

# The Provincial Wesleyan

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## LIFE AND IMMORTALITY.

A SERMON PREACHED AT WESLEY CHAPEL, HALIFAX, BY THE LATE REV. WM. BIRD.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.

1 Tim. i. 10.

Of all the egregious absurdities invented by wicked and foolish men, "Materialism" is the most contrary to reason, judgment and common sense.

It views man as merely a piece of machinery—a wonderfully intricate machine made, not by God, but by a mass of more intricate matter under certain circumstances, modifications or refinements. It denies the existence of a God, ignores a bountiful providence, and reduces every event in the world's history to the effects of chance. It bids men look on death as utter annihilation, and closes our prospects beyond the grave.

To any reasonable man the idea of annihilation is terrific. The soul cannot bear to think of it. It delights to dwell on its own immortality. But how shall we be assured that Materialism is false, and that the soul is immortal? Only by divine revelation.

1. THE IMPORTANCE OF LIFE AND IMMORTALITY BEING BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

1. Importance to Mankind. Many sinners are restrained and kept from the commission of some of the most terrible crimes by the secret dread of a day of judgment. In their widest excesses men are checked by the thought of an eternal state of existence. If they could shake off all their convictions and fears, and become materialists so far as to disregard all laws, both human and divine, this world would become a hell upon earth. But by the secret dread of a judgment which may come, many of the vilest sinners are restrained from those breaches of universal decorum which they would otherwise commit. Hence, by the truth of the soul's immortality being brought to light, men are constrained to cease off the commission of various crimes and seek their soul's salvation.

2. Its importance to Society. If this knowledge were not given on men's consciences, they would commit the most fearful enormities on each other, and our world would be too vile and sinful for men to live. Hellish passions would reign triumphantly in the hearts of men, and virtue would be pushed out of the world. Love, hope, faith, charity, honesty and goodness would be no more. Envy, malice, covetousness, lying, violence, murder and despair would take the place of all that is holy and good. Our world would be as vile and wretched as sin could make it if the fact of the soul's immortality could be denied, and the dread of a day of judgment could be removed from men's minds.

3. Its importance to the Christian. It is this knowledge which clears up the mystery surrounding the tomb, and robs death of its terrors. It is this which makes the grand distinction between the heathen and the heirs of the field, and exalts man to the highest rank in God's creation. Possessed of this knowledge, he looks beyond the bounds of time and space, and discovers a heaven of glory as his home, and immortal life as his portion.

II. THE UTTER INABILITY OF ANY HUMAN POWER OR THOUGHT TO DISCOVER AND DEMONSTRATE THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

Man cannot prove the soul's immortality, and he would never have known it at all if God had not revealed it. We have heard many attempts to prove it, and we will examine some of the arguments used, but [we shall find that men are not able to bring life and immortality to light without the Gospel. Let us look at the argument.]

1. From the Soul's Immateriality. The argument is stated thus: The immateriality of the soul may be inferred from the fact that it possesses consciousness and reason. Whatever form matter may take in masses or in atoms, no modification can give it that which is foreign to its nature; it must be without consciousness or reason, and like the marble statue, devoid of life. If the soul possesses consciousness and reason it cannot therefore be material. If we admit that the soul is immaterial, the argument states that it is not composed of parts. That which has no parts cannot be divisible. Hence it is immaterial, and therefore immortal. Our answer is: It follows from this reasoning that the soul cannot perish in the same manner as the body, but it might cease to exist from causes as still unknown. Cannot that God who made the soul, by one sovereignty act of his will annihilate it? This argument, therefore, fails to demonstrate the soul's immortality.

2. From the soul's repugnance to annihilation and its aspirations after immortality. The argument is well expressed by Addison in the *Quintus* lines:

It must be so—'Tis, then, reason's will—  
How when this passing hour, the fond desire,  
This longing after immortality,  
This wishing our selves dead and inward horror  
Of falling into nothing?—Why strikes the soul  
Back on her state of sense, as if to death?  
'Tis the Divinity, that leads us on;  
'Tis the Divinity, that points out a life here,  
And immunes eternity to man.

This argument, when stripped of its poetic garb, is fallacious, and will not bear the investigation of reason. It assumes that the soul must be immortal, because nothing but immortality will satisfy it. Do we always obtain what we desire? Are we always to be made possessed of an object because we shall never be satisfied without it? Certainly not. This argument, therefore, with all its tastefulness, fails to prove the soul's immortality.

3. From the soul's power of improvement, and its aspirations after a perfection of knowledge and virtue, which man's short stay on earth forbids him to attain. It is urged, from the gradual improvement and development of the mind from infancy to old age, and sometimes to the end of life, that the soul must therefore develop and improve for ever, and therefore must be immortal. But without revelation, we cannot be sure that this will go on for ever. Does not the body gradually increase in power and strength from infancy to the meridian of life, and then go back to second childhood and death? And may there not be a fixed period in the mind of God when the soul shall relax its powers, and drop and die too? This argument, like all the preceding, fails to demonstrate the immortality of the soul and

prove a future state of existence. Indeed, the ancient Greek philosophers spent all their strength and ingenuity in endeavouring to demonstrate this fact; and yet they could never say more than "We hope"—"We think"—"We desire" immortality. It was reserved for us who enjoy the light of divine revelation to sing—

We know, by faith, we know  
In this vile house of clay,  
This tabernacle, sink below  
In ruinous decay.

