The New Thought of Immortality

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Read and present to your neighbor.

"He hath brought life and immortality to light."
II Tim. ii., 10.

These words do not mean, as our fathers interpreted them, that Jesus brought the fact of immortality to light—that he for the first time made it clear to men. Our later knowledge of ancient religion makes it indisputable that the fact of immortality was discerned, more or less clearly, ages before Jesus, among all peoples. It never has been brought more clearly into light than in ancient Egypt. What Jesus did was to bring the fact of immortality into a clearer light than that which Israel knew, in its later belief borrowed from Persia, or than that which Greece knew, in the theorizings of Plato, or than that which rose above most peoples, through his return from the spirit-sphere; to give the one historic attestation of life beyond the grave which has sufficed men for these centuries, as the foundation of their faith; and then to bring the nature of immortality into fuller light. He brought the fact of intercommunion between the seen and the unseen worlds out into a light such as had never risen upon this truth before.

From the time of Jesus to our own day, there has been little or no development in men's faith concerning immortality. The fact of immortality has not grown any more luminous, neither has its nature grown any more intelligible. It is a curious fact, this, that for wellnigh eighteen centuries there has been practically no development in the doctrine of the hereafter. The fact is indisputable. Down to the beginning of our own century men thought concerning immortality just as their fathers had thought, in each preceding century, up to the age of Jesus. You have but to analyze the hymns, the sermons, the theological and religious treatises of Christendom, in the first half of the nineteenth century, to find that they repeated the ideas that were current in every earlier age of Christianity. For nearly eighteen centuries there had been no progress whatever in the thought of immortality.

The first really new conception of the character of immortality given to the world for eighteen centuries came through the great savant and philosopher and theologian of Sweden—Emanuel Swedenborg, who died in 1772. Whatever the nature of the source of his thoughts, its character was revolutionary. He reconstructed the whole idea of the hereafter. For the first time in eighteen centuries—one might almost say for the first time in the history of humanity—it took on sane and sensible forms, and became rational and conceivable, natural and necessary.

Swedenborg's thought has been slowly leavening the great churches of Christianity in the Western world; and, under its influence, the traditional conception of immortality has been unconsciously changing. A veritable new growth is spreading before our eyes to-day—a growth entirely unparalleled in the history of Christianity.

This new thought of immortality has been fed by the remarkable movement of the latter part of our century known as Spiritualism. Whatever our judgment of the nature of the sources of the ideas that are current in Spiritualism, those ideas themselves are remarkable. There is a certain underlying unity among all spiritualistic communications concerning the hereafter. This general body of thought strangely parallels the thought of Swedenborg. Whether drawn unconsciously from him, or whether it be, as its followers believe, the result of actual communications from the unseen world—the fact remains that the nature and character of
the hereafter, as outlined through mediums, strangely confirm the visions of immortality that came through Swedenborg.

Under this double influence, the traditional conception of the hereafter is fading out of men's minds, and a new vision is rising upon their souls.

I.

Let us refresh our memory, for a moment, concerning the traditional conception of immortality. According to the traditional idea, death is really a sleep. The spirit passes into unconsciousness at the touch of death. It remains in slumber until the resurrection morning. On the resurrection day the soul, which has passed from the body at death and remained asleep, re-enters the body and awakens to consciousness. Body and soul then, together, rise and pass into the true life of the hereafter. The veritable body laid away in the grave rises from the grave, as the habitation of the soul in the hereafter. In the quaint old village of Easthampton, where I summer, the earliest pastor of the village lies buried at the eastern end of the old burying-ground, facing toward the east—that on the morning of the resurrection day, at the sound of the arch angels' trumpet, he may be the first to rise from the grave and lead his flock in triumphant ascension to the skies. A touchingly pathetic illustration of the traditional belief! The Moors of Morocco, have a grotesque form of this widespread belief. When their heads are shaved, one lock of hair is carefully left, in order that, on the resurrection morning, an angel may seize each man by this lock of hair and raise him from the grave.

