

NON OMNIS MORIAR.

PROBABILITIES OF AN AFTER LIFE.

BY F. W. ORDE WARD.

WE see a vision of personal immortality objectified in the continuation of the human race; we know there was a paleolithic man ages ago, and perhaps before him the colithic man ages and ages ago. Nor indeed does any assignable limit, within millions of years, seem possible. There appears to be no reason why there should be a final end now or in the ages to come. We existed almost from the beginning of time in the ancestral germ-plasm of infinitely remote but related predecessors, and we perpetuate ourselves, so to speak, in our children and in their descendants as well as in the race. We belong indissolubly to each other by right of succession. The individual cannot help identifying himself with the race. This seem practically immortal and therefore why are not we ourselves? We admit a subjective futurity for all, in memory, in love, in honor, and in the minds of others. The best part of us, our spiritual life, sows itself, takes root, flowers, and bears fruit in endless following generations. Our work endures, builded into the work of others and confederate with theirs and our successors. It carries on the personal note into the impersonal inheritance. We, who perish in our mortal part, transmit nevertheless out of the time process our distinctive features into the life process, the cosmic process, the eternal process. We belong ethically, through the passing on of undying truths and virtues, our moral and religious excellences, our spiritual expansion and experience, to another world or over-world which recognizes no death. We feel it impossible to believe that the indomitable soul with its appetite for infinity, its craving for the universal, its heavenly hunger, its divine discontent, can pass away like the outworn flesh or a crumbling clod. If the so-called dead body exists and

must exist forever, though in different forms, and becomes part of new incarnations and enters into new and countless complexes, how shall the highest part of us (the essence and not the accident) with such noble qualities and aspirations, disappear into absolute nothingness and become less than the very dust beneath our feet? Besides, the holotelic impulse, the effort of every individual thing to fulfil and complete itself, remains otherwise utterly and entirely unaccountable. Consciously or unconsciously, life seeks for a spiritual totality, a rounding off of itself never quite finished here, but yielding inextinguishable references to a future and a hope in some kind of vaster otherness beyond.

“Thou wilt not leave us in the dust;
Thou madest man, he knows not why;
He thinks, he was not made to die;
And Thou hast made him—Thou art just.”

Young children cannot understand death, it is more than difficult, impracticable to explain it to them. They know better, being sure of themselves and of life. But not only so, they also bring with them at birth into the world, something more than knowledge, an instinctive assurance of greatness and persistency, which dies in them very hard, if it ever dies at all. Before the stupid machinery of an intelligent education has commenced, they feel themselves bigger and better than they seem. They possess a mystical endowment which declines to be explained away. Children have these intuitions which they may be unable to express or are afraid to talk about, but still they cherish them among their most sacred and private treasures. It often appears to them, not from a diseased egotism or megalomania but from a healthy conviction, that they deserve a larger medium and are members of a regal family, and the earth is too small for them. They inherit as by some heavenly right royal instincts, which all too soon prove incommensurable with a humble lot. It is not so much recollection, though it may sometimes partake of this, as a deliberate and ultimate faith, which asks no reason and lies beyond the necessity of demonstration. It operates as one with life's outfit, its original stock of equipment.

Wordsworth in his magnificent ode “the high-water mark of English literature” as Emerson justly called it, has given for all time the final expression to this strange and beautiful consciousness. The child, of whom no poet has ever spoken so adequately and truly as Wordsworth, stands nearer to the fountainhead of life. What we adults only think or hope or guess or vainly desire, he is.

Thought and being with him are one. He expects, he needs not proof, just because he sees and knows. At first, at once, he does not enter the time process which enslaves the older, but he dwells in the life process, among the centralities and essentials and truths and fundamentals. He is united to reality. So that doubts and fears and misgivings and hesitations lie outside this vision, as a *terra incognita*. The recognition of death with its accompanying dread does not occur to him. If presented it remains unintelligible. Death does not concern him, because he stands at present on a different plane, on the level of immediate knowledge. Poets and artists, and those we call prophets, never can altogether lose this intimate assurance of immortality. And when the end of their existence in the time-process does arrive, they feel like Frederic Myers, who hailed the event with relief and pleasure as the *exeat* of the schoolboy who is only going home, and knows that the shadow does not mean either extinction or severance but simply a closer spiritual union.

Whatever the Hebrews may have thought of immortality, it seems certain that after the exile, and most of the Psalms certainly seem post-exilic, they must have transferred to some extent the continuance of the nation to the continuance of the individual, as the later prophets probably did. And a naive childlike faith begins to show itself in these. At any rate in the Psalms we frequently find "soul" and "glory" employed as convertible or synonymous expressions. They had definitely realized that the "soul" of man was indeed the chief "glory" of man. And to children, at the outset dwelling in a sphere not in time or space, all things look *sub specie aeternitatis*. They inhabit for a while Spinoza's spiritual universe. The poor adult has to die, often a thousand deaths in a sense, before he can be *in aeternum renatus*, like the votary of Mithras. But the child begins in the life with which we end.

