

Breaking the Crust and Throwing Out Shoots

29th Degree Essay

College of the Consistory

Submitted by:

David E. Amstutz, KCCH

Valley of Richmond

Orient of Virginia

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“Once upon a time, not your time or my time, but upon a time” (a partial line taken from *Song of the South*) ó there was no time; and this will again be the case when we are dead and our souls are gone. Thus, to be encased in time is a reference to being alive, to being held in time’s grasp.

We are held to a linear time that runs from yesterday, through today and into tomorrow. We believe, or at least state that time is infinite ó meaning it extends back forever in the direction of yesterday, and ahead forever in the direction of tomorrow. For an individual, his time began at conception, at his birth or at the moment of his earliest memory and runs (presumably) until his death. An individual exists within these bounds and is thus encased.

We easily imagine that time extends beyond these (our) limits. For example one might believe that time began with the so-called big bang, or at some very brief moment after the big-bang, which is estimated to have occurred about 13.5 billion (billion, as used to measure current government programs in dollars) years ago in the direction of yesterday. Some first century Jewish-Christians believed that time began with creation. And, they believed that creation had taken place only a few (about 12, as expressed in the *Book of Revelation*) thousand years in the direction of their yesterday.

Albert Pike’s reference to, “encasing ourselves in time” no doubt refers to a person focusing his full attention on the now, or present, of his life, and to do so throughout his life. Thus, one encased in time would spend little if any thought on his life after death. Perhaps he would give no thought at all to the hereafter.

The crust spoken of by Pike is a likely reference to the barrier imposed by an individual on himself, on his own thinking, about a hereafter. This crust was an intellectual inertia in that one cannot totally bar a thought from his mind ó at least not consciously. It is possible of course that Pike had a subconsciously imposed barrier in mind when he referred to the crust. However, his notion of breaking the crust implies a conscious act ó an act to overcome a self-imposed restriction such as a consciously structured barrier to consider something like the hereafter; which itself has no immediate and pressing need for mental attention, in most cases.

The courts in our country indicate at least implicitly that an individual may be considerate of a hereafter when making a so-called death bed confession. Either that or the assumption that the confession is valid stems from the court’s determination that the dying care not of the consequences of what may seem to be one’s final thoughts.

By throwing off the crust one then would be intellectually free to consider the possibilities of an existence after death, and to imagine as he will what the hereafter may be like. Part of one’s considerations of the hereafter would seemingly include thoughts

of preparation ó what should one do to fully prepare for a hereafter? The first question developed in such a mental process might concern the existence of qualifications. Are there any qualifications at all? Specifically, need I do anything now to prepare myself for the hereafter? Is the hereafter a condition that is denied to those who are unprepared?

And so we come to the, "throwing out shoots" By this Pike must be thinking of one's preparations. Namely, the thoughts and actions one must undertake to ensure a proper passage to the hereafter. One must wonder if there are allowances for improper (less than fully regular) passage. Are there different hereafters? Is there a part way there?

The phrase, "throwing out shoots" is taken as used by an agriculturist. Some plants and trees (e.g. roses, grapes and fruit trees) grow shoots which may need pruning. Thus the throwing out means casting of ideas and actions, as required by the ideas, for preparing for passage to the hereafter. This is a strange concept in at least one way, for it suggests a guidance to try everything ó the reward will make the investment of time and effort well worthwhile. This shooting-in-the-dark approach reminds me of the ancient Hebrew definition of the word star: to be strewn, thrown about or scattered. The alternative idea of the ancients was that the stars had in fact been created, both dim and bright, and placed in a definite and well considered fashion.

Perhaps Pike had in mind that one should throw out shoots (castings) but then prune those castings himself to create what he believed to be a correct and complete pattern of behavior to ascend to a hereafter. To do such a thing would require a healthy dose of both faith and reason. A balance of faith and reason would provide the necessary guidance for using the pruning knife (hook, shears or saw). We are well aware of the importance Albert Pike placed on the balance of faith and reason.

Albert Pike's intent for the expression may have been only a reflection of his personal beliefs. Being a Christian, Pike believed that a pleasant life in the hereafter was reserved only for those who confessed belief in Jesus Christ; that through this belief alone was admission to be gained. "Throwing out of shoots" must have been a reference to the acts taken by one to achieve, "new life." The only act required from a Christian being the mentioned confession of belief. Casting of shoots would then be a repetition of the confession and a continuous living of a proper Christian life style.

Obviously the choice of words could imply a totally different circumstance. Namely, that there might be a variety of ways and means to gain passage to a hereafter, and one should blanket the situation with as many shoots as he is able. This interpretation seems totally inconsistent with Albert Pike's thinking, as displayed throughout his writings. (The new Miss USA's statement of being both Catholic and Muslim exemplifies the notion nicely.)

The full meaning of the expression can only be determined by examining the preliminary phrase, "We ought to love life." Most would agree with this admonition and would opt for the circumstances that would prolong their exposure to life. However, in theory and in imagination, there might be circumstances when one would chose to abandon his life, as a price worth paying for some preferred outcome. In anticipation that such a

circumstance might arise, one should not find himself so holding to life as to be unable to give it up. Albert Pike may have been encouraging others to be willing to pay the price by offering them the idea of a hereafter ó a sharing of his own faith.

Concerning what Pike actually intended that we conclude from his breaking the crust of time and throwing out shoots statement, we must recall his further statement that: "our spiritual life decays in the confinement and darkness of the world; and that it may gain new vigor, our thoughts must now and then be unfurled, and held high, and shaken in the air of heaven." This remark is clearly intended to mean that we should reveal and shout aloud our spiritual thoughts lest they decay from confinement. Therefore we are left to conclude that Albert Pike is shouting aloud his Christian faith concerning an after life (a hereafter) to be spent in heaven.

This freedom taken by our author, though not found throughout *Morals and Dogma* has shown through in his writings. After all, what better place is there to make this point than in his 29th Degree, Grand Scottish Knight of St. Andrew? A Degree lecture where we find, "Christian knights winning Jerusalem from the infidels and the bulwark of Christendom against the Saracenic (Moslem) legions that swarmed after the green banner of the Prophet Mohammed."

Albert Pike also shares his great concern for the viability of religion in human existence in his 29th Degree lecture. He specifically identifies science as struggling to "remove God's Providence to a distance from us." Pike admits that all religions deem undeniably "that God rules directly in all the affairs and changes of material things."

The entire Degree is focused on the role of religion in human affairs and is highlighted throughout by the teachings that all have come to understand to be Christian. And thus we come to understand what Pike has intended for us when we study his breaking of the crust of time and throwing out of shoots.

References:

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