

OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

The following discourse was delivered by Rev. Wm. Hamilton, D.D., in answer to a letter received from a so-called Christadelphian, a sect which repudiates the essential immortality of the soul; declares that the dead are unconscious till the resurrection; affirms that immortality is a conditional gift bestowed at the resurrection, and denies that the devil is a personal agent, but says that he is only a scriptural personification of sin. Some of the other topics may hereafter be discussed. In the present discourse only the first has been considered; that is, the immortality of the soul as an essential and original gift of God.

"And God said, let us make man in our image, after our likeness."—Gen. i. 26. "And man became a living soul." Gen. ii. 7.

"The proper study of mankind," says the poet "is man." We do not believe, however, that the study of man is the highest and noblest study to which our attention can be directed. God Himself, our Creator, is a much nobler study; but there is one study which combines them both; that is the study of our Lord Jesus Christ. "God manifest in the flesh." In Him we find perfect God and perfect man, two natures in one person. Emmanuel—God in us, God with us.

We are told in the two texts . . . chosen, first, "that God made man in his own image or likeness, and second, that He made him a living soul.

It is urged by some who deny the natural immortality of the soul that "God only hath immortality." He has indeed immortality *in Himself*; but to deny from this that He cannot or will not make an immortal soul would be to limit the Holy One, and deny the infinitude of His power. Angels, and the souls of men have their immortality from Him. Because *He* lives *they* shall live also. *His* immortal existence had no beginning; *theirs* depends on Him, "In whom they live, and move and have their being."

In reading that grand passage, the first chapter of Genesis, any one may see the difference of expression between what is said of the creation of the material world—the sun, moon, and stars—and of the formation of man. Of the material things the expression is, "God said:" "Let there be a firmament," "Let the dry land appear," "Let the waters bring forth abundantly;" but of man it is said, "Let us make man." Here we find an indication of the Trinity holding counsel, as it were, regarding the creation of the noblest work of God. Man is at once mortal and immortal. "All flesh is grass, and all the goodness thereof is as the flower of the field, but the Word of our God shall stand for ever." It is said in the Word that God formed man of the dust of the earth, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Elihu says, in the Book of Job, "The breath of the Almighty hath given me life." Jesus encouraged His disciples by saying to them, "Be not afraid of them that kill the body; and, after that, have no more that they can do; but I forewarn you whom ye shall fear, fear Him, who after He hath killed, hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, fear him." I have heard of a quaint old preacher who said, on meeting with some of those men who do not believe in the immortality of the soul, but who contend that *hell* simply means the *grave*, "I say unto you, my friends, do not fear the *hangman*, but fear the *gravedigger*. The one can only take your life away; but the other can cast you into *hades*, the *grave*. Beware, beware of the *gravedigger*!"

May we not thus establish the doctrine of man's immortality from the account of his creation, and from many allusions in the Bible to man's unceasing life.

II. Farther, we say that this doctrine may be established from considering the nature of the human soul. First, it is spiritual, of the same nature as the angels. In that most interesting passage of the Gospel According to Luke xx, when the Sadducees, who did not believe in either angel or disembodied spirit, asked the Saviour, respecting the woman who had married in succession seven brothers, *whose* wife of the seven she should be in the resurrection, that is in the future state—Jesus answered them, "Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God; for in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." And then how powerful is the argument for immortality, when our Lord brings from the title of Jehovah, "I am the God of Abraham, and the God of

Isaac, and the God of Jacob: God is not the God of the dead, but of the living." Therefore Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are still living. Our Saviour does not give the conclusion; but it was so evident that after He had confuted the Pharisees in like manner, no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man from that day forth ask Him any more questions. Second, the soul of man is unmixed and immaterial. It is not composed of flesh and blood, as the body is. A man may lose almost every limb of his body till nothing but the trunk and head remain; yet the thinking power is not affected or diminished. "Handle me and see," said Jesus to His terrified disciples after the resurrection. "Behold my hands and my feet that it is I myself; handle me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have."

Matter is divisible. It may be cut into pieces; not so the soul. It is out of the reach of any instrument of slaughter or dissection. The bullet and the bomb cannot pierce or shatter it. The soul would live amidst the crash of matter and crush of worlds.

If we believe the Bible, we must accept the statement that man was made in the image or likeness of God. The Almighty breathed into him the breath of life and he became not a mere intellectual animal, but a LIVING SOUL. Bear witness heaven and earth! that *mind*, not *matter*, is the measure of man.

Consider, for a moment, the powers and faculties of man's mind. Elihu says most justly, "There is a spirit in man, and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth him understanding." David, expostulating with the disobedient, says in the Ps. xxxii., "Be ye not as the horse or as the mule, which have no understanding, whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee."

Consider also the immense range of subjects which the human mind can comprehend—things material and things immaterial—things spiritual and corporeal—things corruptible and incorruptible—things temporary and eternal.

If it were not in some degree assimilated to the angels, how could the human soul know anything about the spiritual world?

