

## THE PROBLEM OF PERSONAL IMMORTALITY

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THE belief in immortality reflects in its development the most different phases and the most manifold turning points in the history of mankind. Often denied and combated, often materialized and polluted, it is yet indestructable like the spirituality of mankind itself. It always arises again with new life when a generation such as ours begins to turn away from the brutal reality and listens to the voices which penetrate from the innermost soul. The monstrous murder of the world war, the spendthrift policy which all the nations partaking in it had to commit in real or imaginary necessity of defence of their existence, and carried on at the expense of their most precious possession, their youth, has brought out with a sort of super-compensation the incomparable value of man's soul. The ever-present consciousness of death laying in wait brought forth in the best and most mature intellects the certainty of a higher and infinite destination, a destination transcending the bounds of life. The re-awakening of idealistic and personalistic thought, which had already started before the war, was here completed in an unforeseen way: namely, in the sense of the indestructible final substance, the soul-force acting according to its own constant life-laws. To the unconditionally active soul, following impulses absolutely its own, with its infinite hunger for full and most personal development, for further extension, for eternal growth and continuous refinement, the thought of an end is inconceivable, just as to a logic schooled in the world of the senses the thought of immortality is indemonstrable. Nevertheless, with a deeper and closer exposition of this series of thoughts, the senses enter into their rights again; just as no religious experience can exist or manifest itself without symbols, so must every thought of the immortality of the soul borrow its colors from the colored reality, even if they be the most delicate and least obtruding tones and shades. And as long as we remember this necessity as

such, and also incorporate into our ideas of the consciousness how inadequate all these indispensable symbols are, there is nothing to object to in their use; only with such deductions and limitations can man experience and enjoy in the highest sense that which is more than human. But if we discard all conceptions of a heavenly landscape, of a boundless life in aesthetically pleasing and ethically elevating forms, if we remove all earthborn ideal conceptions from our picture of the beyond, retaining them at most as necessary help for our concept, but for no more, there remains a question which from earliest memory has occupied man again and again and which at times stirred the best to their very depth. The question is: Shall we see each other again in the beyond? Is that, too, only an earthborn concept, to be discarded critically; or is there at least the *possibility* of reality, with which we may anyhow reckon, and which we may unite with the innermost kernel of our thoughts of immortality. Perhaps a few words to clarify this question may not be out of place.

First of all, one point must be settled: What of us survives? Certainly not the body, without which we can conceive of no intellectual life; not any soul life based on our experiences and on the peculiar construction of our soul. The expression of such soul life need not, however, be identical in essence with what we clearly feel as corporeal. Just as we decline every materialism, so we refuse to accept every theosophical, esoteric teaching of the ethereal body, in which we can only see a sublimated form of materialism. What is the entelechy in the sense of Goethe? It is the constructive principle of spiritual existence. It is the personal setting of an aim to our life process which by no means need be defined in a material sense, but may be designated as a directive tendency, as the inclination to self-development, to intensification of being, or to the calm enjoying of self in the fullness of life or in intellectual enlightenment—but which is still further characterized by the selection of the sensuous which it draws into itself, as well as by the individual tempo and rhythm of its life processes. That the latter forms of manifestation are given to us by existing earth conditions is undeniable: but we are much too ready to regard these somewhat accidental conditions as equally necessary and eternal with the essential traits, because we neither have nor can have any experience whatever of the behavior of personality under quite different and remote conditions. Nevertheless not the mystic alone, but every man with any depth has at times the irrepressible need to think of his ego as freed from all earthly ties, conditions, and definitions; and to listen

to the innermost driving force of his soul. But it is that innermost soul alone which the spiritual man can, and wants, to think immortal and incorruptible. Who would want to drag through all eternity these earth conditions, the slender sensory satisfactions of which he has by unspeakable tortures and humiliations to purchase daily. Thus for us the question arises: does being with those "nearest" to us, using the word in its highest and most daring sense, belong to the externals; or does it touch anywhere the core of our personality? This can only be decided separately in each case. We come into contact with a countless number of persons in the course of a year without being fundamentally moved; there may even be people who are quite unreceptive to any influence from other personalities; there are others who are "hungry for men" (*Menschenhungrig*) but who consider their neighbors as substance, or as an object for a certain aesthetic pleasure, perhaps also for moral judgment if not for blatant self-interest. Of all this, we do not speak here. All these types of people do not interpenetrate, although a pure aesthetic devotion may enjoy the manifestation of an inner power in some mode of deeper vision. But a real understanding of others we only get through the medium of "love," by apparently extinguishing our own ego, and by thinking ourselves into the soul of the other, which now becomes our own soul. The repression, and still less the extinction, of our own personality is only apparent: there is merely a change of aim in the soul's energies, perhaps for a shorter, perhaps for a longer time. In all cases, the living thing which by love we have acquired, will become an integral part of our personality; it will become one of the deciding factors in the force of our soul and as such will act even when the bearer of this force has been lost to our bodily eyes, and even when we no longer think of him. As the energies and directions of force inherited from our father's and mother's side continue to act in us, without our being conscious of them in most cases, so also with the influences of those personalities whom we have conquered through love. But we especially treasure and cleave to these influences because we attach to them a value which we have experienced, and which life cannot take away from us. For, in love, only that aspect of the loved one continues to live in us which was of special value for us: that by which we felt intensified and deepened. And as we are conscious of this action we retain a livelier and more precious picture of the loved one than even his bodily presence or most effective portrait could give us. This is not a case of mere remembrance of loving thought; it is an

effect of the personal life of the other in us, and of our personal life in him. Certainly it is not easy for us to see quite clearly into these inner processes because of the duality of our nature. In other words, being spiritual as well as sensuous, we are bound to the corporal phenomenon, and by association the outward phenomena always appear before us with the inner being in order to react again on our sense-nature. Still, from what has been said already, it becomes clear to us that this way of seeing is only the necessary outcome of the connection of our spiritual principle with matter and with the relations of the world of experience. Thus it begins to dawn on us that it might also be otherwise; that the death of the other cannot hinder and interrupt this most tender, intimate intercourse of the soul. Often enough, it happens that the corporeal, final separation makes the relation of the living with the dead friend only purer and deeper. But as soon as the continued existence of the proper spiritual man is assured, we shall be of firm faith that everything which we grasped in love follows us into a far future, in a lasting communion, even when every remembrance of one's own and of the others "empirical individuality" has vanished. What has been acquired in love belongs to the active and moulding forces of the entelechy; and in the beyond a Faust cannot be without Gretchen just as she will be drawn with magic force to her lover. We are mistaken when we believe that such a spiritual union and acting together gives no satisfaction, that it cannot replace a full union in an earthly sense. Here again our values are based on our earthly position which does not hold good for eternal life. In the deepest recesses of our personality, we do not value in our friend and our lover that which comes near to us in everyday life through the senses, but the soul which is active in all these things and cannot be grasped from without. This central core can become our sure property and the "meeting in eternity" signifies only the purest, closest, indestructible community, the glory of which we can only conceive in rare moments of enlightened vision.

In any case there is no other means given us to secure the lasting union with the beloved one than to love with our whole soul, to love in such a way that we appear no longer to live our life for ourselves but in heartiest wooing of the other soul. And if we succeed in kindling in that other soul an equal love, and an equal honest need for our personality, then our friend remains as closely tied to us as we to him, whether he believes in immortality and a meeting after death or not, and whatever his conception of such a meeting may be.