

SPECIAL
ARTICLES

Our Contributors

BOOK
REVIEWS

THE FACT OF IMMORTALITY.

By Geo. B. McLeod, M.A., Truro, N.S.
Man instinctively turns towards the thought of immortality as the needle towards the magnet, as the earth towards the sun, for man has within himself powers, possibilities, and longings that would fain lead him beyond death, darkness and the grave. Blot out the thought of immortality, and while some of the finer souls would doubtless cling to conscience as the ground of moral conduct, there would be an awful rending of the moral code.

Reason demands immortality, and bases its demand upon the universality of the idea. The current of belief in a future state has ever flowed through the channels of human thought. The Hebrews had their Paradise. The Greeks had their Elysian fields. Mythology represents Charon as ferrying the souls of the dead over Stygian waters. Isis and Osiris sit in the judgment halls of death, weighing the merits of the souls of the departed. The Norseman sang of his Valhalla, the palace of immortality. The Indian, bold child of the forest, had his happy hunting ground. The thought of immortality lives in monument and pyramid, in sarcophagus and stored urn, and has found expression in painting, in sculpture and in song. It is a silent witness to the fact that man is not the product of mere force, and that he shall not mingle with the elements, to know no more of feeling, of action and of thought. There is that within the soul that revolts against the mere suggestion that "this scorable, warm motion should become a kneaded clod." The cry of the human heart finds expression in the language of the poet:

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

The desire for immortality is universal, and universality is the pledge of truth.

Reason demands immortality, and bases its demand upon the incompleteness of the present life. "The days of our years are three-score years and ten," says the Psalmist.

"Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!"

But, if that is all then man's mental and spiritual endowments are strangely out of proportion to the brief limits of his life. Can the possibilities of an aorn be cradled into an earthen jar? Is an ocean liner built to sail on river and bay? Can men whose thoughts overrun the centuries and outcar the planets, and whose mortal nature lingers after God, be crowded into seventy years? No man can realize himself within so brief a limit. Darwin, feeling old age creeping upon him, but realizing his powers and possibilities for work, exclaimed: "If I could go on now with my head sixty years old, and my body twenty-five, I could accomplish something." Goethe, with the great intellect, went out of the world at eighty-three, saying: "Light, light, more light!" Victor Hugo at seventy said: "Winter is on my head and eternal spring is in my heart." The nearer I approach the end, the plainer I hear around me the immortal symphonies of inviting worlds. For half a century I have been writing my thoughts in prose and verse, but I feel that I have not said a thousandth part of what is in me." Cecil Rhodes, the empire

builder, relinquishes his herculean task with a sigh: "So much to do, so little done!" And what of the lives that could have accomplished great things, but were hindered? What possibilities of development have been checked by adverse circumstances? What of the powers that have been crippled by the lack of opportunity? Death plucks the blossom and eats the unripe grain that gave promise of rarest fruit and richest harvest. Many of life's best things—inspirations, hopes, yearnings, and affections—have been buried with the years.

The demand of reason for immortality is supported by the claim of conscience, which is based upon the injustice and the wrongs of life. Dowered with a sense of justice man feels life's inequalities. He sees the innocent suffer with the guilty. The seeds of sorrow are sown in the constitution of the little child, victim of a parent's sin. In the green tree of youth is the ambushed flame of passion kindled by heredity. The world is full of suffering. The victims of oppression are everywhere. Justice is oft perverted. Right is not always crowned. Truth is not always throned. Low cunning often lords it over virtue and the unprincipled may succeed where patient merit with the high ideals fails. For failure it is if there is to be no striking of a balance, no settling of accounts.