The notion of personal continuity seems to have held good in most people, and even some of the most degraded savages. They all felt that the death and disintegration of the body had little to do with the real life and effected no interruption. The deceased were supposed to go on with their earthly pursuits, though in an invisible world, but a world underlying and enfolding and embracing this. "Not to know how a thing can be, is no disproof that the thing must be and is." In a world of animism, which goes back as far as the earliest records and endures still and can never pass away, it was far easier to believe in the perpetuation of the individual than in his annihilation. The primitive instincts, like the instincts

in the lower animals, seem virtually infallible. Even the cave-man probably said to himself, though not in so many words, *non omnis moriar*, I shall not altogether die. Besides, long before, the idea (so simple now) of individuality, when the whole tribe was a single organism affected by the action of every member and sinning and suffering with every member, each constituent unit sharing in the solidarity of the tribe, while at death passing out of sight, enjoyed still the existence of the tribe and lived on in that. The race was immortal, and therefore the individual.

It may be, in spite of appearances to the contrary and the fancies of poets often pessimistic with a view to excite pity and stir the emotions, that the belief in immortality was so universal and profound a conviction that it was taken for granted and rarely if ever proclaimed as a fact. *I shall not die but live*. Love has given the lie to extinction. Death was often rather a sleep than an end. In fact the idea of a terminus seems absolutely foreign to the primitive mind, when survivors gave food to the departed and buried tools and weapons and wives, slaves and animals with them. Persistency seemed far less difficult to accept, confronted as the aborigines were with birth upon birth in their own families and in nature. "Everything has in itself a striving to preserve its own condition and to improve itself." The stupid and most unobservant, the least curious spectator of life, did not recognize death so much as an increasing purpose, a process of eternal creation, an everlasting epigenesis.

Finality is a purely modern conception, and the troglodyte would never have exclaimed with Horace *Debemur morti nos nostraque*, we and ours are doomed to death. This was but one of the affectations of poetry, the disease of a decadent civilization, working in the shades and backgrounds of the picture. As a matter of fact, if in varying degrees, every one and no doubt Horace himself followed Aristotle's advice, *ἀθαρτίζειν ὡς ἐδέχεται*, practised immortality in so far as it was possible. The two dominant forces in human nature have ever been faith and love, and these must have made short work of doubt or fear. And the fact that speculations on the soul and on a future state have always been subjects dear to philosophers proves that the belief in immortality must have been a very general persuasion. Historically the Roman Catholic Church dates from the Council of Trent, 1542 to 1563. But faith in survival after death remains undated and dateless, like Browning's poetry, which is for no particular period but for all time. Men noticed from the very first, without philosophizing, that there

were no breaks or stoppages in nature, for in spite of checks and catastrophes here and there and now and then and indeed everywhere, things went on as usual. The spirit of the departed found familiar work to do in the beyond, and never lost its particular personality. Cessation of activity was not real but only apparent, and visibility and tangibility were but the least portions of the individual. The more the soul changed in its external form, the more was it the same thing.

From the beginning man conceived himself to be free of two worlds, the seen and the unseen. His gods, his ancestors and others inhabited the last and he the first, but the two overlapt and were conterminous. In sleep and dreams he crossed the borders, which united rather than divided, while the denizens of the unseen were ever able to cross over and frequently did, taking as they did, still a keen interest and energetic part in earth's existence. Peoples of the very lowest grade in culture, nevertheless present to the traveler ideas of personal and lofty gods. And the Omaha, according to Miss Fletcher, adore their deity in contemplation. The closed systems of the present day would have had no meaning to the paleolithic men, and possess none now for the dullest peasant of the dullest nation on the earth, who with all his ignorance knows he will live for ever, and allows no final end in his limited vocabulary.

Yes, we all pass but we none of us perish or can perish. *Tout lasse, tout casse, tout passe, mais tout renait.* Transformation meets us everywhere, but an ultimate terminus nowhere. If the simplest and oldest organisms, that propagated and propagate themselves by fission or gemmation, by constant division and sub-division or by throwing off buds, are practically immortal, there should surely be some permanent element in the higher and more complex organisms that cannot die. Whether the trend be anabolic or catabolic, upward or downward, we discover no annihilation, and no true finality. Something survives, persists, endures, marching on like John Brown's soul.

Man would never be able to look beyond, unless he was intended to live beyond. The cosmic sense, which empowers us to measure and judge and rise above the world in which we live, and despise mere material barriers, the Christ sense which impels us to sacrifice ourselves for others, and the sense of responsibility which assures us of a personal account to be asked and given, and the sense of solidarity which identifies every man with every other man, all these afford accumulated evidences and arguments, that,

when the body returns to its elements, the spirit does not and cannot die. We dare not assert quite as much as Eckhart, "I am as necessary to God, as God is necessary to me," though this involves an important and vital truth, as we shall presently see. But, whatever our philosophy of life may be, or our theology, it seems clear that a permanent and persistent factor in man, a spiritual principle, has always been the belief of the race, and such an intuition must be infallible, because error always was and will be particular and not universal.