We have a house above,  
Not made with mortal hands;  
And firm as our Redeemer's love  
That heavenly fabric stands.

III. THE MEANS BY WHICH THE SOUL'S IMMORTALITY IS BROUGHT TO LIGHT.

It pleased God to reveal his will and purposes to us by his servants. Holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and thus God's Word came into our possession. All the writings of good men are not preserved to us. For instance, St. Jude speaks of the prophecies of Enoch, but they are lost to us. Immortality was brought to light gradually and by successive revelations. God's will was not given at first fully, but darkly hinted. Adam was assured that the "seed of the woman" should bruise the serpent's head. Abraham was permitted to see Christ's day by the eye of faith, and through Christ he had intimations of immortality. It was more fully revealed to Moses and the prophets, and they were permitted to behold Christ dying that they might live. It was more fully revealed by Christ and his apostles in later times, especially at the transfiguration, where Moses and Elias were seen of men. It was further revealed in the conversion of Saul, who saw his risen Saviour in heaven when the light from heaven shone round him and he fell to the earth. In these days of Gospel privileges we have a full and glorious view of immortality. We know that life and immortality are brought to light through the Gospel, and that Jesus Christ is the author of our immortality. Thus by successive revelations, at different periods of the world's history, God has been pleased to make known this great and glorious fact, which finite minds could never discover.

IV. THE USES WE ARE TO MAKE OF THIS FACT.

1. We are to seek consolation from it in affliction and in the hour of death. Materialists may pray as they please about "bowing to the stern laws of nature," and "facing the grave manfully," but we can never gain any comfort from the prospect of annihilation. We turn in disgust from their dark and gloomy view of the grave, and lift our eyes of faith to a risen Saviour in heaven. We regard Jesus as the pledge of immortality. He passed through death, burst the barriers of the tomb, led captivity captive; and because He has triumphed, we shall triumph; because He lives, we shall live also. It is this that throws a light around the portals of the grave, and makes the Christian sometimes desire to enter it that he may pass through death triumphant to his home.

2. We ought to learn that the body will be immortal after its resurrection. Elias on the Mount of Transfiguration had his body with him. Our bodies shall be fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body. I am not going to enter now into materialist and infidel objections about the impossibility of a resurrection. You must believe it possible, if you believe that nothing is too hard for God.

3. Learn the great importance of attending first to the soul's eternal interests. If the soul be immortal, and our bodies be but mortal, it is evident that that which is of eternal importance ought to be attended to first. The first duty of life is to secure your soul's salvation. I have often marvelled at the short-sightedness and stupidity of those who devote all their attention to the adorning and ornamenting of their bodies—who please and pamper themselves by fine dress and costly food, while their souls are uncared for and neglected. I remember a story that was told me many years ago, and I will tell it you. There was one Christopher Smart, who used to go about the streets of London with a melancholy appearance, and a keel down on a wisp of straw, and pray in the streets. Somebody told Dr. Johnson about the man, and asked the doctor if he did not think that Smart was insane. The doctor replied: "It is better to pray as Smart does than not to pray at all; but there are so many who never pray at all, that their senses are never questioned."

O MAN OF GOD!  
Is it a time to sit at ease,  
When God in the world is moving;  
When he calls his Witnesses,  
And looks for the proof of our loving?  
Shall we sit still when he calls to rise  
With divine resources?  
When earth is ringing with clamorous cries,  
And Hell is ranging its forces.

Heirs of the truth they held of old,  
The truth for which men were martyrs,  
We lack the love that made them bold  
Stronger than fires and waters.  
Brave hearts we lack, that yearn and long,  
Touched with diviner feeling;  
The simple faith that made weak men strong,  
True to their work and willing.

O for the hearts that break and burn,  
O for the words that are open and shameless;  
O for the souls that weep with woe,  
For secret things that are nameless!  
Shall it be said to us "Well done!"  
Shall we join in the heavenly halting,  
When souls perchance that we might have won  
Pass to the west and the waiting?

Good that we warn, and pray, and preach,  
Standing in holy places;  
But in the dark homes we never reach  
Men die with their stony faces.  
Die with a dull despairing moan,  
Outcasts from God's salvation;  
Men of our flesh, and blood and bone,  
Purchase of Jesus's passion!

True, we say, but our hands are full,  
Full of our business and pleasure;

And the cry of these souls comes faint and dull  
To us who have little leisure;  
But God said, He will give to all  
The just reward of our doing;  
And the barren tree shall surely fall,  
And we too to the wreck and ruin.

H. HOGG,  
Nottingham, New Year's Day, 1872.

(From the Christian Guardian).

## EDUCATION OF MINISTERS.

As long as the work of the Christian minister is deemed important, the education of candidates for that work must be regarded as a subject of great practical interest to every branch of the church. Dr. Warren's article in the last *Methodist Quarterly Review* on the Education of Ministers in the Methodist Church, of which we spoke last week, contains many valuable practical suggestions; some of which are applicable to Canada as well as to the United States. He regards the Methodist Church of the past, as a grand theological seminary for the training of ministers; but thinks that as applicable to Canada as well as to the United States. He regards the Methodist Church of the past, as a grand theological seminary for the training of ministers; but thinks that as applicable to Canada as well as to the United States.

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