

## Life after Death; and Immortality.

THE two things are not quite the same. It is, of course, impossible to believe in immortality and not in life after death, but it is possible to believe in life after death and not in immortality. The various forms of the doctrine of conditional immortality posit this. They hold that there is a life beyond, but it is not eternal in duration for all. In due course the soul that sinneth, and persisteth therein, shall die.

The present age has been very aptly described as that of the question mark. Its note is that of interrogation. It regards nothing as outside the range of inquiry. It upholds the right of criticism and investigation. Often it pushes this mood and temper to extremes, and one sometimes feels that the questioning is superficial rather than deep. Nevertheless, it is there, and has to be met. Positions old and new have to defend themselves. Mere assertion does not suffice. The grounds of belief have to be stated as clearly as possible, and be shown that they are not unreasonable even though they may transcend reason. How stands the belief in life after death in this questioning age? What can be said on its behalf? If, in the final result, we are not able to give proof of a future life to satisfy all minds, we shall have accomplished something if we can come to the conclusion and conviction for ourselves that death is not the end of our personality.

To my mind one of the most interesting and important things to ascertain, not only in regard to this but other beliefs also, is, What does the ordinary man think? What is his outlook? So far as one can discover, the average man does believe in a hereafter; at least, he is not prepared to deny; and, moreover, he holds fairly generally that the hereafter is affected by the kind of life lived now. The belief may not be held very intensely, nor may it often occupy the thought, but it is there. His answer to the old question, "If a man die, shall he live?" is, on the whole, in the affirmative, though the affirmation is in many cases made rather faintly. When death comes and robs him of one that is very dear, he clings to the belief for comfort and cherishes it in hope. The problem of a life beyond then becomes to him a personal one, for, as Mark Rutherford says, "Whenever anyone we love dies, we discover that although death is commonplace, it is terribly original." To every minister there is given more than

one opportunity of seeing the ordinary man's view of death, and by the ordinary man we mean, for the moment, the man who makes no religious profession and very rarely is to be found in our churches. The majority do not deny a life beyond, or at least the possibility of it. It is accepted as a kind of traditional belief not often thought upon. It may not in many cases represent more than this, that man is something more than flesh and blood. He has a spirit which lives on. It is what we should rather expect. Where the conception of God is very nebulous and the experience of fellowship very feeble, the thought of an after-life is not likely to be much considered. We all need to clarify our own ideas if they are to be of any real value. Our beliefs may be quite as vague as those of the man in the street.

The belief in human immortality has been challenged and defended in modern times from many points of view, and much literature has appeared upon the subject. We will concern ourselves in this paper with some of the lines of defence. The appeal has been made to faith and revelation, to science and philosophy, to spiritualism and the evidences of survival. One can but note some of these lines of defence and emphasise that which seems to have the greatest value. In attempting to write anything on such an admittedly difficult subject one is bound to be influenced by one's own prejudices and experience. If we have given any serious consideration to the problem at all we come to it with our own predispositions.

It is always difficult to classify, for the lines of defence so converge. The scientist may set out to write purely from the standpoint of science, but introduces a good deal which really belongs to the realm of philosophy or faith. Nevertheless, certain classifications can be made.

From the standpoint of science, particularly that of organic evolution, Dr. Simpson has given us a fascinating treatment of the subject in his *Man and the Attainment of Immortality*. The thesis is that evolution is a fact. That in the case of man it has been a process of winning freedom and individuality; that in him we have something which has survival value, and when that which has survival-value appears it is perpetuated, it endures. Human personality is the product of a long and costly struggle, in which new qualities and values appear. It comes to have that which cannot be equated with the purely physical, and which detaches itself more and more from that order. In short, man gains for himself a soul, a capacity for God, powers and potencies which lift him far above the rest of creation. Man is the product of evolution—anything but mechanically conceived—which has brought him to where he is. Evolution instead of

overthrowing teleology sets it on its feet again in a nobler and vaster way. Its purpose is seen in the appearance of man, and in him it is interpreted. He is destined for eternal life, and achieves it in fellowship with God. "Eternal life is a matter of union with, of keeping hold of, God. The reward of the good life simply is its persistence, because it is in relationship with God" (p. 286). Immortality, therefore, is something man attains to. He wins it and keeps it by his right and true relationship to life. He may fail to attain.

Now the theory of evolution meets with wide, if not almost universal, acceptance to-day. If it be true, and the contention stands, that human personality is the product of a long and costly struggle in which it becomes richer in content and value as the ages pass, then one does feel that there is much to say for the possibility of the triumph of personality over death. Shall that which has cost so much be finally thrown away? On this basis does not science need to make an act of faith in the interests of the rationality of the process it describes? Dr. Simpson makes that act of faith. Christianity comes in to substantiate it. Dr. Simpson says as much as can be said, perhaps, from the standpoint of organic evolution. To some his line of reasoning will seem very convincing.