Death fixes the doom of a man forever. As he dies, so will he live—saved or lost eternally. Life is a probation. Character does not change after death. The touch of death stereotypes character forever. The good pass directly to heaven; the bad pass directly to hell. The good never fall from heaven—the bad never rise from hell. Fate is fixed irrevocably at the moment of death.

That fate, however, is not finally declared until the judgment day. On that great morning, before the great white throne, the books are open and the doom of destiny is read for each individual soul. The dividing line is drawn, and those on the right of the throne pass into their eternal heaven, while those upon the left are driven to their eternal hell. Endless happiness for the saved—endless suffering for the lost!

Neither in heaven nor in hell are there any natural relationships. The relationships of Nature are rudely broken at the touch of death, never to be formed again. In each family, one is taken and another is left. Heaven knows no perfectly re-united family—hell misses some of the home circle.

The whole adjustments of life in the beyond lack any natural orderings. There are no natural occupations. The saved need nothing but the joy of their salvation—the damned can have no joy whatever. The powers of earth, which find upon the earth their natural employ, and no provision for such activities in the beyond. The atmosphere of the celestial city is desiccated, and in its dry vacuum the pale and ghost-like forms of the blasted moved across the scenes, bloodless and colorless. The hosts of the redeemed are grouped, as in pre-Raphaelite pictures, in endless concentric circles round the great white throne of God. Eternal, harps in hand, forever hymning praises of the Most High. The old Scotchwoman described the traditional heaven when she said that "we shall sit upon stilts and sing psalms all the day long." A dear old child in our Easthampton pulpit, years ago, described the joys of heaven in the conclusive statement into which was condensed what years of tire in the daily chores had made him long for: "And there, my brethren, we shall have nothing whatever to do! Think of it! A whole eternity in Heaven, and nothing whatever to do!"

This traditional conception of the hereafter is passing wholly out of the mind of our generation: so rapidly that it is difficult to realize now that men only a few years ago actually thought thus—or thought that they thus thought—of the hereafter. The language of this traditional conception still draws in our hymns, still drones from our pulpits, still whines in our prayers. Alas, that we conservative Churchmen, holding our venerable prayer-book in our hands, in the last sacred offices of the dead should ever fancy ourselves obliged to repeat language that is archaic, obsolete and untrue—words ringing false upon our consciousness, offending our judgment, and belying our faith!

II.

Let us turn now to consider the new thought of immortality that is dawning upon our century.

Whatever the new thought of immortality may be, it must be one that will fit into the universe as we know it. The highest generalization concerning our universe, thus far reached by man, is that expressed in the word evolution. Immortality, then, must be conceived in accordance with the doctrine of evolution. It must be read in terms of evolution. Evolution simply means that the infinite and Eternal Life is moving in an orderly unfolding of itself through the organic...
The New Thought of Immortality.

Whatsoever, then, the future life may be—
if we have eyes to see, we can discern it
in the present life. What we are now
shadows what we are to be. Immortality
will prove the reality of the present earth-
ly life in finer forms. All the character-
istics of the celestial life can be traced in
the earthly life. Rightly to read the es-
sential elements of our life here and now
would be to prophesy the hereafter.

III.

Applying these principles, which are in-
volved in the general law of evolution, we
an affirm, confidently, certain things con-
cerning immortality.

Death is no real break in life. It is a
conjunction, not a disjunction, in the story
of being. It is a stepping-stone from one
stage of existence to another. It is the
link that binds the lower with the higher
form of life. It is a birth into the here-
after. It is an episode in the story of
man—only this and nothing more. "In
my Father's house are many mansions." Deatb is the door opening from one room
into another in our Father's house—the
universe.

