

The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

## **The Crown of Asphodels**

**written down by H.B.**

Theosophical Publishing Society -London and Benares - 1904

It was said unto me:

"Write this, that those who look for the Dawning of the Soul may read and understand."

The Crown of Asphodels is formed of five blooms	
First Bloom:	The dawn of life
Second Bloom:	The awakening of the heart
Third Bloom:	The opening of the sense of sympathy which makes the soul, so far solitary and possessive, a part of the whole
Fourth Bloom:	The unfolding of the spirit into the ethereal spaces
Fifth Bloom:	The final flower is the divine part; when that blooms they form the crown of man

- I -

## THE FIRST BLOOM

### The dawn of life

The whole nature of man lies like a landscape, grey and colourless and silent, until the little chill wind arises which is the herald of the dawn; under that little breeze, springing up in the darkness, the soul of the man stirs in its sleep, as the trees and the flowers and the grass blades stir and shiver in the dawn breath.

The stir and the shiver in the soul of the man are the first feelings of vague discontent with his life; of disillusion and disappointment; of undefined fear of the future, when there comes a momentary realisation that after life follows death. These feelings come to everyone sooner or later: they may come in the form of a fulfilled desire, which, being fulfilled, does not reach unto its true ideal; in the form of a love, ardently desired, that proves unsatisfying when it is obtained; or they may come in the sudden realisation that youth is passing, that at the end of the longest road of life the gate of death stands open into the unknown Beyond. But however it comes, it is the chill precursor of the dawn.

It does not last; it passes in a breath, and as it passes there comes the wonderful pale lightening over all the land before the first sunrays are visible.

The whole aspect of the landscape changes; the peaceful, slumbering silence passes into a watchful unrest; the shadows deepen and darken; what light there is, is ash-grey and cold and dreary. The warm security, the pleasant hush of the darkness are gone; the light and warmth and colour of the sun will come; but in that short moment before the dawn there is emptiness and nothingness, an absence of any hope or promises. And so it is in the soul of man before the dawn of the soul life has flooded it with the eternal sunshine. The easy, pleasant slumber in the satisfaction of the material life has passed into an uneasy expectation, a fearful questioning, a shrinking from the void that slumber had filled.

And then, in a moment, the first sunrays dart from the edge of the horizon - the dawn is here. The awakened soul waits in a trance of expectation till the full flood of light has flowed all over it, making a new heaven and a new earth. All the shadows, all the grey dreariness have fled away from the sun-bathed world. All the beauty and the colour and the brightness undreamed of in the slumbering darkness stand revealed in that pure light of the dawn.

The dawn of the soul life comes not in the same way to every soul, or at the same time. To many it comes only in the moment of passing from this life to the other. To a few it comes while they are still alive upon this earth. For some that moment before the dawn, that moment of chill emptiness, lasts from the awakening until the end of this life. For those to whom the dawn arises while they are still on earth, it is day for ever after. Clouds may come up hiding the sun, rain may darken the heavens, but still it is day. An he who has seen the dawn knows that surely behind the clouds, above the rain, the sun is still shining.

To all of you who shiver still in the little cold wind before the dawn, I say: take heart, the shadows will

## The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

pass, the emptiness will be filled; be sure of that. As certainly as the sun rises upon the earth, so certainly shall the dawn of the soul life glorify every soul of man in the time that is appointed for it.

There is here a great miracle, but it is simple and natural, as are all the great miracles of nature: the daily rising of the sun upon the earth; the germinating of innumerable seeds whose life-principle is hidden from us; the eternal miracles of birth and death so simple, so natural in their orderly procession, that man ceases to notice or wonder at them.

The dawn of the soul life is as these, following in the natural order of things without shock or suddenness, coming as the inevitable fulfilment of all that has preceded it.

Watch for the dawn with open windows, and be assured that it will come. It is only to those who sleep in dark places, heavily curtained with desires and passions and contentments of the material life, that the divine light cannot penetrate; and to those living in dark cellars, who make to themselves lights of their own artificial and selfish imaginings, and so forget to look for the glory of the dawn and miss the splendour of the sunrise.