Spiritualism seeks to go beyond faith and establish real proof of human survival. In spite of the evidence given and the great names which can be quoted as supporters of spiritualism, one does not feel that the phenomena are incapable of other explanation. If telepathy be admitted, for instance, very much could be accounted for by it. We are but at the beginning of the exploration of the mystery of personality and its powers. We need not introduce the Devil to account for the phenomena of spiritualism, as some do. We can straightway admit the integrity and good faith of many engaged in psychical research. But before spiritualism can meet with wide acceptance its evidence and communications will need to be far more impressive than at present, and it will have to rid itself of a certain stigma which it has certainly gained through the ages. Having read a good deal of the evidence, one remains unconvinced still of definite communication with those in the Unseen, and the assurance of immortality seems to be of greater moral and spiritual value when held on a basis of a faith sure of its grounds. There are spiritualists and spiritualists, as indeed there are Christians and Christians, and therefore one should speak with a certain hesitancy. But none can deny that there have been very real reasons for the attitude of the Church generally to spiritualism. It has had, and still has, its moral dangers, and has not yet given anything of greater worth and ministry than that which the

New Testament has taught. The fact is that the majority of those who feel they can accept the Resurrection do not seem to need the evidence of spiritualism. They believe on other grounds, and the séance does not appeal. In many instances also the utterance of mediums seems very like the projection or copy of earthly ideas. It may appear to some unreasonable, but before accepting the spiritualist's explanation of the evidence he gives one wants to feel convinced that it is not capable of being otherwise explained. As has been said already, if telepathy be admitted, there is much phenomena which can be accounted for thereby. Dr. Hadfield, in his essay on "The Mind and the Brain," gives one striking example of this. "In a series of séances arranged by the Society for Psychical Research, with Mrs. Piper as medium, the investigators sought to obtain an account of a certain conversation which took place between Mrs. Sidgwick and Mr. F. W. H. Myers, some time before his death. This conversation was known to none except to the two participants. In her trance Mrs. Piper claimed to have access to 'Myers,' and an attempt was made to induce the spirit of 'Myers' to reproduce the conversation through Mrs. Piper. As long as Mrs. Sidgwick was absent and did not come into contact with Mrs. Piper, the medium failed to reproduce the conversation. When, however, Mrs. Sidgwick came into contact with Mrs. Piper, there was a remarkable, though not perfectly accurate, account given of the conversation. That is to say, it was the proximity of Mrs. Sidgwick, *who knew the conversation*, that made the difference. Mrs. Sidgwick, therefore, concludes, and rightly so in my opinion, that the medium became possessed of the information, not from the spirit of 'Myers,' but by mental transference from Mrs. Sidgwick herself. In other words, though it did not prove communication with the spirit world, it did afford important evidence of telepathy" (p. 55, *Immortality*, by Dr. Streeter and others). Other very striking examples are also given in the same essay which seem to point to the reality of telepathy and of the tendency of the mind to function independently of the brain. The conclusion of Dr. Hadfield is that, whilst there is not proof that the mind will survive the body, it is not an unreasonable hypothesis, and that there are signs which point that way. Professor William James also, in his Ingersoll Lecture on Immortality, argues on the line that the mind may still function when the body has fallen into decay. That the machinery has run down does not carry with it necessarily the fact that the operative is no more.

If science cannot deny the possibility of immortality, neither can it conclusively prove it. Strictly speaking, the subject is out of its domain, yet it can give us such facts of man's past, and tell of

what he is now, in such a way that we feel he should be conqueror over death. We gladly accept any contribution science can give to the body of knowledge and use it in our interpretation of life as a whole. It may yet furnish us with that which is of the utmost value and of vital importance to the subject. Philosophy and metaphysics are continually showing their indebtedness to scientific gains. This must be so if we believe in the rationality and unity of things.

It would seem, however, that it is not so much to science and philosophy we should look for light on immortality as to religion and the affirmations of religious experience. It is along that line man has come to belief and assurance. He has gained a real conviction, "an earned belief."

Thou wilt not leave him in the dust :  
 Thou madest man, he knows not why ;  
 He thinks he was not made to die ;  
 And Thou hast made him : Thou art just.

Undoubtedly some have passed beyond the mood of these lines, and have risen to passionate belief and firm conviction. The words of Job have been taken and filled with an enriched meaning : "I know that my Redeemer liveth."

