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YOU, OUT THERE

You, out there! watching, watching. Of me, above me, within me, enveloping me—Soul! What do you make of this perverse breathing Self of mine Groping about for the Light, feeling its way like a child, Turned hither and yon, sometimes buffeted, sometimes repelled, Often driven headlong as before a hurricane, Often excited, aroused, yes, even glorified, deified, for the instant Then blind as a bat! You, out there! Where am I, what am I, why am I? Whither lies the Light?

—T. L. H. in Christian Register.

Mr. Skinner's Skeleton.

By PHILIP BEAUFROY.

"Dear Sir," ran the letter, "owing to the fact that we are making considerable reductions in our office staff, we regret to inform you that we shall not require your services after this day month, the 27th prox. We shall, of course, be pleased to give you any testimonials you may desire in the future, and you have our best wishes for your subsequent career."

Kimber read the note three times before he was able to realize exactly what it meant. At first he had believed that it was a sort of joke on the part of the correspondence clerk, the fellows were always having what they called a "game" with him, because he happened to be the oldest man in the office. He had reached the critical age of forty-five and the inverted values of the twentieth century demand that the last thing on earth to be respected shall be the dignity of age.

But, although, in the beginning, he had been inclined to regard the letter as a jest, further observation proved that it was quite wrong. The note bore the signature of "James Skinner," the head of the firm, and even Dixon, the correspondence clerk, would hardly have had the audacity to forge that august gentleman's name.

"So I'm to be kicked out," he murmured, "and I can guess the reason. I'm too old. That's it. Too old! I'm punctual, I'm quick, I'm everything they want, but my hair is going gray, and people don't refer to me any longer as that 'young fellow.'"

A feeling of violent resentment seized his soul, shutting out the milder sensation of sorrow. That would come later, of course, but just now he could only feel anger. It was scandalous, brutal, altogether unjustifiable, he reflected. What right had they to use the best years of a man's life and then fling him away on to the dust heap when the whim seized them?

He glanced around the deserted office, whence the clerks had departed to their Saturday afternoon football or music hall. Jove, how attached he had become to the place! The clock, the dingy desks, the rickety stools—all these things were part of his life and had twined themselves into the routine of his days. Somehow, he could not imagine himself working in any other room. It was true that he had often disliked the monotony of his toil, but now that there was the prospect of something new and strange he shrank back into the memory of that happy monotony with something like the gratified shiver which the disturbed sleeper returns to the warmth of the sheets.

It was Skinner's doing, of course. The manager had always like him (Kimber), and would never have suggested his removal. Skinner, however, was prejudiced in favor of young men; doubtless that trip to New York last year had developed his prejudices. Often had he heard Skinner say that young blood was what the modern business man wanted. Yes, it was Skinner's doing, and a feeling of passionate resentment against the smooth faced, brutal head of the firm rose in Kimber's soul. If Skinner had entered the office at that moment, he would not have been answerable for what happened.

Suddenly he conceived the idea of going round to his chief's private house and demanding an interview. On Monday, at the office, it would be impossible, for the stream of callers was incessant, and at most he would be able to snatch a few minutes only of the busy man's time. But if he went to the house he could say his say undisturbed.

"Yes, I'll do it," he resolved, and, having brushed his hat and straightened his tie, he climbed on a bus going westward. His heart beat more swiftly than usual, but his face was calm. He was even able to listen with a vague interest to the conversation of two men who sat in front of him.

"Yes," said the elder of the two, "it's what I've always said. Every man has a skeleton in his cupboard. Sometimes it's the skeleton of a woman, sometimes of a drunken father, sometimes of a lunatic brother. But there it is, and although he keeps the key of that cupboard in his most carefully buttoned pocket, somebody steals the key at last. That's what happened to poor Bennett."

His companion acquiesced, and then attempted a feeble joke. This led the conversation into a lighter vein, and the subject of skeletons was dropped. On the brain of Kimber, however, the chance words had made an impression. A gleam came into his eyes and a spot of color glowed in his cheek. His mind worked with feverish energy.

The bus paused at Lancaster Gate. He alighted, and walked swiftly to Westbourne Terrace, where the great man lived. He hesitated for a moment at the door, asking himself whether he should knock or ring, for he was not used to visiting at "swagger" houses. Eventually, with a touch of bravado, he resolved to do both.

A man in quiet livery opened the door.

"Is Mr. Skinner at home?" he asked, boldly.

The servant stared at him, guessing that he was from the office and accordingly favoring him with the contempt which all right minded funkeys feel for mere clerks.

"Don't know, I'm sure," he replied carelessly.

"Then be good enough to inquire," said Kimber, sternly.

The tone was brutal and produced the desired effect. The man asked him to step inside, and inquired his name.

