

STUDIES IN CHRISTIAN ESCHATOLOGY.

V. IMMORTALITY.¹

IMMORTALITY is in no sense an exclusively Christian idea, much less the cardinal point of Christian faith. This place is claimed for it by certain writers, as Lessing or Tennyson, who seek thereby to bring out its importance beyond cavil. But in their estimate two considerations are overlooked—first, that immortality was believed in and taught by religious men long before the Christian era, next that in any case it is subordinate, a corollary to belief in God. Always the real question has been not whether we exist after death, but what kind of existence this will be. The problem of God and the problem of immortality go together, and the argument about each, roughly speaking, has taken the same form. It has been an argument not so much as to being or reality, as rather about intrinsic nature.

For convenience we shall here use the word "immortality" instead of "resurrection," yet this does not imply that the idea of resurrection is now devoid of meaning. Its meaning is to be determined. True, resurrection is relative to body, for soul cannot be buried; and if we discard the notion that the glorified spirit will be reinvested with the very organism it wore on earth, composed of the same material particles precisely (an idea rejected explicitly by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians xv.), it may seem imprudent to keep a word which invites that old misunderstanding. Our real interest is to affirm immortality—the life after death and for ever of the redeemed personality, sinless and individual, in union with God. Further, on a variety of

¹ In this paper I have embodied one or two sentences from my booklet, *Studies in Christian Truth*,

grounds, the term "resurrection" is more wisely kept to denote Jesus' special victory over death.

At the same time, resurrection stands for truth of such certainty and value that we may be sure it will never be parted with. The whole man—soul and body in one—connotes and embraces the effective human energies developed in and by his past life, controlled and unified by the self; and these energies, faith holds, will after death retrieve and reassert themselves in forms not now imaginable. To use St. Paul's figure, out of the seed will spring a new ear of corn.¹ The total efficacy of a life, considered as a force acting on environment, is unmeaning apart from organism; and this efficacy will not perish; it will resume elsewhere its tribute to the life of the Kingdom. It is unnecessary to say, with Fechner, that the surviving spirit will be conscious of its influence as simply the aetherealisation and extension of its body; but at all events his theosophic fancies remind us that an outer mode of being necessarily belongs to spiritual life as such, and that if we think away all externality, there is an end of fellowship. Thus, belief in resurrection is a defined, even if symbolic assertion, that the life to come will be life in a body.

The eternal form will still divide
The eternal soul from all beside.

The Christian mind has never been really cordial about a bare dogma of the immortality of the soul. It has felt that personal life can be re-established on the farther side only as spirit is invested, by God's gift, with a perfect organism.² Curiously enough, no one has taken this line more distinctly than Schleiermacher. So invariably, he writes, are we conscious of the relation of our most inward

¹ We must not appeal to this passage for theories: see Metzger, *Die christliche Hoffnung*, 51 ff.

² For a metaphysical theory of the possibility of this, see Galloway, *Philosophy of Religion* (1914), pp. 571-2.

and profound spiritual activities to those of the body, that apart from the idea of organism we are really unable to form the conception of finite spiritual life. We imply body, indeed, when we speak of an immortal *soul*, for spirit is defined as soul only in its relation to body. One main reason of opposition to this in philosophic circles is obviously the underlying prejudice that body as such—not simply matter—is a debasing burden or limitation. But we may reasonably think of it as a principle of individuality as well as a serviceable medium of spiritual commerce, in the absence of which souls “unclothed upon” would share no life but their own.

To mention the philosophers in a discussion of immortality is at once to be reminded that the topic is one on which they differ among themselves quite as much as other people. Plato can be set against Aristotle, Leibnitz against Spinoza, Kant against Hegel, Lotze against Wundt. It is idle, then, to talk of the philosophic verdict on the point, as if a unanimous opinion had been put forth authoritatively. Here I can only make a brief reference to outstanding points in the long debate.