With the dawn of life in the soul comes also the dawn of knowledge, even as with the rising of the material sun comes heat as well as light, both of which are needed for the growth of all things that flourish upon the earth.

The dawn of knowledge is very near at hand, a brighter dawn than there has been for many centuries; but if all the dwellers of the earth will hide themselves in dark places, if, shivering in the first cold breath that heralds the dawn, they will return to sleep in the warmth of their illusions, then the precious moment will be lost, and must be waited for again through many generations.

- II -

## THE SECOND BLOOM

### The awakening of the heart

The heart can only be awakened by a great love. No passing fancy, no wandering passion wakes the sleeping heart of man, sleeping since its last incarnation. Only the hand of love laid upon it in supremest benediction can rouse it from this slumber. The awakening may be sudden and vivid, startling it into full consciousness in one breath or it may be slow and gradual, only half-conscious in its beginnings. But when once it has awakened and risen up in full consciousness, it becomes aware of all the other hearts that are incarnated round it, whether they be sleeping or waking; and, more or less clearly according to the nature of the man, it understands them.

All cruelty and harshness that can hurt other hearts is seen and understood by the heart awakened looking on. None of the joyous or laughing or indifferent masks behind which wounded hearts would hide their pain can deceive the clear eyes looking on in eternal sympathy and understanding.

Until the heart is awakened the man is as unconscious of all the other hearts around him as a blind man walking in an unknown path is unaware of the flowers growing round about him, and as unheedingly does he trample them down and brush them aside.

The sleeping heart is conscious only of itself in all the world. It is able to feel, but only for itself; its own joys and sorrows move it, but in a blind dumb fashion without understanding. The joys and the sorrows of others cannot touch it, because it is unaware of their existence.

Out of the knowledge and insight of the awakened heart grows a great power of forgiveness. No error, no misconception, no crime of those whose hearts are still sleeping is too great to be forgiven by him who is able to see that they are sleeping. No wrong committed by others whose hearts are awakened can be harshly judged by the man who is able to understand the secret springs from which action flows.

Every man forgives himself for his own transgressions and his own mistakes, finding reasons and excuses for his own actions, however much they may seem worthy of condemnation in the eyes of the rest of the world. And, even as he forgives himself, so fully does the man of the awakened heart forgive his brothers, for he has realized that all hearts are, in truth, one; that the great heart of the world is one; and that all the hearts of men that seem to be distinct and individual are but reflections of the great heart, images reflected separately in the separate little pools of each man's individuality. The seeming difference between these is but the wavering and flickering of this image reflected in pools that are rippled and ruffled by the winds of the world, or shadowed over by passing clouds, or broken up by falling raindrops; or, it may be, pools so shallow that every little stone and shell of the petty cares and desires of life show through the image, breaking and deforming its perfection. Only here and there is there a pool deep enough and still enough to reflect truly the perfect image; as a smooth, still tarn, hidden away among the hills, reflects unbroken the image of the sun shining down upon it.

## The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

There is only sun, but every lake and river, every sea and every little pool upon the shore, every wave and every ripple, carries its innumerable reflections.

As un-forgivingness and vindictiveness becomes impossible to the awakened heart, so also do "envy, hatred, malice, and all un-charitableness". Shall a man's right hand envy his left hand because it wears a costly ring? Shall one member of his body hate another member? Shall one member enjoy ease and comfort while another is suffering pain? All these things are impossible to the physical man, and they become equally impossible to the spiritual man when once his awakened heart has understood that all humanity is one; that the whole must suffer for any sin, and with any pain of every part; that the whole must rejoice with whatsoever joy or honour comes to any part of it.

Kindness, charity, and pity are the inevitable outcome of the awakening. And with it comes also what indeed seems a paradox, a complete indifference to the blame or praise of men, to their ingratitude and their misunderstanding.

The awakening of the heart, however gradual it may be, comes always as surprise and a revelation to man. And when it does come, it shows that the time of forced reincarnation on this plane is very near its end, and the time approaching when the man, having learnt many things and having reached unto the Temple at the end of the Path, is able to decide for himself when and where he will incarnate, and under what circumstances his return to this plane will most benefit all those other men of his race who are a part of himself.