Kimber took out his card and wrote on it: "May I see you, sir, for a few minutes on a very urgent matter?"

"You will please give this to Mr. Skinner," he said. "I am sure he will consent to see me if he is at home."

The servant went away and returned a moment later.

"Just step in here and wait a bit," he observed, as he pointed to a room, the door of which was open.

Kimber obeyed. There was a mirror on the mantelpiece. He walked to it and surveyed himself. Jove! how wonderfully young and well he looked. The years seemed to have rolled from him during the last ten minutes. The dominating impulse which had seized his brain had brightened his eyes and brought a glow to his cheek. He felt that he was ready to achieve anything. Anything!

"Er—what do you want, Kimber?" asked a voice, rousing him from his reverie. Facing round abruptly, he saw that Skinner had entered the room.

"I took the liberty of calling, sir, in reference to this letter," he replied, and handed it to his employer.

Skinner read the letter as though he was not aware of the contents.

"Indeed! Such things are done every day. You must excuse my saying so, but—er—you are getting a little too old for us. We want younger men."

"Yes, that is what I thought. But all the same, sir, I don't admit the justice of it. I can do everything that a younger person can do and perhaps do it better. As to salary, I'm only getting a hundred a year, and I doubt if even a man half my age would take much less."

Skinner shuffled his feet impatiently.

"My good fellow," he said, "I really can't waste time arguing with you about the ethics of commercial efficiency. I suppose I have a right to do as I choose in my own office. Now be sensible and take your gruel like a man. Otherwise I may change my mind about furnishing testimonials when you want them!"

Kimber realized that the hour had struck for action. He pulled himself together and approached his employer.

"Mr. Skinner," he said, "you are an ambitious man. I know that you have just been elected to a city company, and I believe that you contemplate standing for Parliament at the next by-election."

Skinner stared at him as though he believed his clerk had suddenly gone mad.

"What the mischief has all that got to, do with you and your dismissal?" he asked, abruptly.

"More than you think," replied Kimber, as he fixed his eyes upon the other man with a very acute glance, "much more. For you must remember, Mr. Skinner, that I have been in your office twenty years and that during that time I have kept my eyes and ears open."

"Well?"

There was just a touch of uneasiness in the exclamation. Skinner again shuffled his feet, but this time anxiety and not impatience impelled the mechanical action.

"Well, an observant man can learn many things in twenty years. He can learn other things besides matters which concern the office. You understand?"

"What do you mean?"

Skinner's hands were now engaged with his watch chain. He was twirling it nervously. A shade of pallor deepened in his heavy face.

"I think," said the other man, coolly, "you can guess what I mean. I don't want to hurt your feelings and to go into needless details. But I daresay you will call to mind that there is a certain circumstance which you would not like to be brought to light, either now or in the future. This is a very censorious country, Mr. Skinner, and people insist on their Parliamentary representatives having unspotted records, or, at least, records where the spots are decently covered up. Need I say more?"

Skinner did not reply for a moment. Then, with a sudden anger, he burst out:

"So you're going in for blackmail, are you?"

"Pardon me, but I'm doing nothing of the sort. I'm not asking for money. I'm asking for mere justice. All these years I've kept silent, when if I had liked, I could easily have wrung money from you by hinting to you of the exposure which a few words of mine would bring about."

"And had you done so I should have sent for a policeman," muttered Skinner.

"Hardly, for if so why don't you ring that bell now and call in a constable?" observed Kimber, triumphantly. "I can promise you that I shan't try to escape. But, really, Mr. Skinner, I doubt if you would have been foolish enough to ask for police assistance. There are cases where compromise is the best plan and the safest. This case is one of them."

The two men eyed each other, as though they were measuring their relative strengths. Kimber stood the gaze of his employer unflinchingly. Until that hour he had never dreamed that he possessed so much courage. The hour had called it forth, and lo, it had come.

"Now, look here," said Skinner, after a pause. "All this may be mere bluff. Where are your proofs of your absurd statements?"

"The proofs," replied Kimber, calmly, "lie in the mouth of the person who confided to me the story."

Skinner swayed back, a slight foam on his lips.

"Great heavens!" he gasped, "then she—"

"Yes, she is still alive and very, very anxious to be kicking as well," returned Kimber, quickly, "but as it happens she does not know exactly where to find you. I do. Now do you understand?"

Skinner sat down and buried his face in his hands.

"Confound you," he said, thickly, "I thought it was all over and forgotten."

"Most men do comfort themselves with that belief," observed Kimber, "but they find out their mistake sooner or later. But, believe me, Mr. Skinner, I have no wish to cause you any distress. I have merely referred to the episode to show that I speak of what I know. The skeleton is locked in your cupboard, and I happen to have a key as well as you. That's all. But I don't want to use the key if I can help it."