The soul of man has knowledge of eternity itself. A past eternity is beyond our grasp. We can hardly form an idea of the beginning of things, when GOD ALONE EXISTED. We know that arts and sciences are rapidly advancing to maturity. Man, by the powers of his intellect, has made the winds and waves the instruments of his will. He brings down the lightning from the clouds, nay, he can produce the electric fluid and imprison it in cases, by which it can be sent harmlessly from city to city. Some of us can remember when these wonders of science were unknown, or but in their infancy—who can tell where scientific discovery can be arrested? Where the powers of nature shall cease to be under the control of man's all-inquiring mind? Things are done now every day as matters of ordinary business, which would, three centuries ago or less, have subjected their agent or inventor to a trial for witchcraft, and might have brought him to a cruel death. But the soul of man overleaps all barriers, and claims all the secrets of Nature as its own. The past eternity is dim, uncertain and shadowy; but the future is full of light. Science concurs with religion in pointing forward to a time when "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased." But *faith* goes farther still. She draws aside the veil which conceals the unseen world, and shows that, "in the resurrection," in the future state, men shall be as the angels of God, glorious, perfect, and immortal.

But what shall we say of the little children—the dear little ones, who came into this world but to smile and weep for a while, and were then snatched away? Their reasoning powers were never called into exercise—their faculties were but in the bud, when they were broken from the parent stem, and then consigned to the tomb. Have we not reason to believe that such little ones are dear to our blessed Lord? He said, even respecting them, "Suffer the little ones to come unto me, and forbid them not; for of such is the Kingdom of God." He took them into His arms, and *baptised* them with His blessing; as we also, in obedience to His command, bring our children in their infancy and offer them in baptism to the Lord. Just as of yore, the believing Jews circumcized their little ones at eight days old.

We have now briefly spoken of the vast capacity of

man's mind and soul—its immense desire of knowledge, its ever grasping at something new.

Let us not forget, also, that the *will* of man, unsubdued and unshunnable, shows, at once, his origin and his destiny. Have we not, all around us, men who have fought their way up from the lowest place to the highest—from poverty and want to affluence and independence. Difficulties only stimulated and increased their efforts until, at last, they were crowned with success. They can look back, with mingled feelings, on the way by which they have struggled up to the platform of success. They have surpassed all their sanguine early hopes. In accumulated wealth they possess a power, which works for them, while they rest. And yet we may ask, Do riches give happiness or contentment? Are the favoured sons of fortune happier now than when they were laboriously struggling up the hill? Few men ever had greater temporal prosperity than Solomon; but the result of his experience was—"Surely this also is vanity and vexation of spirit." "I returned," he says, "and I saw vanity under the sun. There is One alone, and there is not a second: yea, He hath neither child nor brother; yet there is no end of all *His* labour, neither is *His* eye satisfied with riches; neither saith He 'For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good?' This is also vanity, yea, it is a sore travail."

Well may we be warned, therefore, not to set our hearts on riches. The soul of man cannot be satisfied with anything less than the riches that perish not—the inheritance that is incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, eternal in the Heavens.

Let me say, further, that the immortality of the soul can be proved from the light of nature and reason.

1st. In the writings of ancient philosophers we have abundant proof that the ancient heathen believed in the immortality of the soul. Cicero says that, as we know by nature that there is a God, so we judge, by the consent of all nations, that souls remain after death and are immortal. In everything, he says, the consent of all nations is reckoned to be the Law of Nature. There is something in the soul of man that recoils from the idea of annihilation. Mere mortal life may be surrendered without a murmur; but the soul cannot be satisfied without the future. Many good men have sung songs of triumph at the stake, many have died in bodily agony; yet confidently anticipating the better life which is eternal, the glorious life beyond!

The Bible is the most ancient book of history in the world. It gives the records of ancient nations, especially in reference to their religions. Now, we find that all the nations with whom the sons of Abraham came in contact, had certain gods of their own. They believed in a spiritual world. Man may be defined as a religious animal. The very prevalence of idolatry proves that men everywhere had the idea of a God, that *ought* to be worshipped. When Athens was in her prosperity and pride, the city was filled with temples, which were the chief boast and glory of Greece. Every one of these temples testified to the fact, that man believed in the power of the gods, in their ability to help or injure man. All nations have had their ideas of Tartarus and Elysium—the scenes of future happiness or pain.

2nd. We can appeal to the inner consciousness, even of wicked men, for the belief of a future state. "The whips and stings of conscience do make cowards of us all." Such a man as Felix, the corrupt, bribe-seeking Roman governor, trembled when Paul reasoned before him of *righteousness, temperance and judgment to come*. "Go thy way," said Felix, "for this time; when I have a more convenient season, I will call for thee;" but that more convenient season never came. Felix trembled for the future that he felt was coming, but Satan had him bound in chains of evil habit; and the stings of conscience did not goad him to repentance or change of life. How many there are like him in the present day, who know their duty to repent and turn to God, but are not led by the Spirit to real reformation and to the service of the living and true Jehovah! They know and feel their accountability; but Satan binds them so firmly in the chains of evil habit that they never attain the freedom of the sons of God. Yet conscience, even among the heathen, testifies to their guilt.

3rd. A third consideration may be argued from the unequal, and apparently unjust, distribution of the good things of this life. Wicked men often prosper, while good men are trodden down and despised. "If in this life only," says Paul, "we have hope in Christ,