Speculative or scientific opposition to the everlasting hope is apt to place its first line of argument in a simple review of motives from which belief in immortality has sprung.¹ Much is made of the primitive fear of death and thirst for life; Feuerbach says we believe what we

¹ Most negative opinions on the value and destiny of the human self are rather due to a vague atmosphere of materialistic prejudice than to a careful scrutiny of the relevant considerations. Annihilation is called self-evident, because it is evident in no other way. The picture of the world that lives in many minds is determined solely by physical science; even a great psychologist like Wundt fails to rise higher. The proposal has recently been made to cure the longing for immortality, which properly is a disease, by so much improving medicine and hygiene that life will be greatly lengthened, and men will be only too glad to escape. They would gradually develop an instinct for death.

wish, and we most passionately wish to survive. Or resort is had to associations of ideas, characteristic of dream-life, where for a brief space we are reunited with the loved dead, in scenes painted from daily experience. Or it is said that death was felt to be unintelligible; its reality, therefore, was imperiously denied, as offering to thought and will an end so dark and vain as to be intolerable. Or ethical incentives of a lower kind are detected—the political intention to stimulate good behaviour, a fierce longing to see justice done to our enemies, and a not less selfish insistence that our personal merit should be recognised. Best of all, and none too good, is a sense of rebellion against the failures of life, and a wish (which can never be cleansed from egoism) to retrieve what has here been missed or lost.

So far, however, the question is obviously one of psychological fact merely, not of truth. No investigation of the causes of belief is relevant as such to the point, whether the belief is itself a right one. It may well be that assertions of immortality were at first due to motives largely egoistic, and it is certain that even the Christian hope has often been expressed in terms savouring of natural hedonism. But no chiliastic caricatures or primitive egoisms have anything to do with the real issue. Virtue is not discredited by the fact that a schoolboy may be led to virtuous conduct by hope of reward or fear of punishment, and no clear thinker can suppose that faith in immortality is lowered in moral rank by the fact that its meaning has often been very badly expressed. What is really of interest is to ascertain how far there is discernible in history a steady rise in the kind of motive appealed to, with a gradual tendency to believe in immortality for its own sake. If such a rise took place, earlier motives become negligible, and we are left asking whether the reasonableness of the world does not justify a belief found to be associated vitally

with the loftiest moral achievement. Man, in that case, has no *right* to efface his own immortality before a universe, however vast. Not only so, but Christian faith is conscious that its eternal hope is not produced by any selfish postulate ; it is the lowly and obedient acceptance of a Divine gift.

Theoretic denials of immortality—and little is gained here by distinguishing philosophy and science—may all be reduced in the end to a single axiomatic principle. This is to the effect that experience shows no faintest trace of soul-life apart from a material body. And if this be so, the two must in fact be inseparable. Of course, various points of view may seem to yield this conclusion. It may be the outcome of materialism ; but of materialism, as a reasoned theory, its philosophic critics have long since made an end. But it may also be a rider to the view known as psycho-physical parallelism. Let it be remembered that parallelism all but inevitably means a monistic metaphysic of a kind which, whether materialistic or no, cannot at least be accurately described as spiritual. The single being or essence underlying mind and matter is *ex hypothesi* not interpretable in terms of either ; for it lurks behind both as an inscrutable mystery. Thus, in McDougall's words, " an important implication of all forms of psycho-physical Monism, is that human personality does not survive the death of the body." ¹ With the break-up of the series of changes we designate corporeal, there ends the mental series also, consciousness and body being only two aspects of one thing. Our reply must be confined to these points. First, the Christian faith in another life is in no way at variance with the *actual* correlation of soul and body, as a fact of universal experience, but only with a specific theory of this correlation—a theory, in any case, which rests upon highly questionable metaphysical presupposi-

¹ *Body and Mind* (1911), p. 194.

tions. In revolt from the old difficulty of understanding how soul and body can affect each other, it actually presents us with the two graver difficulties of understanding how all apparent interactions can be mere semblance, and how a single basal substance can manifest itself in two modes which stand in no conceivable mutual relation. Secondly, it is illegitimate to bring forward the parallelistic theory as an accepted scientific view. It is of course nothing of the kind. Those who reject it find themselves in very creditable company, as may be seen from Mr. McDougall's imposing list of authorities.¹ The simple fact is that no modern theory of body and mind enjoys anything like universal vogue.

The more general position, that spiritual life cannot be in separation from body, is itself a conclusion which goes much beyond the premises. We are entitled to say only that such a life is unimaginable. Personality needs organs or conditions, through which it is expressed; but from this it is a long step, and one which no law of thought bids us take, to say that no conditions save those now existing will serve. That is the argument *e silentio* with a vengeance. We commit no breach of logic, indeed, by holding that a higher type of organism may be in store for us, one more delicate and noble, and better able to reveal the soul. To quote an illustration which, by its felicity, may seem to have something of the force of an argument: "The whole question of the possibility of the continuance of conscious life after the destruction of the body is simply this—is the relationship of matter to spirit that of a cause as an engine's is to steam, or that of a medium as a prism's is to light?"²