A pause followed, during which various emotions throbbled through Skinner's poor, sordid little soul. Rage, fear and surprise held the high place there, and it was easy to see that the words of his clerk had produced a terrible impression.

The clock struck 4.

"I'm afraid," said Kimber, "that I'm taking up too much of your time."

"No, no, wait a moment."

Kimber smiled and sat down again. Presently his employer looked at him intently.

"Mr. Kimber," he said, and the fact that he used the word "Mr." struck the clerk as being significant.

"I suppose that you are not a vindictive man."

"I hope not."

"You cannot really have any grudge against me except that you think you have received an unjust dismissal."

"That is my only grievance."

"Suppose that the dismissal were to be withdrawn, the grudge, I imagine, would be withdrawn also?"

"Of course!"

A deep sigh of relief issued from Mr. Skinner's throat. He rose and almost smiled.

"Then," he said, "you may consider yourself reinstated."

"Thank you very much, sir."

Kimber reached for his hat and umbrella and went toward the door.

"One moment," murmured Mr. Skinner, "you told me just now that you were getting a hundred a year. That is certainly not an inflated salary. I think I shall give you the charge of an additional department and raise the salary to £150."

Kimber bowed.

"Thank you very much, sir," he said again.

The contemptuous looking footman showed him out, wondering why the caller smiled so expansively as he went down the steps.

"I should like to know," reflected Kimber, as he climbed on his bus, "what Skinner's skeleton really is."

—Black and White.

Why Razors Get Tired.

"Do you know why we dip a razor in warm water before we begin shaving, and do you know why some ignorant men say a razor is 'tired'?" asked the barber. "Well, this is all due to the fact that a razor is a saw, not a knife, and it works like a saw, not like a knife. Examined under the microscope its edge, that looks so smooth to the naked eye, is seen to have innumerable and fine saw teeth. When these teeth get clogged with dirt all the honing and strapping in the world will do no good—the razor is dull and nothing will sharpen it. Then is the time the ignorant say it is 'tired' and stop using it, but the wise know it is only clogged."

"The wise, though, don't suffer their razors to get clogged. They dip them in warm water before they use them, and thus the teeth are kept clean. It is because a razor is a saw that lather doesn't soften the beard, as so many people think. It stiffens it, so that it will present a firm and resisting surface to the razor."

Philadelphia Record.

Newspaper Advertising the Best. The newspaper is the best advertising medium, and the more we employ that and boycott the other the better for the community. Advertising devices and the bill-board are utterly hideous.—Professor Zueblin, in a Lecture at Boston.

There are only 104 miles of street railway in England still holding to horse traction. There are sixty-four on which motive power is steam, twenty-five cable and four gas.

THE PULPIT.

A SCHOLARLY SUNDAY SERMON BY THE REV. J. A. R. CAIRNS.

Theme: The Glory of Death.

Belfast, Ireland.—The famous Presbyterian divine, the Rev. J. A. R. Cairns, recently delivered the following sermon entitled, "The Glory of Death." He took as his text: "To die is gain."—Phil. 1:21. "The victory."—1 Cor. 15: 57.

Is it not remarkable that the thing that haunts us like a terror is, the thing that burns like an inspiration to the men who wove together the teaching of this Book? What we try to forget, they strove to remember. What we call calamity, they called blessing and deliverance. What makes us cry, made them rejoice. The clearest teaching of this Book is that death is glorious. It is an inspiration. And that teaching makes the uniqueness of the Christian Gospel.

Let us gather the incidents that seem to present this teaching:

The great Teacher is going to die. The hints at death grow clear and unmistakable, and the hearts of the disciples begin to fall them. The labors and prayers and denials of those busy, ministering years appear as though they would issue in nothingness. Even friendship is going to be taken away, and out of all those years only a memory will be left them. No other issue seemed possible. They had no knowledge and they had no power.

And how did Jesus face that? What does He say? What can He say? He seems shut up by a logical necessity to admit the dark forebodings of His disciples. But it was just there that the opportunity for the new truth came—just at the point when human effort seemed to fail and human inspiration to die—that its meaning could be vaguely felt, if not clearly understood. And His new truth is this simply—"That death is glorious." It has a glory all its own. John 14 gathers about that single truth. That is its meaning, its purpose—"I go to prepare a place for you, that where I am there ye may be also." "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

That friendship and that inspiration and that teaching that they loved so much and feared so much to lose, would become deeper and fuller and eternal because of the coming of death. They would lose nothing, they would gain much. "If ye loved Me ye would rejoice because I go."