What a travesty of justice it will be if man, giving himself in self-sacrifice to uplift humanity, shall never "see of the travail of his soul and be satisfied." Shall Paul never see the harvest of the seed his hand has sown? Shall blind Handi never see the Messiah of whom he has so grandly sung? Shall deaf Beethoven, whose soul was as a finely attuned instrument, never hear "the grandest of all masters of harmony—above, above!" Shall Livingstone not know of the answer to his prayer for the healing of the open sore of Africa? Shall the great heart of Bishop Hannington not survive the bullet of a savage? Shall General Gordon be annihilated by the spear-thrust of an Arab foe? Was it all delusion when that great soul nourished his faith with the thought of immortality, and sang with Paracelsus:

"I go to prove my soul!
I see my way as birds their trackless way,
In some time, His good time, I shall arrive.
He guides me and the bird."

Thank God for all the arguments in favour of immortality. But let us confess that though there are many indications that man is:

"The heir of hopes too fair to turn out false."

yet the arguments from reason are not fully satisfying. The logical processes do not bring the assurance that man would like. He is ever vesting them. He is ever afraid that they may fail. It is possible, too, that we may unconsciously inject into rational arguments the strength of Christian thinking, thus making them appear stronger than they really are. If we would see how far reason can carry man in the direction of immortality we must look back of Christianity. The belief in a future life, as already noted, has ever been strong, steady, universal. But how crude was its conception even among the Hebrews. And in the pagan world this grandest thought was wrapped in the mummy-swathings of egotism and imbecilities. But Jesus has brought immortality to light by the Gospel. Divinity comes close to humanity. The smiling face of God looks through the darkness and the gloom, as Christ declares Himself to be the Resur-

rection and the Life. Under the shadow of the Cross and by the empty grave faith sings the hosannas of immortality. Then every argument of reason glows with the fire of divine truth and every analogy from nature breaks forth into speech. From seed, and bulb, and flower, and plant, and chrysalis ten thousand voices echo the question of the great apostle: "Why should it be thought a thing incredible, that God should raise the dead?" That the resurrection is a mystery we admit. That it cannot be explained we readily grant. But why should we seek to explain it? Is it not enough that Jesus has risen from the dead, and "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

Christ has stamped immortality upon the best thought of the world. He has changed argument into fact. In the light of the resurrection we may look up into the very Face of God and see manhood glorified, death robbed of its sting, and the grave of its victory. "Thy dead shall live again. Together with my dead body shall they come." We shall see them as they are. We shall see Him as He is. In the words of Browning's Easter Day:

"Christ rises; Mercy every way
Is infinite."

In Him life's broken threads are united, earth's tears are dried, and the aching heart is satisfied.

"If a man die, shall he live again?"
"Yea," said Jesus, "I am the Resurrection and the Life."

REVIVALS.*

By Rev. W. D. Reid, Montreal.

What is a revival? It is not necessarily special meetings, or a distinct kind of hymns, or certain peculiar kind of preaching, called evangelical. These may be the adjuncts, but they are not the revival itself. A real religious revival is a quickened sense of God in a community. It is the excitement of many people at the same time about the same subject, namely, their religious standing before God. Sometimes it comes in silently as the dew, other times like the rush of a mighty storm. Sometimes it starts through some appalling Providence, or comes as the result of some powerful sermon, or, again, from the application of an ideal rule of life.

In his second division Mr. Reid dealt with the revivals of history. He specially mentioned and analyzed the revival which brought in the Reformation, the revival which arose among the Puritans in the days of Bunyan and Baxter, and ended in dethroning Charles I., and the Wesley revival, which met and overthrew the infidelity of the eighteenth century, and the revival of Finney and Moody. He emphasized the thought that every revival has been the result of teaching some neglected truth and has had a direct result. The revival of the Reformation, emphasized the great truth of man's responsibility to God. The just shall live by faith. The Puritan revival brought out the great truth that Jesus Christ is alone king and head of the Church. John Wesley's revival brought to the fore the great truth that man must be born again, and should have the continual witness of the Spirit within him, and Finney's revival, that of man's responsibility in that he has his free will. Moody specially brought out the love of God to man.

Looking at the past Mr. Reid drew a

* Condensation of paper read at meeting of Montreal Protestant Ministerial Association by the pastor of Taylor church.