

THE IMMORTAL HOPE

Second, there is the havoc wrought by the testimony of the senses. Early in life we are confronted with an inrush of sensations and at first we are inclined to give these the determining voice in life. Many reject the reasonableness of immortality because all the appearances are against it. We are reminded of the ordinary history of the individual. We must wait until the brain develops before we can do competent thinking. In the full strength of brain and body we reach our highest attainments. Then a change comes. The body declines. The strong man weakens physically, mentally, spiritually. Sight grows dim, hearing dull, taste fades until bankruptcy comes and with the last atom of strength the last ray of intelligence vanishes. Nothing that the senses can detect remains in life or death to suggest that there is a personality entering into a life beyond. The testimony of the senses is overwhelming. Many reason thus and become materialists and deny immortality.

Before accepting such a verdict it is well to linger awhile and ask whether in the affairs of this life we attach any such finality to the testimony of the senses. It may perhaps shock our easy-going confidence to be told that our senses very frequently deceive us and that we early learn to discount their seeming validity and always subject their testimony to a critical examination. Our senses tell us that the sun moves through the heavens and the earth is standing still. For ages people believed this, but we now know that the whole race was deceived. Our senses tell us that the sun and stars disappear during the day, and that, too, is false. The senses tell us that a straight stick placed in water is crooked, which of course is false. Our senses tell us that when we look through green glass that everything is green. Personal peculiarities and the medium of communication are unconsciously transferred to objective reality and the senses may report errors as facts. Superstition is the child of the unregulated, uncriticised senses, of the power of the mind to project mental images with the appearance of reality. All scientific progress is due to the effort of reason, verified by experiment to get behind the testimony of the senses to the permanent principle in nature which alone is valid. Truth is demonstrated, not by sense impressions but by its relation to certain fundamental laws and principles already accepted as universal. The fact that the testimony of the senses makes immortality seem unreasonable is nothing to cause the slightest alarm or even surprise. The facts of the decay of the body issuing in death mightily affect the feelings. The senses take in all such impressions with almost abnormal intensity, and at first, imagination is a slave of sense. To be reasonable we must subject these impressions to the test of all sense impressions. We must bring reason and experiment to the problem of interpretation. The facts on the spiritual side are not obvious to the senses in the very nature of things. The facts of consciousness, man's capacity for God, and his personal yearnings are not matters for the physical senses but for thought. In reality the old solid world of the senses has long since disappeared. The senses tell of real, solid matter. Mill, with his keen intellect, made matter but the permanent possibility of sensation, Spencer made it the Unknowable Power, Berkeley made it Infinite Spirit, others make it the Infinite, the Eternal and Absolute. Matter, then force, then will, then Universal Will, such is the testimony given by those who have sought to find out just what the testimony given by the senses means when pushed into the region of intelligent principle. The tendency of reputable science is to see in matter but the garment of the Spirit. The passing from the material to the spiritual, from the seen to the unseen must be the supreme moment in the

birth of the soul into the larger life of reality. Bonar has beautifully balanced the testimony of the senses with the permanent reality of the unseen, spiritual kingdom yet to be revealed in its fulness:—

The river is not lost when o'er the rock
It pours its flood into the abyss below;
Its scattering force regathering from the shock,
It hastens onward with yet fuller flow.

The lily dies not when both flower and leaf
Fade, and are strewn upon the chill, sad ground;
Gone for shelter to its mother earth,
'Twill rise, re-bloom, and shed its fragrance round.

Thus nothing dies, or only dies to live—
Star, stream, sun, flower, the dew drop, and the gold;
Each goodly thing, instinct with buoyant hope,
Hastes to put on its purer, finer mould.

Short death and darkness, endless life and light,
Short dimming, endless shining in yon sphere,
Where all is incorruptible and pure,
The joy without the pain, the smile without the tear.

Third, there is the difficulty felt by many thoughtful people occasioned by certain conclusions arising in connection with the doctrine of evolution. This is the modern problem. The doctrine of evolution swept away many of the old landmarks in philosophy and theology. It gave a new psychology and a new history of the origin and development of human life in all its powers. Traditional positions were assailed and the doctrine of innate ideas received a severe shock. Newer voices claimed a hearing and once admitted and established within the inner courts of the soul they gave their testimony to the lowly origin of all things human. Dealing particularly with immortality the theory is to the effect that instead of it being an innate idea planted by God in the soul it is the result of the misreading of the dreams of primitive man. The theory tells us that primitive man in his dreams imagined he went forth to distant lands to war or the chase, and that on the strength of these dreams he assumed that he had a soul separate from the body. When he slept this soul went forth from his body. In the superstition which overshadowed primitive man he believed that at death this soul went out from the body to some far distant land to live anew. Such is the theory of the origin of the immortal hope. Modern Psychology gives an adequate explanation of the phenomena of dreams but it is universally admitted that the earliest forms of belief in the life beyond had a very lowly origin. Many claim that this admission is fatal to validity and reasonableness of the immortal hope.

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