Death is not a divorce between the soul
and the body, needing to be annulled by
the soul's reunion with the body. Nature
knows no such backward process. She is
not so poor that she has to stoop to pick
up discarded clothes. "They all shall
wax old as doth a garment, and as a ves-
ture they shall be changed; but thou re-
mainest." As the Infinite and Eternal
Spirit is forever changing the living gar-
ment wrapped around his true Self—that
garment which we call Nature—so the
child of the Infinite and eternal Spirit
casts aside his worn out garment and
needs not to reclothe himself with it. The
belief in the resurrection of the physical
body, as a necessity for the clothing of
the spirit, is a pagan superstition that has
lingered too long in Christianity. It is in
no respect a Christian thought. If any-
thing, it is distinctly an Egyptian specu-
lation.

Death, however, is not a mere unclo-
th ing of the soul, but a clothing again of
the immortal spirit. No life known to us
exists disembodied. When life sheds one
body it is but to grow another. The body
always grows around the life. Each cell
is an embodiment of mind, and is grown
by that mind. The intelligence that grew
it can grow it again in a higher form.
The soul of man, which first clothed itself
with the visible body, need not draw from
the precipitate of matter that we call our
earth to fashion for itself a new and re-
splendent garment.* The elements out of

*Tesla, in a remarkable article in the June
"Century," says: "We can conceive of or-
ganized beings living without nourishment, and
deriving all the energy they need for the
performance of their life-functions from the
ambient medium."
which our body is composed exist in the air about us, in finer and subtler forms. From that surrounding atmosphere there can be drawn the materials to reclothe the spirit at its will. When orchids, hanging from the tree boughs, suck from the air the materials that build their beautiful forms, cannot the spirit of man do as much?

Death, in reality, frees the real body. Within this outer form we call the body, there must be an inner formative something that holds these coarser elements in abiding identity of form. The materials that compose our bodies are streaming in and out of us continually. Every seven years we re-form our body completely; so that no particle of the matter that made your body seven years ago is in it now. What is this inner form that seizes these fluent particles of matter, stamps them with its own impress, and rebuilds ever on the same lines the body in which we are identified by our friends? Paul gives the clue to this mystery, when he says, "there is a physical body and there is," even now, and here within us, "a psychical body." It is this psychical body, within the physical body, which is the true principle of form. The touch of death frees this psychical body, and man, passing from the habitation of the flesh, finds himself not unclothed, but clothed upon.

Death, then, is the true resurrection. No other resurrection is conceivable. The body that we dwell in on the earth decomposes, and its materials pass into other structures innumerable. There is no law of **habeas corpus** which can reclaim these bodies of ours, after they have been appropriated by other lives. The archangel's trump, at the sound of which we all are changed, as in a moment, is the splendid imagery of the apostle. The real trump of the archangel is a still, small voice, heard by no mortal. At that sound we all are changed, as in a moment. The day of resurrection is the day of death.

The traditional thought clings to our ancient and sacred offices for the dead, in language archaic and obsolete: "For as much as it hath pleased Almighty God, in his wise providence, to take out of this world the soul of our departed brother, we, therefore, commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; looking for the general resurrection in the last day and life of the world to come, through our Lord Jesus Christ; at whose second coming, in his glorious majesty to judge the world, the earth and the sea shall give up their dead, and the incorruptible bodies of those who sleep in him shall be changed and made like unto his own glorious body." Even the splendor of this language cannot disguise from us the fact that it no longer rings real to our consciousness.

God has given us to see a higher thought. Will our Church be faithful to the Spirit of Truth, who is guiding us into an trutj? Or will she still expect her ministers to repeat words that are no longer true? "Why seek the living among the dead? He is not here; He is risen." Death is no literal sleep. To the outward eye it seems like a profound sleep, and thus we call it. Thus the Master himself called it; but, if I rightly read his mind, not as meaning thereby that the departed fell into a long state of unconsciousness, but simply that he had not really died—that it was only the seeming of death. Sleep, to our modern, scientific, study, proves to be a figure of the fancy. The senses fall asleep. The body slumbers. The mind never sleeps. It is always wide awake, thinking actively. Only it is in another state of consciousness, which we cannot well link in with the consciousness that we call wakefulness.

