

# **THE GATE OF DEATH: A DIARY**

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The gate of death: a diary by Arthur Christopher Benson

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**ARTHUR CHRISTOPHER BENSON**

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DEATH: A DIARY**



# The Gate of Death

A Diary

*"But the children began to be sorely weary; and they cried out unto Him that loveth Pilgrims, to make the way more comfortable."—PILGRIM'S PROGRESS, Part II.*



G. P. Putnam's Sons  
New York and London  
The Knickerbocker Press  
1906

# GENERAL

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## INTRODUCTION

PERHAPS some of those into whose hands this book may fall will be inclined to find fault with it for not being what it does not lay claim to be. It deals with the saddest, darkest, most solemn, most inevitable, most tremendous fact in the world—death ; the one event of awful significance for every one, small or great, noble or base, wise or dull, that is born into this strange world. It is not a complete, nor a comprehensive, nor a philosophical treatment of the subject ; it is nothing but the record of the sincere and faltering thoughts of one who was suddenly and unexpectedly confronted with death, and who, in the midst of a very ordinary and commonplace life, with no deep reserves of wisdom, faith, or tenderness, had just to interpret it as he best could. There are many people who have no opportunity of looking back upon such experiences at all, whom death

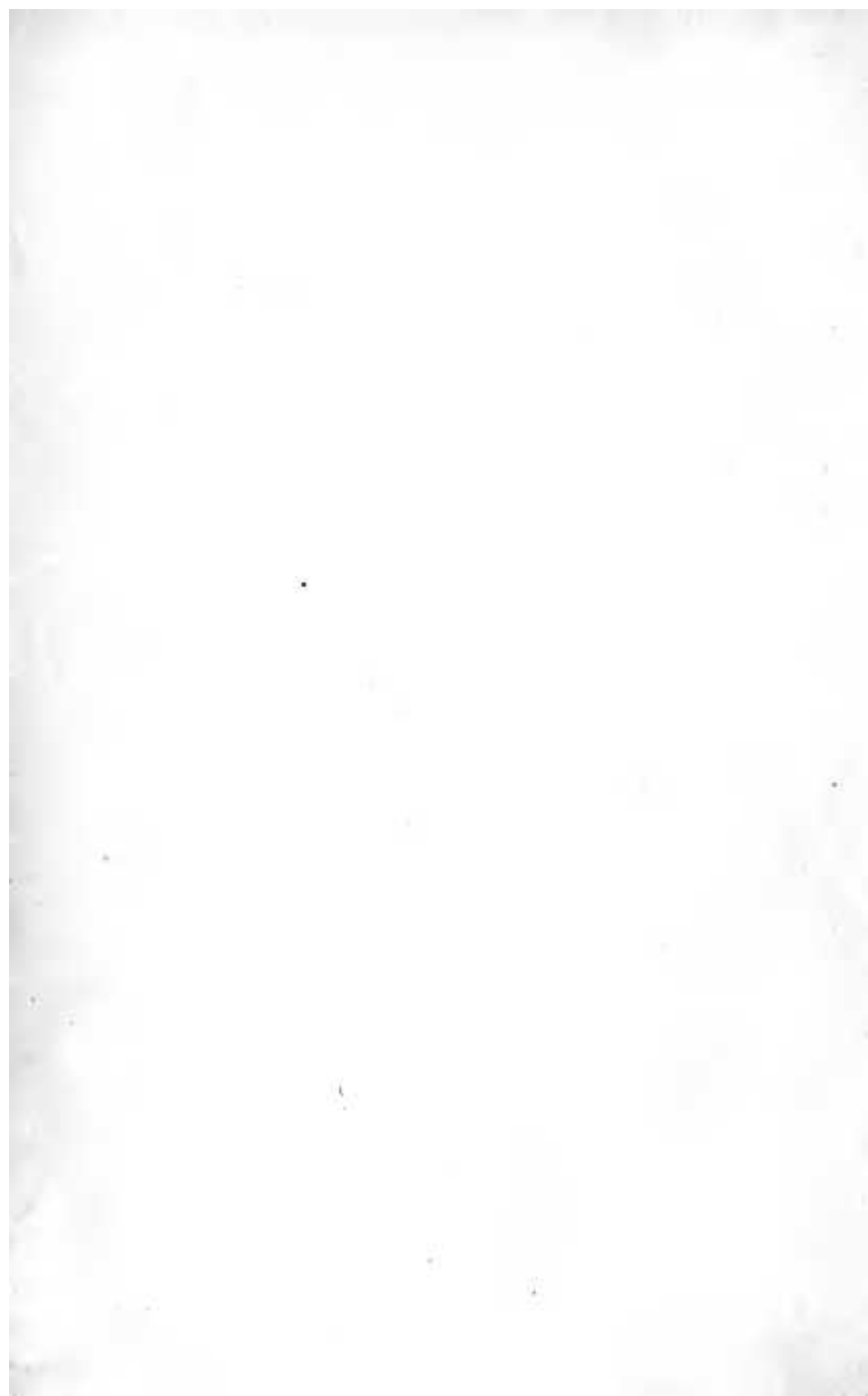
has beckoned away before they have had the time to wonder what it meant ; and there are others upon whom it has cast such a shadow, that they have not the heart to speak of it ; and there are others who perhaps would speak of it if they could, but who have had no practice in expressing their thoughts in writing. I can only say that it has seemed to me to be of the nature of a duty to speak as plainly and as frankly as possible of my great experience: and these pages are meant not for the inquisitive or the speculative, not for the light-hearted or the indifferent, but for all those who feel the shadow of the supreme event of life cast backwards over their lives, and who are conscious that day by day they are moving, reluctantly perhaps and heavily, but whether they will or no, to meet what no one can avoid and what all must dread—that last adventure that shall divide us from all the familiar things that we hold so dear, from the love and light that we know, even, it may be, from ourselves.

In these latter days the investigations of science have told us much more of what has been and



what is than our fathers knew; but science tells us nothing of what we shall be, and thus, by reason of its explorations into what can be known, has even heightened the gloom and the terror of the unknown and the unexplored. And thus it seems to us, at this point of time, as though the more we know of God and the designs of God, the less we understand Him; some day indeed it may be that our children, in the light of a fuller knowledge, may look back and wonder how we can have borne to live thus, with our uncertain knowledge, our diminished faith; but I would rather believe that God proportions our faith and our courage to our need and to our pain. Such value as these pages may possess will be due to the fact that the writer has tried, as simply and sincerely as he can, to look his experiences steadily in the face, not to disguise his bewilderment, his suffering, and his fear; and, at the same time, not to attempt to explain away, in a faithless and despondent spirit, the hopes, the instincts, the consolations, that went with him to the brink of the dark stream.

*Jan. 16, 1906.*



# The Gate of Death

## A DIARY

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*June 16.*

THE great doctor has just left me, and the blessed words are still echoing in my ears : " I see no reason whatever why you should not, with a little care, entirely recover your normal health." He tells me that I am perfectly sound, and that my constitution is evidently a very strong one. He adds with a smile that I seem able to take a good deal of knocking about, without being materially the worse for it. I wish I could make a hymn out of my gratitude and thankfulness, could say, in a few sweet, simple words, a tenth of what I feel ; as it is, my silent joy goes up to God, like a fragrant incense, from the altar of my heart . . . the God of my joy and gladness. . . . I seem to float to-day upon a sea of