An interesting and impressive Pilgrim's Progress can be traced in two directions at least, that of the Greek and that of the Hebrew. In both cases we may start with fairly similar ideas of the Hereafter; the Greek Hades and the Hebrew Sheol. There is in man, soul, or spirit, as well as body, and at death the soul or spirit enters the world of shades, to live a dim, ghostly life. But in both cases we find men rising to the conception of something nobler, to belief in a future life which is more, not less, than life on earth. In the case of the Greek such belief was reached through the experience of fellowship afforded by the Mystery Cults and Religions. In that of the Hebrew it was gained through the fellowship of the soul with Yahweh and the increasing realisation of the implications of that fellowship. It is the latter progress we should consider, for it leads us on to the New Testament and the revelation of God in Christ.

The subject of the Hebrew mind in relation to the Hereafter has been dealt with by a number of writers and students of Old Testament thought, but one of the most valuable treatments is to be found in Dr. Charles' little book, *Religious Development between the Old and the New Testaments*.<sup>1</sup> Chapter four is given to a consideration of "The Rise and Development in Israel of the Doctrine of a Blessed Future Life." "This belief in Israel,"

<sup>1</sup> Home University Library, Williams & Norgate.

he says, "arose not in the abstract reasoning of the schools, but in the mortal strife of spiritual experience, and thus . . . is full of practical importance for all who are seeking to live the life, not of nature's ephemera, but of the children of God. For in this progress from the complete absence of such belief in Israel to a positive and spiritual faith in a blessed future life, all alike can read writ large in the page of history from 800 B.C. to A.D. 100 a transcript of their own spiritual struggles as they toil up the steep ascent that leads to the city of God. It is a national Pilgrim's Progress, which every child of man must repeat in his own spiritual experience" (pp. 96-97). In the early stages of the religion the eschatology of the individual was not the pressing problem. The idea of corporate personality predominated and the future of the tribe or nation was the main concern. There was first the concentration on the national future, especially in the strain and stress of such experiences as the exile. With the rise and development of the idea of the Messianic kingdom, and the thoughts of a restoration and a glorious future for the nation, we have the birth of the idea of the resurrection. "Not only should the surviving righteous participate in the Messianic kingdom, but the righteous dead of Israel should rise to share therein. Thus the righteous individual and the righteous nations should be blessed together."<sup>2</sup>

Thy dead men (Israel) shall arise,  
And the inhabitants of the dust shall awake and shout for joy.

—*Isa.* xxvi. 19.

The passage could be paralleled elsewhere. In Daniel xxii. 2ff, resurrection is bound up with the thought of the Messianic kingdom, but here some of the wicked also rise, and not to life but to judgment.

It is, however, chiefly along the lines of the rise of religious individualism we should trace the growth of the belief in immortality and a blessed future life. We may see this in such writings as Ezekiel, Job, Jeremiah, and certain of the Psalms. As corporate personality counted for less, though the idea is always there to some extent, and the sense of individual relationship to God became more realised, we get a greater concentration on the eschatology of the individual. For the soul that has known and rejoiced in personal fellowship with God on earth must there not be a continuation of that fellowship even beyond death? Hence the utterance of the psalmist's faith, "Thou wilt not leave my soul in Sheol; neither wilt thou suffer thine holy one to see corruption" (Ps. xvi. 10). That the hope of the Psalmist was not vain was shown in the resurrection of Jesus

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 113.

Christ, is the use Peter made of the passage at Pentecost. Legitimate as may be the Christian use of this passage, we must not forget its original meaning to the psalmist. There is in the Old Testament, in the later and higher stages of its thought, evidence of a growing belief that there will be for the soul which seeks fellowship with God, and rejoices in His ways, a real life beyond death; something better than the gloom of Sheol where the light of the divine favour does not shine.

Until comparatively recent times the general conception of the period between the Old and New Testaments was that it was a dead and barren time. It is now conclusively proved that this is not the case. We have the witness of such writings as Enoch, Testaments of the Twelve, Jubilees, the Book of Wisdom, the Psalms of Solomon, the Assumption of Moses, and many others. These show the ferment of thought and the development of ideas on the future of the nation, the Messianic kingdom, and the destined lot of the righteous and unrighteous. Many of these ideas were carried forward into the Christian era and help us to interpret some hitherto dark passages, such, for instance as we find in Jude, Second Peter, the Apocalypse, and even Paul. Space forbids more than this passing reference. The writings show that in the pre-Christian era many in Israel had come to believe very definitely that there was to be a blessed future life for the righteous, and retribution for the ungodly. The conception of the future life is the attainment of a resurrection, not immortality on the Greek line of thought.