All testimony from the unseen world— if there is any such testimony whatever to be trusted—confirms the convictions that he who passes through death, so far from finding himself in a state of unconscious slumber, finds himself wide awake, instantly. The dead have found it hard to realize that they have died. Again and again, if any such testimony is to be trusted, those who have, as we say, died, only became conscious of the change that has passed over them in their inability to communicate with the forms around them, so well known and loved. They speak, and no one hears them. They touch familiar forms, and there is no responsive thrill. Thus they come to know the change that has passed over them. "I am he that liveth and was dead, and, behold, I am alive for evermore!"

He who dies awakens into consciousness—the same being as of old. He is conscious of his continued personal identity. He knows himself to be himself. The threads of the old existence are not cut at the touch of death. They spin on and on into the new being, weaving the old framework of memory and association and habit—of all that constitutes personal identity. Every touch in those beautiful stories of the after life of Jesus reveals the continued identity of the Man of Nazareth. He was one and the same in the glorious form that he was upon the earth.

The dead are, therefore, recognizable by one another and by the living, if ever communication is established. This follows, inevitably, from the continuation of personal identity. The question of our recognition of friends in heaven is not one that should ever be raised by a thoughtful man. Despite the changes that take place in our visible bodies, as
they renew themselves altogether every seven years, the personal identity con-
inging, we are recognizable one by the-
er through all disguises. Voice and
ook will betray the friend whom we have
not seen for decades, however changed
the form may be. As it is here, so is it
there. "Jesus said unto her, Mary! And
she, Rabboni [Master]!"

Death ushers us into no foreign world,
We will be at home in the hereafter, as
we are at home here. All that is essen-
tial to human life here will be found
there. The activities of our being
on earth will be the activi-
ties of our being in heaven. They are
the continually abiding activities of our
nature. They cannot change. We must
find room for them in any conceivable
form of existence. Life's finest joys and
highest ecstacies would be stolen from us
in a heaven where there are no play for
these powers. The occupations of earth
must, therefore, exist there and one by the oc-
cupations of heaven. In higher and
nobler forms, we must go on doing there
what we are doing here. There must be
ample room for these occupations in the
universe revealed to us nowadays, the
er outer vestibule alone of which we enter
in this earthly life.

If homes are necessary here, homes
are necessary there—the centers of
family life, without which the truest
"bands of a man" would be broken. Those
truest "bands of a man," apparently
broken on earth, must be reknit in heav-
en. The associations that group them-
selves naturally here must, in higher and
nobler forms, group themselves in the
hereafter. Life without association is
death. In Milton's swelling phrase, there
must be there "noble troops and sweet
societies." The institutions of society,
evolved with so much painful effort on
earth, must blossom into higher and
nobler forms. There must, therefore, be
the reality of the State as of the
Church. In the heavenly State there
must be the functions of the earthly
State, as in the heavenly Church the
functions of the earthly Church, and
thus every noblest power of man find full
employ. There will be there hosts of un-
developed lives to be governed and ruled,
to be taught and inspired.

Death makes no break in the continuity
of character. It works no miracle. A
man is the same here and hereafter. He
is the same, intellectually, before and
after death. The thoughtful, studious
man upon earth, will be the thoughtful,
studious man in the heavens. He that
is silly and superficial here, will be
silly and superficial as he starts in life
there. The wise man before
death will be wise after death.
There are fools over there, as here.

The physical transition that we call
death can make no essential differ-
ence whatever in the spiritual reality
that we call character.