Sorrow and loneliness and separation come no more into the life of the man whose heart is awakened. All the joy, the companionship, the brotherhood of life are his since he has joined himself to the whole and ceased to be a separate part.

Though the awakening of the heart comes only by a supreme love, love does not always bring the awakening. There are many forms of love in the world that are none the less love because they differ from each other both in nature, in amount, and in constancy. And wherever love is found it is always doing its work of breaking down the barriers of separate personality; it is always teaching its own lesson, that no man is sufficient unto himself. There are forms of love that are selfish, jealous, and exacting, that are incapable of awakening the heart to the larger community of brotherhood, and yet they are not wasted; they teach the selfish soul to admit at least one other within the narrow limit of its personality, and where one has passed the barrier there is an entrance always open that will some day widen and widen until the whole barrier is pushed aside. There are some souls who, having once opened their doors to one love, when that love is lost, would fain close the door for ever after, but they cannot. It may be no other personal human love will pass through it in that incarnation, but crowds of tiny sympathies and gentle thoughts, pities for others and comprehension of them, will slip in through the door which once was opened by a human hand, and which thenceforth can never be closed again.

There are many things on the earth that are little understood of the men who dwell thereon, but there is none so little understood as Love, and the mission of Love.

## The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

When Love comes and knocks at the closed door behind which the separate soul bars itself, he comes not to enter in and dwell there, imprisoned in the gloom and the narrowness - comes to lead the dweller forth, out into the open earth, under the open sky. But the dweller, opening the door and seeing the fair beauty of him who knocked, would have him enter and would close the door behind him, that he may not depart again; and when Love would take him by the hand and lead him away, he will not come - he clings to Love, praying him to stay; and because he will not come, Love must go forth from him alone, leaving him desolate.

Believe and understand this, O disciple. Love is not a companion come to dwell with thee in thy narrow house of personal separateness; he is a messenger come to lead thee from that narrow prison out into the wide, free places of the earth, and if thou wilt not be led by him, then will he go on and leave thee, as a messenger who may not tarry.

Here and there in this world are born children who from their very babyhood are unselfish and unable to realize their own claims and rights. These are they in whom the heart has been awakened. Whatever trials of further initiation they may go through in this incarnation, they are never lonely or unhappy, for they are never without love, not always love received it may be, but always love given.

The great object of the earth life is the awakening of the heart. Until this happens no further step can be taken. With the heart un-awakened men stumble on the rocky Path, like blind men on a mountain-side who grope about, now in one direction, now in another, but get no nearer to the summit up to which the Path leads.

Through incarnation after incarnation the lessons learnt from pain or sorrow or disappointment are forgotten; experiences that should serve as guides are wasted; the progress made in one life is not continued in the next, for all progress, all knowledge, is but superficial and for the moment, until the heart is able to take part in it.

The heart alone remembers and stores up its knowledge; the awakened heart alone can look back along its past incarnations and understand their teaching. While the heart sleeps the man moves in his life like a phantom, a shadow without consciousness of what he does, as well as without consciousness of the other phantoms round about him. Nothing that he learns or achieves becomes a part of himself to be carried by him through future lives, because only through the awakened heart can the living man communicate with that divine part of himself which goes on through all the successive incarnations.

The heart that sleeps communicates nothing of the lessons learnt or the experience gained in a life to that divine part which is the man himself, so that when the physical man dies his learning, his experience, and his acquired wisdom die with him, and for his true self the incarnation has been wasted, for nothing remains to carry on into the future. It is for this reason that men come back again and again to the earth on the same level, and begin again the same laborious struggle against ignorance and illusions, and fall again into the same mistakes and the same disappointments, having learnt nothing in the past because nothing has been transmitted for remembrance.

## The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

There are many who go about amongst you on the earth whose hearts are awakened, but no one recognizes them. They are little thought of by men, because they think little of themselves; the world passes them by, and when it speaks of one of them it is only to say: "There goes one who is mad, or a fanatic." And no one listens to him or cares to learn what is the difference between him and other men. Those who are in sorrow and those who suffer know him; he seems sometimes to be their prey, but he is not; he knows them, he sees into their hearts and understands.

