

Shall We Live Forever?

A Reply to Darrow's "Myth of the Soul"

by CLARENCE TRUE WILSON

If a man die, shall he live again?

— JOB, XIV, 14

I DOUBT NOT the first man who ever faced death asked the same question, and it has been of universal interest since. If it be true that we are to live forever, this life, this hour is crowned with a sublimity it could not otherwise know; a new light, a new inspiration, is given to the experiences of human life, and the opening vistas of the future are invested with attractiveness and a kind of glory. But if we find that "you and I are destined like streaks of the morning cloud to melt into the infinite azure of the past," then our views of every day and every duty must undergo a complete change.

To the old query of Job's day millions have confidently answered in the affirmative. Millions more have doubted, while some thousands have emphatically denied. The question I want to discuss is not "Have we absolute knowledge that the soul survives the shock of death?" but "Have we rational grounds for belief?" For this there are two kinds of evidence: first, facts, which appeal to the reason by the inductive method — facts concerning the mind, its nature and operation, and facts concerning the moral nature; second, facts concerning God, His work, His evident purpose, the indications from His methods of government. We shall inquire if the Christian doctrine of immortality is rational, if it is in harmony with a spiritual interpretation of nature, and if it blends with the indisputable facts of man's character.

An immortal life for the soul is not impossible. There is nothing in science or philosophy which is inconsistent with such a belief, and we know of nothing inconsistent with it in the will of God or in the nature of man. There is no

possibility of proving that immortality does not exist, for no one is justified in making that statement until he has explored the entire universe and found that it contains no souls. Moreover, even if it were possible to make such an exploration, it is certain that we are not possessed of such powers and faculties as would be required to find souls. Our sense organs are not sufficiently acute to enable us to discern a spirit. Even matter, about which, in comparison, we know much, possesses many qualities which are too fine for our perception. Men were acquainted with water long before they understood the subtle power of steam; they saw the lightning flash many times before they were enabled to harness electricity. If there are these powers in matter too fine for our grasp, then certainly we must recognize that spirit is not susceptible of analysis. Since we see that no man possesses sufficiently delicate senses, even if he could examine the entire universe it would be manifestly impossible to prove that there is no soul and no future existence.

A young medical student returned down South and taunted his old colored mammy on her faith. He said, "Mammy, I have dissected a Negro, just after he died. I examined his blood, his bones, his brains. I followed every nerve and sinew; and I never saw a soul or where one had been."

"Child, you certainly is ignorant for one who has been to school so long. I wouldn't think you would ever try to find a live soul in a dead Negro."

That settled the controversy.

The nature and constitution of the soul indicate that it may dwell apart from the body. The body is constantly undergoing changes. Every atom with which I began my

life has gone long since. It is a well established fact that I have already changed bodies several times. Yet amid all this flux and flow of material, I am conscious of being the same person. It is certain that the same process of dissolution and change which takes place suddenly at death is going on gradually now. "I died daily." Joined as companions for life, soul and body might seem to have the same fate; but they do not. The bodily organism wastes and decays, but there remains the abiding personality of the self-conscious agent who dwells

plest form lies at the basis, the beginning of things, but the trend of all development of worlds, of plants, of animals, of men, is perpetually away from matter in its coarser and grosser manifestations toward something subtler, finer, more intricate, more complex, less sensuous, less palpable, less tangible, but none the less real." We need not attempt to draw out the argument as illustrated by the facts of natural science. We are all aware of the general truth that the first forms of life were crude. Man is no exception to the universal tendency;



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within. Its persistence reveals the possibility of future existence as clearly as though one rose from the dead. The dust returns to the earth as it was, the spirit unto the God who gave it. Man's spirit is not made up of atoms that waste and change, but is a simple spiritual unity. As such, it is not subject to the law of decay. Its extinction would mean annihilation, but there is no indication in nature or the Bible that God has ever annihilated a single atom, much less a conscious spirit.