But if we thus repel philosophic objections to immortality,

¹ *Ibid.*, 204

² Carnegie Simpson, *The Facts of Life*, 203

as resting on an unproved dogma, may we call philosophy as witness on the other side ? Shall we make the Christian hope dependent on speculative logic ? Not if we are wise. The philosophic "proofs" of life after death resemble those for the Divine being, on which they are modelled more or less consciously, in this particular that they apply the term "proof" to what falls far short of coercive force. The argument for immortality *e consensu gentium*, for example, is not invalidated certainly by the replies of savages to an unskilful cross-examiner, but its completeness is fatally undermined by the case of Buddhism, to say nothing of atheists or agnostics. The moral argument takes either the Kantian form, postulating an infinite life for the attainment of infinite perfection, or that of a more general contention that the unjust distribution of good and evil in this world needs to be corrected ; but to this it has been objected, even by Christian writers, that virtue and vice are exactly recompensed in the present life, while even more formidably it is argued that unless the good is absolutely valid in itself, irrespective of what the future may contain, no real basis exists for theism. The teleological argument points to that in man which asks for perfect and divine fruition ; but thinkers like Schopenhauer have accepted this, yet in a sense totally indifferent to personal survival. Finally, an ontological argument has been stated in two forms, a lower and a higher—the one analysing out immortality from the soul's nature, as a simple immaterial entity, which, having once entered on being, can never cease to be. Here it is a fair question whether the terms "simple" and "immaterial" do not also hold true of the ultimate elements of matter, as science now conceives them ; there is no necessity of thought, besides, to say that what has been must be for ever. Or stress may be laid on the immanent infinity of spirit, the unending potency

of human thought and action; and yet the question once more is whether this necessarily involves the life after death of finite persons, while its force is much diminished by the fact that, sooner or later, all human energies known to us pass into decay. Thus, of each argument we have to conclude that its value is a personal question, and this value will vary according to the respective dispositions, opinions and experiences of those to whom the argument is addressed. It is not that it contains no truth, but that the rays of truth, as one has said, "stream in upon us through the medium of our moral as well as our intellectual being."¹

These arguments, then, do not force their way to an irrefragable conclusion. And yet they prove something. They prove how congenial the notion of immortality is to the human mind. They prove that the hope of a future life has a worth for us which nothing can replace. They prove that apart from such a hope the achievement of spirit must remain a torso. But the demonstration of survival they offer is scarcely fitted to convince the normal intellect, or to compel the agnostic by logical necessity to confess that he is in error. Some minds will be utterly insensible to its force. And in any case the Christian will not consent to base the hope of life to come upon philosophy, for no philosophy goes far enough for him. It can never give a pledge of fellowship with God. At most it offers survival, not eternal life. It misses the vital fact that there are spiritual preconditions of faith in immortality such as can never be set out in syllogistic form. On the other hand, it is now just as clear that neither philosophy nor science can justifiably interpose a veto. Negative argument is fully met by positive. Here, as so often, the use of philosophic instruments in Christian theology is not

¹ Newman, *Grammar of Assent*, 311.

to provide faith with new content, but to repel speculative objections ; not to build, but to clear the ground for the builder.

Those who at this point turn wistfully to the Society for Psychical Research really miss the point at stake. They argue as if any kind of immortality were desirable, but it is not so. To the Greek mind, death was terrible, not because it brought existence to an end, but because it opened an existence wholly devoid of warmth or interest. "Speak not comfortably to me of death," are Achilles' famous words, "rather would I on earth be hiring to another, a landless man of little substance, than be chief over all the dead."¹ And for Israel there speaks the voice of Job: "Cease then, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little, before I go whence I shall not return, even to the land of darkness and of the shadow of death ; a land of thick darkness, as darkness itself."² It was not extinction which these men feared ; it was continued being, in the absence of all that made life sweet. Those who collect evidence of survival given by spirits through mediums seem unaware that they are engaged in resuscitating the old Hebrew notion of Sheol, and casting back to the primitive animistic belief in spirits, which has at bottom nothing to do with religion, and in any case is as unlike the Christian hope of everlasting life as night to day. It is a nearly insoluble mystery how a refined intelligence like the late Henry Sidgwick, of Cambridge, could, at least for a time, turn from Jesus Christ as Revealer of the unseen to Mrs. Piper, and spend weeks, or even months, in the hopeful investigation of her ongoings. The only immortality which can interest a man that has seen Jesus, and felt God's love in Him, has no point of contact with ghosts or rappings. His faith is born in conscience, and grasps the living God.

