

LIFE BEYOND THE GRAVE

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WE look at the bloom of youth with interest, yet with pity; and the more graceful and sweet it is, with pity so much the more; for, whatever be its excellence and its glory, soon it begins to be deformed and dishonored by the very force of its living on. It grows into exhaustion and collapse, till at length it crumbles into that dust out of which it was originally taken." How often has this evident thought, sobering indeed, come to us, especially at this season of the year when the mortality of nature is showing its signs all about us! But is this death the end or only the commencement of another life for man? "To be or not to be" has been the speculation of each and every thinking man from the earliest days. A natural query—since on its solution must depend man's philosophy of life, and on its alternatives are built all religions.

That man's line of conduct regarding himself and his fellow-man has to be based on the yes or no to this question is quite patent. For, if nothing remains for man after death, he will so plan his course of action that when the earth embraces his stiff form, each desire will have been satisfied. And all this talk that, despite the emptiness outside this life, man should live as if there were realities beyond, cannot have a lasting or convincing appeal to him. "Virtue is its own reward" may sound pleasing and have a philosophic tang, but practically, unless based on firm truths, it is meaningless. And to set up foundationless ideals that call for the sacrifice of the most desirable things, for suffering and anguish oftentimes almost unbearable, is not, to anyone burdened with the insistent demands of a pleasure-loving, sensual and selfish nature, good philosophy. When Heaven and Hell are branded as fairy tales and when man is asked to act as if they really existed, we have a strange paradox. If there be no God, if no account is to be rendered for the deeds done here, if the last breath is an eternal amen to all life, then the only consistent course that man can follow is to satisfy every whim and fancy. He should gain all the advantages for each day, regardless of the morrow, since the grim reaper makes no distinctions and comes like a thief in the night. The slogans, "for the common good," "humanitarianism," and

all glorifications of society, ultimately depend on the individual's arbitrary wishes. Without Heaven and Hell, morality, charity and cooperation are meaningless; licentiousness and the superman idea must hold first place.

Such is man's philosophy, if there be no future life. But, if man lives on beyond the grave, what then is his code of action? It will be the same, unless the life to come is regulated by an all-wise, all-just, all-provident God. That the existence of a Supreme Being, endowed with these qualities, is the only thing that can call forth from man love, honor and sacrifice, becomes evident from a consideration of all other conceptions of this Supreme Being and of the state beyond the grave.

These other attitudes about God and Heaven may be summed up as follows. Some say that God is not at all interested in the affairs of this life. Others look upon Him as one Who will only punish. Still others view Him as too good to inflict punishment for wrongs done by man. Heaven, for some, is a mere succession of lives; sometimes as a brute animal, again as a plant, or as another person. Many hold that it is a place from which the souls can pass at the beck and call of mediums or apparatus. Such a God or such a Heaven, however, cannot satisfy man or evoke his noblest efforts. Why strive to show reverence and honor to a God Who is not interested in our actions? Why worship a God Who will condemn us even if we do good; or, on the other hand, Who will be merciful no matter how wicked a life we lead? Only a fickle Divinity would make us pass through a span of lives varying from that of a tree or a dog to that of a sinner or a Saint. These may be punishments, but why should this Deity insult the dignity of man by changing his soul into that of a beast, or, worse still, into that of a senseless tree? Or why should He mock His own honor by submitting to all manner of humiliations from man, the handiwork of His creation? For that is what this succession of lives really means. Do what I please in this life for I shall have opportunities to make amends in the lives to come.

So far in this summary of opinions about a future life we have endeavored to show, from the nature of man, the desirability of a life beyond the grave that will preserve the notion of a personal and just God; a God Who will recompense the beneficent acts done with a pure motive and avenge the evil done to Him directly or to His creatures. But, it may be objected, mere desirability does not prove the existence of a God such as we postulate, or of a free will and an immortal soul in man. And so we proceed to the positive evidence supporting eternal verities. Does there exist a God, all-perfect; is

the will free, and is the soul immortal? If so, Heaven and Hell follow as logical sequences.

In regard to the existence of God, let us consider, first the moral argument drawn from the common consent of nations and peoples. In all ages and among all peoples has existed the idea of a Being that controls the destinies of this world, and Whose wrath is visited on the evildoer unless appeased by good works. If even barbarian tribes, without a common language and means of communication, have held simultaneously these propositions, how are we to account for their origin? To say that they originated as myths and were disseminated gradually among the various peoples, does not answer the question as to how this belief originated with the first people. This is not a demonstrative and conclusive argument for the existence of God, or the existence of Heaven and Hell, yet it carries some weight. We shall proceed, therefore, to the real demonstration.