But you say Christ was somehow untaught. He was tempted in all points like as we are, and yet without sin. With His spiritual vision and power we can see how He could be fearless of death, and find in it a rich and abiding testimony to the truth of His Gospel, but what of the burdened men—the men who walk in mists and mysteries, who lack the vision and the power? Can death ever be less than a terror and devoid of glory? Let us see. Take Paul. Our text is his testimony and confession. "To die is gain * * * the victory."

Paul's life was hard. His years were crowded with labors and denials. How little response there seemed to be for all he gave! And what was it that burned before him as the shining goal to which he longed to come—what was the inspiration that warmed his weary heart? It was death. "I am in a strait betwixt two—having a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful to you." "I am ready. * * * Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown."

And what is the glad note that Peter strikes to cheer the hearts of those who suffer and pray and weep and wait? What light does he throw across the dark pathway of their tribulation? "Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things be diligent, that ye may be found of Him in peace, without spot and blameless."

And what consolation stole into the heart of that lonely thinker on Patmos—shut away from work and friendship, and suffering for the cross? Who are these that are arrayed in the white robes. "These are they which come out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore, are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun light on them or any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

Such, then, is the view of death that was taken by the disciples of Jesus and the apostles of the early Christian church. And I think it is abundantly clear that most of us are far away from such a view. Death is to us the last calamity. We meet it with fear and uncertainty.

How is one to account for this strange dissimilarity? How has a joy become a heartbreak and an inspiration become a terror? If we can answer this we shall answer many lesser questions, and discover how it is that not only in death, but in sorrow and sickness and disappointment we are missing the consolation and the glory that ought to dwell evermore in our hearts.

It is clear, I think, that the men who found and held to the glory of death were free from many of the subtle temptations that surround our lives. The atmosphere they breathed was pagan. The work they did was unpopular. The Gospel they professed was bitterly ridiculed and opposed. These men could not live Christian lives as "of course." They had got to live it deliberately, passionately, earnestly. They were driven back to draw out of Christianity the very richest that it would give. To drift was impossible. They were definitely out of it. And as they faced it all with the Spirit of Christ in their hearts, and with a great, heroic faith in Him, they discovered the true life and what rivers of strength outflowed from Him into them!

The foundation of their fearlessness was experience, and so personal experience of Christ and their utter inability to find joy in the world made the glory of death.

Out of their circumstances and experiences can't you catch a gleam of something that is not our own? Can't you see something in their circumstances and in their hearts that we lack? I think both are abundantly clear.

Take our circumstances. We live in no pagan atmosphere. The churches consecrated to the program of Christ are the most visible objects of our cities. They haunt themselves in our faces. The bells peal out glad notes above the din and clash of traffic. And what of the Book that gathers up the teaching—the words and works of Jesus? All may possess and read it.

To be a Christian is no longer to be heroic. A man may confess Christ without apology. Nay! The underlying assumption behind all our actions is that a man is a Christian. To be otherwise a man must specifically and ostentatiously deny it. We start our life with Christian baptism; we are hid away with the undying words of Christian hope ringing above our sleeping place. We join our life to another, and rear our homes upon the Christian foundation. But all has degenerated to an idle form.

It has come to be taken for granted. Men ask for baptism for their children and burial for their dead, because it is the usual, expected thing. And, brethren, don't you see where it has led us to? To a Christian formalism that contains no vitality, no power. We are living lives devoid of experience. We do not feel the power of Christ, nor do we see the glory of His living presence. We mumble words that have no deep, abiding significance.

It is tragic; it is horrible. But it is the spirit of the age. The Christian life is losing much because of the success of Christianity. Because it has meant and has accomplished so much, it means and accomplishes so little to-day. Its success is the cause of our personal loss. It is an old historic truism that success is the beginning of defeat. It has happened in empires and religions. It is the man who has to fight for his faith that holds that faith as his most cherished possession. We take Christ as we take our daily bread, without one thought of all it means, of all it represents.

And what of our experience? My dear brethren, it is because we find our joy in the world and miss the joy of Christ that death has been changed from a glory to a fear, from an inspiration to a dismay. We have grown to love the world—this fading, dying world—its joys, its music, its rewards. We have grown to forget the sacred, eternal words of Christ as to what life is, and duty, and God.

And the years race on—busy, crowded years of labor for place and money and success. When the night grows dark and lonely we cry for comfort, and when the day breaks with golden beams of light we hasten away and we forget. We forget! We forget!

Ah! It is the man whose night has been the longest that knows Christ the best and fears death the least. There are worse calamities than sorrow and defeat. One thousand nine hundred years ago Jesus warned us against success. It blinds us and it holds much from us. In the day of our own sufficiency it is hard to see and plan for Christ. Is it not impossible?

Such, then, is the view of death that was taken by the disciples of Jesus and the apostles of the early Christian church. And I think it is abundantly clear that most of us are far away from such a view. Death is to us the last calamity. We meet it with fear and uncertainty.

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