

The Immortal Hope

(By Rev. W. H. Smith, B.D., Ph.D.)

Part II.—The Personal Significance of Immortality

When Paul is presenting his great apologetic in defence of the doctrine of the Resurrection he passes from the evidence of Jesus' resurrection and its bearing upon our resurrection to his own personal conviction:—"If in this life only we have hope in Christ we are of all men most miserable." We need not tarry to consider all that is implied. The important fact is that for Paul personally the hope of immortality was the mainstay of all his heroic service and unconquerable devotion. In his daily contact with persecution, affliction and death the hope of immortality so cheered him that we hear the Hallelujah Chorus where the ambitions and longings of others break like spray against the cold, dead cliffs of agnosticism and materialism. It is well to pause and ask, What is the meaning of immortality to us? Does our life gain in value, heroism, self-sacrifice and power? Or, take the negative side of Paul's thought. If we denied immortality altogether, if we dismissed it from our thoughts would it make any real difference in our attitude toward life, work or death? Is it a factor of any vital meaning? Does Rossetti's song appeal to us?

*But is there for the night a resting-place?
A roof for when the slow dark hours begin.
May not the darkness hide it from my face?
You cannot miss that inn.*

The thought concerning immortality has usually followed the positive line. The gain has been unquestionably great. It has been so great that we scarcely feel the value of it until we calmly ask what life would mean without it. Something is therefore gained if we follow Paul's passionate, heart-breaking cry in the denial of immortality. Let us be perfectly frank with ourselves. Let us take up the position of the materialist, no hope of immortality for humanity. Holding this position, certain results would inevitably follow.

First, we would be compelled to admit that human life, in its final goal was a contradiction of all we now know of the world and life. As we come to the full vision of the best life conceivable, we could have no hope of immortality, simply doomed to nothingness. This would surely be a bitter disappointment. Pause and consider what is going on in the world. All nature is struggling to conserve the highest values. This is the truth in the doctrine of Evolution. Life grows from small to great, from chaos to order, from dim outline to perfect plan, from nature alive with instinct to nature alive with reason, spirit, conscience and immortal yearning. There is something in all life which contains the germ of a perfect plan and this unfolds as it has a favourable opportunity. It conserves the best. Human life has the same deep instinct, the passion which urges to knowledge and victory even at great sacrifice. Life becomes in its highest flights a great adventure:—

*Sail forth—steer for the deep waters only,
Reckless, O Soul, exploring, I with thee and thou with me.
For we are bound where mariner has not yet dared go,
And we will risk the ship, ourselves and all.*

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