This may, perhaps, give the clue to
that ordinarily perplexing problem—the
twaddle of the seance. Assuming that
there are human spirits at the other end
of the telephone connecting the world
seen with the world unseen, why should
we expect that there will be no frivolous
messages, no clatter of silly voices heard
from beyond? Society, as one finds it
here, does not consist altogether of the
wise and reticent. Social intercourse is
by no means a feast of reason, even in
Fifth Avenue palaces. I have observed
that it is not always those qualified to
speak intelligently who prate most gar-
rulously over the dinner table. Why,
then, should we wonder if, on our first
establishing communication with the
inhabitants of the other world, there are
no play for these occupations of heaven?
Are there no such things as living in soul sin up to the day
death—wallowing in wantonness, stif-
ing the spirit in sensuality, clutching
at gold and murdering the bodies and
souls of one's brothers to get it—and
then, by "experiencing religion," or by
receiving extreme unction at the last
hour go straight into a heaven of hol-
iness." The fingers that have been busy
handling the croupier of our American
Monte Carlo, which faces Trinity Church,
cannot turn at an hour's notice to play-
ing harps in the new Jerusalem. You
will start in the other life just as you have
made yourself in this life. You carry
over with you, into your life beyond, the
capital that you have accumulated in
your soul here. To lay up treasures in
Heaven you must lay up treasures in the
heaven within you. Only thus can you
take a letter of credit to the celestial
city. There is a profound truth in the
Eastern doctrine of Karma. It is the
truth seen by the writer of the Book of
Revelation of Saint John the Divine,
when he said: "He that is unjust, let
him be unjust still; and he that is filthy,
let him be filthy still; and he that is right-
eguous, let him be righteous still; and
he that is holy, let him be holy still."

There must be rewards and punish-
ments in the life beyond, if it is a real
life. There are rewards and punish-
A man, therefore, cannot miss his heaven. “Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.”

Heaven and hell are not shut off from each other, as we traditionally conceive of them. Heaven and hell commingle upon earth. Men living in each, jostle one another along Fifth Avenue, and crowd one another on Broadway. You pass from heaven to hell as you pass from one block to another. You leave heaven behind you in one home, whose door closes upon you, and you find hell beckoning of the next door through which you enter. Heaven is upon your right hand and hell is upon your left hand, as between two friends you take your afternoon walk. There is no more heaven to be found in the world of space than you will find in your own New York: men and women filled with the divine life, homes radiant with the divine love, the activities of the factory and the studio in which there is the forth-putting of divine energies. You will find nowhere in the worlds about you more hellish hells than you can find here in your own New York: men and women filled with impurity and hatred and every evil passion, homes rent with discord, and spheres of action turbulent with the anarchy of selfishness. Yet these heavens and hells adjoin one another closely, commingling freely.

There are, indeed, spiritual classifications on earth. How should there not be? Men group themselves here according to their moral affiliations. The good seek the society of the good, and the evil seek the company of the evil. Nay, goodness establishes its own territorial zone, and evil haunts its own dens. You know in what part of the city to go, if you desire the company of intelligence and culture and character. You need not ask the policeman where to go if you want to find the gambling hell and the bagnio.

“He went into his own place.” This was the doom of Judas. He could go nowhere else. By every law of natural affiliation, he must seek out his own. By
the prophetic gift when he thought that "auld Neckie Ben" "might tak' a thought and mend." This is the infinite possibility which life holds within itself forever and forever; so that the saints in the innermost circles around the great white throne must forever put up the prayer, "Lest we forget, lest we forget;" and the sinners in the deepest bowels of hell may wing their cries to God for the help that "bringeth salvation." It is the sheerest audacity of dogmatism that undertakes to deny the endless possibilities of change in character.

For the saints we need not fear sorely. Character gathers impetus by movement, strength and solidity by action. There comes a day when, to all intents and purposes, it must be true that a man "cannot sin, because he is born of God." But this thought may give us infinite comfort concerning those who shall mightily err. Shall we not, then, believe that miracles changed conditions work upon weak and undeveloped characters here on earth? Nay even those whom we call, distinctively and essentially, the bad, change, under new conditions—under wiser and truer treatment. The kindergarten remakes the waif of the street. The reformatory makes over again the youthfully criminal. Modern penology, the true science of punishment in our great nineteenth century prisons, is accomplishing the supreme moral miracle of life—turning sinners into saints, convicts into kings. The jail-bird reforms and his old surroundings become abhorrent to him. He is no longer found in the group in the gorgery, among the wild-eyed watchers over the gambling table. His "pals" miss him in his wonted resorts. They can find him, if they know how; but it will be in other sorts of places. Thus the soul is its stages of progress, readjusts its environment to its own condition, and changes its states.