In every rank and calling such men are to be found, and their atmosphere makes life possible on this stifling earth, where the dust of strife and conflict rises ever thick and choking round its dwellers.

### THE THIRD BLOOM

#### **The opening of the sense of sympathy which makes the soul, so far solitary and possessive, a part of the whole.**

As the opening of the bud that has lain folded within its calyx, so is the opening of the sense of sympathy in the soul. When the flower is open it looks up straight at the sun, at the heavens above it and the earth around it, and knows itself a part of the whole; no longer jealously hidden and folded away as a thing solitary and complete in itself; but bathed in the light that is the life of the world, that is shared by all, and animating all things that live, makes of them all one great kinship. The soul has always lived in that life of the world, but only when the bud is opened does it know that all other created things, in the world about it, dwell also in that light and take their life from it.

Nothing lives in separation and solitude outside that light, although the folded bud within its unopened sheath may seem to itself to be living in a world apart, where it is alone. The solitariness of the soul is as if one with his eyes bandaged should come into the midst of a great silent company, and seeing none of them should fancy himself alone without companions, when it is only his own want of vision that creates that illusion of separateness and solitude. When the bandage is removed, then he is aware of those who surround him.

So it is with the man when the bandage of self-absorption is removed from the eyes of his soul and he can use that sense of sight which we call sympathy. Looking round him he sees the souls of other men; he sees whether they are joyful or sad, and he becomes aware of their needs and their desires. It is plain to him also which of them have their own eyes bandaged, and which of them can look back openly, returning his glance. When those whose eyes are bandaged strike him or trample upon him, as is sometimes their way, he forgives them without anger, knowing that they have not even seen him whom they have hurt. And when those souls with the eyes uncovered hold out their hands to him in fellowship, he can see them and take them and grasp them in response.

There are some awakenings of the soul that come to a man suddenly, but this awakening of the sense of sympathy, of the sense of sight, comes more often by slow degrees. A little corner of the bandage is lifted, and he sees, it may be, some unhappy one crouched at his feet wounded and bleeding, and he says to himself: "I am then not alone here". Some there are who, seeing this, pull down the bandage again over their eyes, desiring not to see; but he who tries to lift the bandage further, that he may see better to keep that wounded one at his feet, will become aware of some of the other souls in the great crowd which surrounds him. At first it will be only the few who are nearest to him, but in time his sight will be clear enough for him to see and understand every soul that approaches him.

The full development of the sense of sympathy, of the sight of the soul, is not reached in one incarnation; it grows and increases in every succeeding life. There are souls born into the world with a wonderful clear insight into the hearts of others even from their childhood, and these are never ready to condemn any wrongdoer, never swift to return enmity for enmity, injury for injury. They are ready to forgive and to find excuses for any wrongs that are inflicted on them. They are powerful to draw to themselves the



## The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

confidence of other souls; they are skilled to touch in callous souls the one spot that is still soft and human, to draw out of the hardened hearts all there is of goodness and kindness hidden within them.

They have begun to learn the great lesson that no human soul has an independent separate existence, but that all are parts of one great whole. With the growth of sympathy the lesson becomes clearer and clearer, when it is thoroughly grasped; when, after being felt, it is thoroughly comprehended, then the third bloom of the crown of asphodels has opened, the sheath has fallen from the heart of the flower, and left it open to the sun.

- IV -

**THE FOURTH BLOOM**

**The unfolding of the spirit into the ethereal spaces.**

GROWTH is, in its very nature, a thing imperceptible. Watch a bud that is unfolding; while you watch it you see no change. If you stood all day before it you could not say: "At such and such a moment the change came, the bud unfolded." You have seen no change take place while you watched, and yet the bud that was green at sunrise is streaked with red at noon and open at sunset.

The child that is born to you, you watch day by day. Every day, perhaps nearly every hour, you see it; from one day to another you note no growth, no change, and yet, steadily, the baby grows into the boy, the boy develops into the man, and you who have watched day by day have not been able to see the growth.