The existence of a God Whose nature embraces all the attributes usually associated with Divine Nature has been a mooted question; but understanding the meaning of the axiom, "Nothing passes from potentiality into actuality unless by the intervention of a being in actuality," leads to a realization of the existence of God. The notion of potentiality is seen clearly in a ball resting on the top of a hill. The ball is said to be in potentiality to roll; but until something or some one disturbs it, it will remain there. When the ball, moved by some agent, begins to roll down the hill, it is said to be actually rolling. But how did the agent pass from potentiality into actuality? Something in turn had to reduce it to actuality; and so we must go back until we reach an agent that is always in actuality. The illustration is clearer if we take the moving of a book. The hand moves the book, but first the muscles had to move the hand, while the muscles were moved by the will. We have to push the series farther and bring the mover of the will into the solution, since the will cannot reduce itself from potentiality to actuality. Hence we must come to something which of its very nature is always actual. And this being must be pure actuality without any potentiality, otherwise there would be no motion at all, since the last motion depends on the preceding, and so on to the first. It follows as a consequence that this being embraces in its nature all perfections; for to say that it is perfect only in the order of actuality is equivalent to saying that it is potential by nature and actual by nature, which is a contradiction. Included in these perfections is that of justice. Therefore, if there exists another being capable of pleasing or displeasing this Supreme Being, the latter must reward the creature or punish him according to his works.

This capability to please or displease depends on the hypothesis that man has some faculty by which he is master over his actions, for a just God will not hold him responsible for that which he cannot avoid doing. And this brings us to the demonstration of the existence of a free will in man. Free will is the power to choose to do or not do something, to do this or that thing. It is not the power to do opposing things simultaneously—for example, to sit and to stand at the same time; nor does it consist essentially in the power to sin, which is an imperfection of the will. That the will is free, our consciousness informs us. Each one of us realizes this from the mere consideration of our daily actions. But the truth becomes clearer from the study of the nature of the will. The will is a blind power and depends on the intellect for the proposal of its object. But the intellect cannot force the will to act. The intellect can only decide that this particular thing may be willed, inasmuch as it is a good, or that it need not be willed since it is not the universal good. And since the will is necessitated only by the universal good, it is determined by neither one of these goods but is free to accept one of them or reject both. The illustration of this may be seen in the case of a man who decides to buy a suit. He goes into the store and the salesman shows him several. He is free to pick one or ask to see others, and even after looking at a large variety, he can leave without buying. And so, in a word, the will is really free.

Having established the existence of a free will that can merit the reward or punishment of God by its free acts, it remains to demonstrate that the soul survives this thing we call death and that it is immortal. The root of the immortality or incorruptibility of the soul is its spirituality. For, if the soul is spiritual, then it is independent of matter, as that is what spiritual means; and the decay and corruption of the body leave the soul untouched. As a spirited faculty cannot inhere in a material subject, by proving that the soul's faculties are spiritual, we prove the same for the soul itself. Thought and volition alike declare the immateriality of the intellect and the will. We think of God as a Being all-free from matter; we define things in general terms; we speak of life, man, book and other universal objects. Yet, looking around us, we see with our sense no such thing as God; we perceive that everything is contingent, doomed to pass away, and singular. Therefore, unless we admit some faculty capable of soaring above the material, singular, contingent things of this world, and of seeing the immaterial universal and necessary in them, how are we to account for these concepts? Surely not through any material faculty; for no monkey ever wrote a poem and no horse

ever invented the marvellous instruments of the operating table. "No effect can be greater than its cause," is an axiom that is self-evident. Hence, a being that can conceive universal necessary ideas, while the things of his senses are only singular and passing—in fine, material—must have a faculty in his make-up that is above the material. And from the existence of this spiritual faculty to that of a spiritual, and therefore, immortal soul is but a step. For a spiritual faculty must have its repose in a spiritual substance, which substance is called the soul.

Since there exists a Supreme Being all-perfect, which we call God, and man spiritual in soul and free in will, the future life falls into two ultimate categories, Heaven and Hell. To one of these, as his final abode, man will be consigned. If he recognizes by his actions the inescapable claim that God has on the worship and obedience of his creature, man, Heaven will be his reward. But, if willfully and deliberately, he is disobedient to this obligation to the end, Hell alone remains for him.

HIS CHOICE

The uncreated Architect,
The Builder of the skies,
Has planned Himself a "stable-home"
And in a manger lies!