

## THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

When Voltaire said that if there were no God, it would be necessary for man to invent one, he formulated, unconsciously perhaps, the fundamental truth of existence.

A universe without a God is an intellectual absurdity, which reason rejects spontaneously. God is indispensable. Fate, force, and blind chance do not satisfy the mind. If all the letters in the play of "Hamlet" were shaken in a dice-box and thrown at midnight in a tempest on the Desert of Sahara, they might fall exactly as they are arranged in the drama. It may be admitted that if Destiny kept on casting long enough, they would inevitably at some time so fall, which would render the Bard of Avon superfluous and unnecessary. But this does not disturb our belief in Shakespeare.

Irrespective of creeds and theology, they are wise who would recognize God in the Constitution, because faith in a Supreme Being, in immortality and the compensations of eternity conduces powerfully to social order by enabling man to endure with composure the injustice of this world in the hope of reparation in that which is to come.

Inasmuch as both force and matter are infinite and indestructible, and can be neither added to nor subtracted from, it follows that in some form we have always existed, and that we shall continue in some form to exist forever.

Whence we came into this life no one knows nor cares. Evolution, metempsychosis, reincarnation, are not beliefs.

They are parts of speech, interesting only to the compiler of lexicons.

Our appearance here is not voluntary. We are sent to this planet on some mysterious errand without being consulted in advance. Many of us would not have come had the opportunity to decline, with thanks, been presented.

To multitudes life is an inconceivable insult and injury, an intolerable affront; torture and wretchedness indescribable from poverty, disease, grief, Fortune's slings and arrows; wrongs deliberately inflicted by some unknown malignant power, as Job was tormented by the devil, with the consent of God, just to try him, till at last the troubled patriarch cursed the day he was born.

Worst of all, we are sent here under sentence of death. The most grievous and humiliating punishment man can inflict upon the criminal is death.

Human tribunals give the malefactor a chance. His crime must be proved. He can put in his defense. He can appear by attorney and plead and take appeal. But we are all condemned to death beforehand. The accusation and the accuser are unknown. An inexorable verdict has been pronounced and recorded in the secret councils of the skies. We are neither confronted with the witness nor allowed a day in court. From the hour of birth we are beset by invulnerable and invisible enemies, the pestilence that walketh in darkness and the destruction that wasteth at noonday. Fatal germs, immortal bacilli, heaven-sent miracles, inhabit the air we breathe, the food we eat, the water we drink, poisoning where they fly and infecting where they repose.

Science continually discloses malevolent agencies, hitherto undetected, which vainly try to extirpate, or to build frail and feeble barriers against their depredations.

Theology complacently announces that for the majority of the human race this tough world is the prelude to an eternity in hell. If any trembling sinner desires comfort and consolation in these awful miseries, let him read the sermon of Jonathan Edwards from the text, "Their feet shall slide in due time."

Hell would be preferable to annihilation, it may be, but this alternative does not satisfy those who repeat the everlasting interrogatory of Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?"

Nature, like a witness in contempt, stands mute. Science returns from its remotest excursions, shakes its head, and, smiling, puts the question by. Christ contented Himself with a few vague and unsatisfactory generalities: "Whoso liveth and believeth in Me shall never die;" "In My Father's house are many mansions." Saint Paul, the greatest of the teachers of Christianity, could only respond by a misleading analogy. He knew the wheat which is reaped is not that which is sown. The harvest is a succession, not a resurrection.

The evidences of a superintending moral purpose and design in the affairs of men are faint and few. The wicked prosper, the good suffer. The problems of sin, pain, and evil are insoluble. Visiting the sins of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation, making the innocent suffer for the offenses of the guilty, is an unjust and cruel law that ought to be repealed. Civilization has long since rejected the principle from human jurisprudence. Even treason, the highest crime known to its code, no longer works corruption of blood or forfeiture of estate.

Unless man is immortal, the moral universe, so far as he is concerned, disappears altogether. If he does not survive the grave, it makes no difference to him whether there be God or devil, or heaven or hell. And it must be not only a survival, but with a continuity of consciousness as well, if the evil are to be punished and the good rewarded hereafter. To inflict the penalty of violated law upon a being who does not know that he has offended, is not punishment, but revenge. Conscious identity may not be a necessary condition of intelligence, but it is essential in morals. It is conceivable that a being may know without knowing that he knows; but he cannot sin without knowing that he sins, nor be punished unless he knows for what wrong he suffers.

Frederick W. Robertson, the eminent English divine, closes one of his discourses by saying:

"Search through tradition, history, the world within you and the world without—except in Christ, there is not the shadow of a shade of proof that man survives the grave."

Many years ago I heard a distinguished American orator deliver a lecture upon the evidences of immortality outside the Bible. In the stress and pressure of the closing days of a short session of Congress, he held the rapt and breathless attention of an immense audience, comprising all that was most cultured, brilliant, and renowned in the social and official life of the capital.

He dwelt with remarkable effectiveness and power upon the fact that nowhere in Nature, from the highest to the lowest, was an instinct, an impulse, a desire implanted, but that ultimately were found the conditions and the opportunities for its fullest realization. He instanced the wild fowl that, moved by some mysterious impulse, start on their prodigious

migrations from the frozen fens of the Pole and reach at last the shining South and the summer seas; the fish that from tropic gulfs seek their spawning-grounds in the cool, bright rivers of the North; the bees that find in the garniture of fields and forests the treasure with which they store their cells; and even the wolf, the lion, and the tiger that are provided with their prey.

Turning to humanity, he alluded to the brevity of life; its incompleteness; its aimless, random, and fragmentary careers; its tragedies, its injustice, its sorrows and separations. Then he referred to the insatiable hunger for knowledge; the efforts of the unconquerable mind to penetrate the mysteries of the future; its capacity to comprehend infinity and eternity; its desire for the companionship of the departed; its unquenchable aspirations for immortality; and he asked, "Why should God keep faith with the beast, the bee, the fish, and the fowl, and cheat man?"