We have seen before, and said already, that the individual at first, while by no means non-existent though far from autonomous, was merged in his society. The same appears to have held true even of words, for some authorities think that the sentence preceded the word and the word at first enjoyed no independent life. And so when we examine writing in early manuscripts we find no punctuations and no divisions. But, inasmuch as any given society was believed by the primitive mind to be a portion of reality, every member consciously or subconsciously participated in it. For the underlying fact in race or individual cannot but be reality and reality alone which persists. The tendency of metaphysic was ever to eliminate, so to speak, the copula and to enrich the predicate. All great truths are expressions of new predicates. Every advance in life is a fresh predicate. Each added epigenesis means the very same thing, and we feel, however crowded our existence may happen to be, it is not exhausted and our predicates are not properly or fully quantified. At death (so called) the analytic and synthetic sides of life merge in something higher, and we know we stand in the presence of a new predicate.

Everything, act or word, involves a judgment, and what is our earthly lot or time but a series of judgments connected and expanding and aspiring. Death signifies not even a comma, much less a full stop. To live is to judge, and therefore to claim our individual inheritance of divinity. If we read our Old Testament carefully, we shall find that Sheol or Hades does not necessarily mean a fixed and permanent state, but only a purgatorial period or halting place. Between the lines of all the old sacred books, we discern the holotelic craving, the sense of continued life, which has so much more to know and to be. We realize, the dullest of Englishmen and even the man in the street, our imperfection, that our works constitute at the best and utmost but fragments of some vaster totality. The present life, with its limited outlook and prison windows, seems but an insignificant part of us, while the

best and greater portion of us lies uninvested and unemployed, but nevertheless capable with adequate opportunities of almost infinite enlargement. On the earthly, temporal, human, mortal plane, we have such a mean environment. With a wider field of energy the dormant passive potentialities of reaction, splendid faculties at present lying idle and going to waste, would respond and correspond richly to the spiritual medium in which we repose submerged and helpless. The refusal so common to accept final defeat, and our painful pressing hourly awareness of incompleteness, form a presumption better than all the academic arguments in the world, that we are immortal. *Ubi imperfectio ibi aeternitas futura*—where imperfection resides, there have we the promise and expectation of eternal life. The ulterior relation, the telotelic reference, involve unexhausted and inexhaustible possibilities—*Tendentisque manus ripae ulterioris amore*. It is not so much the lack of balance or desire for compensation, as the sense of a scientific expression of every individual ego.

Omnia in aeternum exeunt—all things, we cannot help noticing, seem to run out far beyond us into the eternal and the infinite and invisible. Even when we knock against an *impasse* or *cul de sac*, we feel certain of an opening somewhere, at the “back o’ Beyant.” Relations exist, doors unclose, though we do not perceive them, for those who possess the secret, the password. And we are conscious at heart that we all ourselves, if not until the end of all, shall know at last the magical formula or faith, the “Open Sesame.” Reality may have as many coats as we choose to reckon, but underneath all is a revelation. The provoking plus met at every turn, the mysterious margin, come as challenges to the soul, that it may claim its inheritance, its birthright in God himself and in nothing less than this or short of him. The dreams of yesterday constitute the ordinary facts and common property of to-day, and the visions, the impossibilities of to-day will make to-morrow’s outfit. All these incessant happenings should encourage us to hope for everything. All things are possible to faith and we can never ask or expect too much.

“We are coming to a King,
Large petitions let us bring.”

This couplet from the dear old hymn embodies the very essence of the matter. “Blessed are they that expect nothing for they shall not be disappointed”—such is the creed of cowards and slaves. The usual Hebrew greeting, *Marhaba*, may you have enlargement, is

singularly suggestive. For this Pariah race, this crucified people, has never doubted its greatness, or its ultimate victory. Salvation for their nation meant enlargement. And their motto might have been

“Hope springs eternal in the human breast,”

had it not actually been assurance. And the everlasting Jew may well encourage us to faith in the future and the survival of personality. The multiplying and widening avenues of life, in socializing the individual and giving the part or member the accumulated strength of the whole and the cosmopolitan feelings of our time, all combine to suggest that the immensely enlarged ego of this age can have no assignable limit to existence. Whatever we do or say now, wherever we go, we meet liberation of new energies, the unclosing of new doors into the infinite. Man, each man, is not so much being socialized as universalized. Everything, every person, appears broadening out. We say, or said, that two and two made four. But the newer mathematics, that sometimes shows the part to be as big as, or even bigger than, the whole, would not object to the sum of $2+2=4$ plus. We encounter everywhere the little more, the particular result *and*. So with us, we are mortal *and*. The mortality does not prove an exhaustive account of human greatness. He wants more, and he would not be autotelic if he were not also heterotelic, and therefore he is more. And as every day we are dying and then rising again, dying to a lower life and rising to a loftier, we do not doubt for a moment that the process we call death must be a step upward and not a step downward, and is but a small part of the eternal progress in which we realize ourselves and individuate ourselves more and more.