And all this strange sorting of souls, this strange placing of spirits, goes on in the superficially indistinguishable mass of human life; the good and the evil jostling against each other; the spheres of heaven and hell impinging on each other, sliding forever into each other. Why, then, should we wonder that it should be so hereafter? How could there be any helpfulness for those whom we call "the lost"—how could the good reach there, if they know how; but it will be in other sorts of places. Thus the soul is its stages of progress, readjusts its environment to its own condition, and changes its states.

Character itself—is it ever fixed and final on earth? Up to the last hour of life the good man may trip and fall. "Come quickly, O Death," sighed the great Marcus, on his imperial throne, "lest I forget myself!" Even up to the last hour of life the bad man may reform. "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom!" cries the dying thief. Saint and sinner may change places even in the shadow of death.

Why, then, may it not be so hereafter? Certainly death itself, the mere physical process, cannot fix character. There is no such spiritual fixative in a physical process. If Lucifer and his fellow-angels fell from heaven, other Lucifers may fall again. Sweet-souled Robbie Burns had
inadequate. We have not yet learned to deal with sin. But we are beginning to learn. No more beautiful development of our century is to be found than in the science of penology, or prison punishment. Up to our own day, there was no other thought in the discipline of prison life than that of punishment as a deterrent of others from wrong and as a restraint upon the criminal himself. The idea of reclaiming the criminal had scarcely entered men’s minds. If one wants to know horrors, let him read a description of the prisons of our own country and of England, in the beginning of our century. We have but begun to apply this new science of penology. Yet already we have gone far enough to assure ourselves that under right conditions and by right methods, the great bulk of our criminal population can be reclaimed. Those noble men who have achieved the most brilliant success in prison discipline thoroughly believe that, eventually, success will be measured by the restoration of the criminal. Repentance, reformation, rehabilitation—these are the stages of recovery of lost souls in our earthly hells.

When man can do this, with his limited powers and his imperfect conditions, what cannot God do? If earth can open the prison doors, shall they remain closed in the hereafter? The baleful words that Dante saw over the door of hell already begin to fade out—“Leave hope behind, all ye who enter here.” The significance of the great Catholic doctrine of purgatory is beginning to be discerned. Not as in the Catholic purgatory, limited, but without limit, so far as we can see, the pains of prison punishment are purifying. The sufferings of the hells in the beyond, as here, are remedial.

The work of all true society, whether in the world seen or in the world unseen, is to carry on this redeeming, restoring, renewing work of God in man. For this end are all the institutions of our social life on earth. For this end are all the institutions of social life in the hereafter—there, however, mightily re-enforced by the developed powers, mental and moral, of good men. That great prophetic vision of the early Christian ages is coming to be seen in its true light. We would not now care to erase from our creed the word; “He descended into hell.” Even in the most literal interpretation of them, we can believe them now, as our fathers dared not to believe them; seeing the work of the Christ and of all his followers in the beyond, not in the selfish enjoyment of a heaven of happiness, but in the unselfish ministry to those in the hells of suffering: that they, too, may be brought into the light of God and led up into the life of the All Father.

The outcome of all life is in that great word of the seer, in the Book of Revelation of Saint John the Divine: “And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire.” The lake of fire that burns to consume all evil, all sin, and all suffering—into this lake, at the last, death itself shall be cast, and with it hell. There shall be no extinction of being, and there shall be no continuation of being in suffering and in sin.

This is the final vision of the Kingdom of God, whether in our world or in other worlds:

“I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband, and I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, ‘Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain.’ And there shall be no more curse; but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it; and his servants shall serve him. And they shall see his face, and his name shall be in their foreheads. And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither Light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light.”