¹ *Odyssey*, Bk. XI, 486-490,

² X, 20-22,

It is the assurance of one who in Jesus' presence has felt his own utter guilt and fragility, yet finds the gift of eternal life put in his hand by the Father. In this light, the spiritualistic argument will always show as immoral and repulsive.

The result of this brief survey is to confirm an antecedent impression that the true basis of eschatological certainty lies in positive religion. Mr. McDougall, who is convinced that belief in any form of life after the death of the body may be gravely menaced by the progress of mechanistic dogma, writes: "I judge that this belief can only be kept alive if a proof of it, or at least a presumption in favour of it, can be furnished by the methods of empirical science."¹ This may suggest indirectly that a scientific *disproof* of immortality would close the question; but it has no other force. The assurance of eternal life belongs to religion, not science. It is anchored in revelation.

So much is clear from the fact that belief in a blessed future arose in Israel not from logic, but through spiritual experience. It did not even come as an inevitable corollary from the acceptance of one true God, to whom death itself is subject; it came from fellowship with Him. Communion with God was at first mediated through priest or prophet, and, while this continued, the certainty of union with Jehovah on the farther side of death was still unfelt. Thus, to begin with, in the Old Testament there is on the subject of the future a silence that speaks: but as soon as the individual had felt the touch of Divine communion, when he could say, "I am continually with Thee, Thou hast holden my right hand," the conditions were at last present in which the knowledge of a blessed life for the departed could be won. Of course, it came gradually at the first,

¹ *Op. cit.*, Preface.

The resurrection of individuals primarily took shape as belief in the resurrection of the martyrs. The future bliss was to be enjoyed on earth, and dead saints—those who had sacrificed everything for the good cause—would rise again to partake in a salvation which had visited the living. God would not let them lose their portion in the Kingdom. Presently, in the Book of Daniel, this was universalised as a doctrine of resurrection for all. All must rise, some to life, others to eternal loss. Apocalyptic thus strikes firmly the note of a real future for the individual.

It is only under similar conditions that this faith can be retained. When it has been lost, or is become enfeebled, it cannot be put back into the mind by itself. The man must be sure of God, as the Father who has taken him into the relationship of a child, before he can know that to this union even death can make no difference, and that Almighty Love will not suffer him to perish. So that the roots of Christian hope lie in the experience of sonship.

But in the New Testament eschatological faith has gained a new note of certainty, and quite as evidently its cause is the fact of Jesus. And what He provided was not better arguments for immortality; it was His own person, as a redeeming presentation of the Father. His disciples, who were Jews and had not been Sadducees, had no need to be convinced that man lives after death. Still their faith derived from Jesus, in two ways, a new certitude and a new quality.

The first fact to tell upon them was Jesus' own belief. The deepest word in the New Testament respecting immortality is that word concerning God: "He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."¹ It enunciates a principle which Professor A. B. Davidson used to call an Old Testament commonplace—the principle, namely, that to be possessed

¹ See the whole passage, Matt. xxii. 29-33.

by God is a relationship that can never end. I have actually read a plea by an able man that the passage containing Jesus' dispute with the Sadducees must be late, because it makes Him quibble like a Jewish lawyer.¹ Admit that in form it exhibits just so much subtlety as may enter in an *argumentum ad hominem*, what does Jesus mean to say? He says—illustrating the truth from far-off times—that he to whom God has once given His favour is one with Him for ever. If we were not so familiar with our Lord's words, I think they would astonish us. They reveal such a thought of God and of man, and of the relation of one to the other, as includes immortality as a simple part of itself. A God who at last could leave men in the dust would not be the God whom Jesus knew. That the dead are raised is for Him no longer a matter for inquiry, but a part of filial trust. His words are not properly an argument; they are a revelation, as if it became Him not to argue. What He says is true for His own mind not on intrinsic grounds of logic, not as probably true, or partially true, but as absolutely certain knowledge, certain in a sense in which nothing else can be certain except His apprehension of the Father.

Can we overestimate the importance of this fact that He who knew God best, and most loved Him, was sure of the life everlasting? Say what you please of the absurdities which, in theology, have gathered round the belief; they all vanish, as negligible and irrelevant accretions, in presence of His faith. Earnest men will always find in Jesus' certainty a sure ground of hope which no speculative objection can affect.

