?"

"I glimpse your reasoning," I mused, "as in a glass, darkly. Strange that a half unconscious effort of my memory should thus recall your spirit into being, re-unite or re-crystallize the particles of your soul. Memory is —"

"Memory," he whispered, or suggested (which it was I cannot tell), "is the seed of life, nay, more, it alone is life. When I am forgotten, my name quite faded, I cannot be thus recalled to an unsatisfactory kind of ghostship, but I shall be free to live, in time, a new existence, and, under some other name, become a child again. Oh, happiness ineffable! New joys, new life, new friends! Old jealousies, hatreds, old musty knowledge gone! Yet some, 'tis thought, remember, in the new existence, a little of the old, not having drunk of Lethe quite so deeply as the rest. Pythagoras felt that he had lived during the Trojan war, when he was—was it not Alectryon?"

"Bother Pythagoras," I blurted out, shaking my head, to clear my thoughts for some more queries. It was a fatal act. The vision faded slowly like a dissolving view upon a screen. Some motes in a sunbeam that had strayed into my study, alone marked the place where I had so distinctly seen my departed friend.

II.—REAL AND IMAGINARY SOUNDS.

I saw the shape; no doubt of that. An illusion it may have been, but I recall with certainty its color and form. When I think of the voice, I cannot be so sure. I understood it, but I cannot affirm that it was soft or hoarse, musical or noisy. Does any one hear voices in a dream? I cannot answer for myself, as yet. Can you—and you? Next time we dream let us try, at waking, to remember the sounds we suppose we heard. Meanwhile I hold that a dream is rightly called a vision, be-

cause imaginary sight is its sole characteristic, the images being like marionettes, which move, suggest words, but never even seem to utter any.

Pantagruel and Panurge, with all their jolly party, are sent by Rabelais on a cruise, well out to sea. They are chatting and laughing, when up jumps Pantagruel (the son of Gargantua), and looking around, quite anxiously, "Don't you hear something?" he asks. "I hear voices in the air, but I see nothing. Listen, all of you." "And we listened," says the historian, "listened with ears like the *other* half shells of oysters, and we even put our hands behind our ears, palms outward, as Emperor Antoninus used to do. At first we could hear nothing at all, but, as Pantagruel said he heard something, we kept on, and finished by doing the same. The longer we listened the more we heard, even to whole words, which alarmed us very much, and no wonder, for though we saw nothing we heard men shouting, women crying, and horses neighing and screaming, until Panurge cried, 'It is sorcery; we are lost. Let us sheer off! Friar John, my friend, stand by me. Have you your sword? Take care it does not stick on the sheath. (He tries it). That's not half drawn. We are lost, I say. Hark! There are cannon shots, by Jove! Let us sail away, row away, anything to get out of this. (I never have the least courage at sea, but lots of it in the cellar and other places.) Let us turn tail (not that I am afraid; I fear nothing but danger.) Let us be off. Right about face. Turn the tiller, you son of a sea cow. Would to God I were on dry land, though I had to vow I'd be a bachelor all my life! Let us get off... we don't belong to them. They are ten to our one, I assure you. They are on their own dung-hill too; we don't know the lie of the land. They will kill us, sure: we need not be ashamed to run away, because, as says Demosthenes, 'he who runs away may live to fight an-

other day.'" Let us at least make a strategic movement to the rear. Haul away. Down with your helm. Look to the booms. Ware the lines,—we are dead men else. By all the devils, let us be off!"

Pantagruel, hearing all the outcry, asked who the skulker was. "For," said he, "we ought first to find out who these people are. Perhaps they are our own folk. I can't see any one yet, though there must be a hundred thousand all around! I once read that a philosopher named Petronius thought there were several worlds, touching one another like equilateral triangles, apex to apex, in the centre of which was the dwelling of Truth, where abode words, ideas, and the exemplars and portraits of all things past and future, while around them was the Cycle. In certain years, at long intervals, a portion of them fell upon the human race, as falls the influenza, or as fell the dew upon the fleece of Gideon, while other portions were reserved until the end of the cycle. I remember that Aristotle calls the words of Homer swift, leaping, flying; so they must be living. Antiphanes, too, says Plato's doctrine of words is of the same kind, because in winter, in some countries, they are frozen as they are uttered, and not heard at all. Thus Plato taught children things they could not understand until they grew old. We ought to philosophize and think if this is not the place where such words thaw out. Should we not be delighted if we found the head and the lyre of Orpheus, which the Thracian women, who tore that singer to bits, threw into the Hebrus, which floated them to the Black Sea and so on to Lesbos, and the head was always uttering a mournful chant, as if lamenting Orpheus' death, while the lyre, among whose strings the winds were playing, made harmony for the song. Let us try to find them somewhere hereabouts."

Find the Orphic lyre, indeed! Since

the Thracian women destroyed the spirit of song, Orpheus has not been again incarnate. Scrawny females, in this or that conventicle, with their so-called hymns and anthems, are murdering him still. What absurdities we are guilty of, even in this nineteenth century, pandering in all things to the low average of the poor mass of us, instead of crying *Excelsior*, and aiming high. Our northern throats are raucous at their best, save now and then a Jenny Lind's or an Emma Juch's, yet we permit such wretchedness as congregational singing. By Saint Cecilia, it is tough to have to endure the croaking of the poll, if one's ears are at all attuned to softer melody and sweeter harmony! What makes these folks take part in such a Brekekoax chorus? Not a bricklayer or grocer, not a barrister or doctor, can carry on his trade or calling without due apprenticeship, but every vulgar snob, under the pretence of worship, is allowed to mouth a travesty of music, and level things divine to the standard of a pot-house song. Small wonder that organs are in fashion, for they serve, like the drums and cymbals of a Turkish band, to drown a horrible din.

"Hin, hin, hin, hin, his, tic, tac, brededin, brededac, frr, frrr, frrr, bon, bon, bon, trr, trr, trrr, on, on, on, on."

—such were the sounds they say they heard on Pantagruel's ship: the noise of horses and the shock of a charge. They anticipated Professor Garner in his study of the language of monkeys and other animals, and that without a phonograph. Barbarians were the people who said "Ba, ba, ba," for speech. Why does not Garner visit our churches with his phonograph, instead of spending his energies in Africa?

Thracian women! Rabelais seems rightly to understand the Orphic myth. How could such melancholy folk appreciate true song? When a child was born to them, the relatives used to condole with (not congratulate) the parents; they would weep and howl at the prospect of misery that was before the infant, and would rejoice when a friend died, because he was delivered from the misfortune and wretchedness of life! Some of these Thracians were polygamists, and when the man died, the wives used to dispute which of them had been the best beloved, for she was privileged to slay herself on her husband's tomb. Herodotus (iv. 93), calls the best of them an ignorant lot. I wonder if the Serbs and Roumanians have had the Orphic murder sufficiently revenged upon them, and if their hate has yet turned to respectful love?