Such a growth as this, imperceptible but sure, is the unfolding of the spirit into the ethereal spaces. It is not a thing that comes suddenly; it is not at the moment of death that the spirit springs into the ethereal spaces, as some have thought and taught. The spirit has been long unfolding into the ethereal spaces, and when it is fully unfolded the sheath drops from it faded and done with, the material body falls from it, leaving it fully open in the sunshine towards which it has been growing, imperceptibly to itself and to all around it, for many days.

This unfolding is a mystery not easily understood even by the disciples, but some of the signs of it are these: when you begin to crave for discipleship, when your thoughts turn to the things of the spirit and are less drawn and satisfied by those things which belong to the material world, then is the unfolding beginning. When you begin to be aware that there are other people in the world besides yourself, whose joy you may strengthen or whose sorrow you may comfort, when the happiness of another seems to you of greater importance than your own, when you can willingly give love unrequited - when all these things happen to you in greater or less measure, then you may know that your spirit is beginning to unfold into the ethereal spaces.

There will come to you in short glimpses the perception of a wonderful gladness which no material circumstances seem to warrant; now and again you will have moments of exquisite peace which will help you to realize what these ethereal spaces are like into which your spirit is unfolding, and in which, unhampered by the body, it shall presently dwell entirely. By those short moments of perfect joy and peace, gladness and holiness, you shall know that your spirit has begun to unfold into the ethereal spaces.

These words are written for the disciple only. The road for every one, it is true, is the same, but those who sit down by the wayside, who linger to weave themselves chaplets of the flowers of pleasure that grow along the road, cannot expect to win to the gates with those who press steadily forward.

There is no question of worthiness or unworthiness, of rewards or penalties in this matter; it is the simple

## The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

law of cause and effect. There is a goal to be reached, but no one is driven along the road to it; those who hurry over the distance arrives there first, those who linger by the way arrive later, those who do not travel the road at all never arrive. In things material it is accepted as a simple law of cause and effect that if you do not attempt to go to a place, you never reach that place, unless indeed you are taken there by force; but in things of the spirit there is no taking by force. Each soul chooses and decides its own path; goes forward, falls back, or remains stationary as it will, and for as long as it will; but it is entirely by its own action, and only by its own action, that it can reach any goal.

It is by its own growth from within that the spirit unfolds into the ethereal spaces. If the spirit does not unfold, what happens? Nothing happens. It remains as it is. The bud does not unfold, but the summer does not stand still for that. By and by it is winter (the end of this *kalpa*); the closed bud cannot open then when the time of flowers is over - it remains still closed, it has done nothing to fulfil its own life, and it is nothing. In the winter the sap withdraws from the branches into the root, which is the heart of things; when the spring comes it rises again through all the branches, forming new buds of leaf and flower, but it does not flow into the buds of last year. Watch the rose in your garden, and see this and understand, and take the lesson to your heart.

Only by the similes of Nature can these mysteries be shadowed, and for him who cannot understand and interpret the ways of Nature there is no other way of penetrating the mysteries that belong to the world of the spirit, and to the ethereal spaces which are the natural sphere of the spirit.

The beginning of the spirit's unfolding into the ethereal spaces is not the moment of death; that moment is in reality its completion. As it unfolds it becomes gradually more and more detached from the material plane, until it lets go its last slight hold upon it, and that is the moment of death.

These words are for the disciple. There are no words by which this mystery can be so set forth that it shall be understood by those who are entirely ignorant of all occult teaching.

The Crown of Asphodels written down by H.B.

- V -

### **THE FIFTH BLOOM**

**The final flower is the divine part; when that blooms they form the crown of man.**

BUT the blooming is not here. No material body hampers the spirit that blooms out into the Divine. The crown of asphodels cannot be completed upon earth. No spirit, however often it has incarnated, wears the crown upon this planet. Therefore, O disciple, you must wait until the lesson of the incarnations is perfect before you can go into that garden where blooms the Divine flower, and with it complete your crown of man.