Jesus' experience of God, therefore, is the last and final fact in this region. We may discuss immortality apart from it, but it is like discussing the chance of wedded happiness apart from love. Modern religion is in peril of drifting

¹ Cf. J. Weiss in *Die Schriften d. N.T.*, I. 172.

from Jesus' real thought of God, of keeping His revelation of boundless grace, but dropping out His faith in almighty power. Yet for Him the one was as real as the other. Titius is simply reporting the mind of Christ as the gospels exhibit it when he says, commenting on His belief in miracle: "The world—nature—is in God's eyes nothing, and He alone is omnipotent Lord." We speak in His sense, therefore, if we say that the Divine love, acting in man's experience, enables him to conquer death not merely by providing internal consolations, in virtue of which he dies bravely or uncomplainingly; it conquers death by lifting man beyond its sway. It overcomes the last enemy by inaugurating for those who die a new career.

The second fact to tell on the apostolic mind is Jesus' resurrection. Now it is a problem of great moment, what is the exact relation between the rising of Christ from the grave and our faith in immortality? The statement is often made that the resurrection is the ultimate basis of our hope to live again; but, while this has a good sense enough, it is after all an abbreviated form of expression. It is roughly rather than precisely true. In strictness, Jesus' resurrection is not the last ground of hope, for it is itself grounded in a reality still more ultimate. Long ere He died, Jesus knew that He would rise again, and He knew this because of His relation to the Father. It could not be that God would leave His soul in the grave. The same thought reappears in St. Peter's speech on the day of Pentecost. "God raised Him up, having loosed the pangs of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it." Why not possible? Because God is what He is, and Jesus His beloved Son. Hence, for the Christian consciousness, there is in this realm something more final even than the resurrection of our Lord. Behind the triumph of the Saviour stands the character of God. Every-

thing, including that last victory, comes out of Almighty Love.

Yet while the resurrection of Jesus is not the final resting-place of thought, the place it fills in the array of evidence is crucial. It does not *prove* immortality, as if apart from it that hope had no sufficient ground ; but it adds incalculably to its hold upon our mind. It is a tangible defence of our belief. It is associated with that belief in such a sense, so fortifies and illustrates it, that it acts as a vivid apprehension acts, giving it luminousness and force. The experience of Jesus was a test case, and, like every test case, it fixed a principle. It did not create that principle ; yet it decided what it should mean for the world. We know that men are brave, but to see a heroic action quickens the knowledge amazingly. In like manner, he whom God is holding by His right hand is sure of life without end, but the spectacle of Jesus' actual resurrection gives to his prior faith a new intensity of feeling. It makes his hold upon it more living, so that he dares to apply it to the darkest aspects of experience—to sorrow, to tragedy, to ignominy and pain. The world is now transfigured in his eyes. To St. Paul, as has been said, " the Resurrection is a great creative act of God, a new influx from the world of spirit breaking into the world of time, and piercing its dreams."

Nor can we fail to ask what the effect would have been had Jesus not risen. Had death silenced Him, as it silences all the rest, would trust in immortality have remained intact and unshaken ? In face of such questions we understand better what is meant by saying that the experience of the historic Christ reveals immortality in being. The spell of death is broken. " The Lord's doing " is " wondrous in our eyes "—wondrous for its own supernaturalness, but also for its place in our minds as the great instance. It is one thing to know that spring is coming, because the almanac tells us

so ; surely it is another, some sweet April day, to feel upon the brow a gust of vernal air, with its mystic fragrance, telling that spring is here.

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THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON.

THAT parable of our Lord which goes by the name of the Parable of the Prodigal Son begins with these words : " A certain man had two sons " (St. Luke xv. 11). It is true that the greater part of the parable is the story of the fortunes of the younger son, commonly called the prodigal, though he is not so described in the parable. But while this is so, we must not lose sight of the fact that a quite considerable part of the parable has to do with the other, the elder, son ; and indeed the point of the parable is in danger of being missed unless we bear this fact in mind. If thirteen verses are taken up with the wanderings and return to his father's home of the younger son, no fewer than eight deal with the elder brother, whose envy, provoked by the father's welcome of the long-lost son, has to be reprovèd and corrected. Indeed it is not too much to say that these last eight verses contain the real lesson of the parable. I am not suggesting that the story of the prodigal son is not an essential part of the parable. That would be absurd indeed. But I contend that the main point of the parable is to be found in the dialogue at the end of the parable between the father and the elder son.

The fifteenth chapter of St. Luke contains three parables—that of the lost sheep, that of the lost piece of silver, and the one under consideration. These parables our Lord spoke in reproof of the murmurings of the Pharisees and the scribes, who complained : " This man receiveth