What did Christianity add? Its contribution centres in the Person of Christ. The gospel of the early days was that of "Jesus and the Resurrection." It was the burden of the message of Paul at Athens and elsewhere. He who had been crucified was alive from the dead, and the apostles preached that belief with all the power of a personal conviction. The rise and progress of the Church becomes unintelligible apart from the resurrection, and all efforts to explain it away demand more faith than the acceptance of the fact. The disciples were sure Jesus had arisen from the dead and appeared to them. They never wavered in that belief, but held it in the face of all denial and incredulity. Without dealing with the evidence of the resurrection, which would demand a special paper, we assume here its truth and see what the apostles deduced therefrom. The chief thing was this, that because Jesus had arisen from the dead there was sure and certain victory over death for them, through their faith in Him which gave a like quality of life. "If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit that dwelleth in you"

(Rom. viii. 11). As death could not hold Christ in its power because His was an immortal life, neither could it annihilate those in whom dwelt the life derived from Christ. He that had the Son had life, eternal life.

This was the firm conviction of the Church, and a perfectly reasonable one. If men were really one with Christ, then death could not be the master of them any more than it was of Him. Because He lives we shall live also. The nature of that future life is developed by Paul in his doctrine of the resurrection body (1 Cor. xv.; 2 Cor. v.). As personality has that body which is suitable for terrestrial existence now, so it will have that which is suitable for the celestial. And after all these centuries since Paul many still feel that no better mode of considering the future has been given us than by the great apostle. In this life we build up in us, through the activity of the indwelling Spirit of God in Christ, the body that shall be. Then at death, when the earthly house of our tabernacle is dissolved, "we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. v. 1). The pre-Christian era, at its best, was one of hope. The Christian, through the resurrection, is one of assurance. Faith gives fellowship, and fellowship gives assurance—the sense of possession. If our estimate of the person of Christ be a right one, we ought not to doubt the reality of a future life, and one which is higher in value than this. It was certainly the outlook of Paul.

We therefore come to the conclusion that there is a life of immortality for the Christian; he reaches this conviction on the basis of his faith. What about the rest of men? In the main there are three views held: that of eternal punishment, that of universalism, and that of conditional immortality. Some measure of support can be found in Scripture for each of these points of view, and there are objections to all. There can be no doubt but that ancient dogmatism has given place to hesitancy regarding those who live and die out of any avowed faith in Christ or concern about the soul. Two things we would stress. The first is that men cannot come to the highest life save in Christ who has manifested it. And the other is that God is the Judge of all men, "the quick and the dead." Moreover, no doctrine of the future state will commend itself to faith which is not in harmony with the revelation of God in Jesus Christ our Lord. That which the conscience feels to be unjust will be rejected, and it is on moral grounds men have refused to believe many views of the fate of the ungodly at one time very prevalent.

There were questions Christ refused to answer. One was this: "Are there few that be saved? And He said, Strive to enter in at the strait gate" (Luke xiii. 23-4). It is manifestly



the solemn duty of the Church to hold up eternal life as a prize to be won, and to interpret eternal life through Christ. He lived "in the power of the endless life." If men make the "great refusal," they must of necessity suffer loss. All that that means we cannot say;

There was a Door to which I found no Key:  
There was a Veil past which I could not see.

Let us frankly admit it. "We know in part and prophesy in part." It is ours to fight the good fight of faith and lay hold on eternal life, remembering as Amiel says, "The eternal life is to be eternally rewon."

F. T. BLOICE-SMITH.

STONY STRATFORD had a sermon from Dan Taylor at the end of June, 1778. He had come straight from preaching for John Brittain in London, and was presently to train John Brittain Shenstone. Nothing is said as to any minister then in the church. Taylor dined next day with his friend John Sutcliff at Olney, and preached at Burton Latimer; on Wednesday at Moulton, on Thursday at Loughborough; called at Nottingham on Friday and got home to Wadsworth on Saturday in time to preach, and to start haying on Monday.

28-678. [Roger Williams.] An answer to a letter from Mr. Coddington of Rhode Island, to governor Leveret of Boston in what concerns Roger Williams of Providence.

The ten-page original in the library of the R.I. Historical Society has been reproduced in photostat by the Massachusetts Historical Society, as also other pamphlets relevant to 33-676 and 17-678.

41-784. Philip Chapman and Sampson Kingsford. An address to the society of Baptized Believers meeting in the Blackfriars, Canterbury.

Kingsford was 34 years old, joint Elder, just ordained Messenger, destined to be a leader for 37 years. The only known copy of these exhortations is owned by the Rev. Arthur F. Taylor, of Canterbury.

The first Baptist Church composed entirely of negroes is supposed to have been organised in South Carolina at Silver Bluff, between 1773 and 1775.