THE EVIDENCE OF EVOLUTION

In the universal law of development there is a strong theistic basis for the faith that death will not destroy our being. "The study of the phenomena of matter and of mind by those who have given their lives to this specialty shows that the great general law of creation is that things shall begin in the small and grow to the large; begin in the rough and grow to the fine; that complexity is not first in the order of being, but simplicity; that matter in its sim-

human development or evolution is from rudeness and savagery toward the enlightenment and refinement of civilization; away from the life of the body that is fed only by the stomach, by the hands, by the eyes, the ears, and the tongue, to the life that is fed by thought.

It is immaterial for the present purpose which theory of the origin of man is adopted: whether man began his life here as a perfect being physically, intellectually, and morally, and then fell, or whether he originally developed from the lower animals. If man fell, the undoubted historical evidence is that soon after his fall he was a savage; and that only in the slow growth of the centuries has he grown toward refinement, beauty, duty, thought, and the loftiness of spiritual aspiration.

Evolution or development — whichever you choose to call it — if it be studied as the expression of a universal law, brings us up to the point where another law, the law of continuity, requires us to demand of the theistic evolutionist the grounds for his belief that death stops

evolution. Life itself is the best denial of death; the sublime New Testament theory of development — that life begins here and that its fullness and richness await us beyond — alone accords with what in a physical sense we know of both the laws of evolution and continuity. If development ceases at the door of the grave, if death ends all, then we ask the doubter to explain why a God of wisdom and power should ordain development to proceed so far and no farther. We ask him to show how he knows that death is the sudden and arbitrary cessation of all growth and development.

EVIDENCE OF MAN'S SOUL

You have heard the criticism that in the pulpit we ignore the body. This one-sidedness, if the charge is true, is more than matched by the manner in which many practical scientists ignore the spirit. All their strength is spent in the study of organisms. If you read Dr. Carpenter on the brain, you may feel that "man is nothing but a retort in which various chemical elements are mingled and by certain physical processes converted into cerebral matter."

But man is more than his intellectual processes. He has the Godlike sense of justice, the power of love and heavenly aspiration. No philosophy can be constructed which leaves out these phenomena and no explanation can be made of them on the ground of materialism. If you admit the spiritual nature of God, you sweep materialism from its foundations as the sole explanation of the universe. Materialism cannot account for the facts of mind. Every attempt to do so has led to utter absurdities. "It is still true that if physical properties require a substantive matter as their ground, mental facts require a substantive spirit as their ground. Indeed, the proof of a spiritual mind in man is just as clear and sure as the proof of a substantive matter in the physical universe." The continuity of self-consciousness proves our spiritual nature. We are not the visible form but the spiritual inhabitant of the form. We wear a different body to-day from what we wore seven years ago. Every atom of our frame has changed, but we remain the same person.

Take the living form, mutilate it — cut off one member after another: you do not invade the citadel of life; you have not affected the power of thought or diminished its force. It remains with unwasted vigor when the body is

crippled, emaciated, or wrenched into hideous deformity. If the seat of sensation or the conscious personality is independent of the body, we have no right to assume that it is dependent on the same forces that sustain the natural body.

Memory, reason, conscious thought, the power to love and hate, to enjoy pleasure and to suffer pain, may remain intact until the moment of death. If these traits of personality were dependent on natural forces, they would be affected by the diseases that cause death and by the perpetual changes of the body. Yet, through them all personality remains intact. Is it unreasonable, then, to assume that personality, thus proved to be different from the body, does not die with it? Does it not seem probable that at death the soul, comprising all the elements of personality, merely lays aside the body like a garment? Thus does nature prophesy a future life.

EVOLUTION POINTS TO IMMORTALITY

The capacity of the soul for endless improvement, service, and worship points to a future which will make possible further development than we achieve here. If immortality be but an iridescent dream, the most illustrious lives that earth has known may well be represented by broken pillars and unfinished shafts. Think of the men who perished in the bloom of youth when all our skies were dark with clouds of war. Count the poets who scarce began to sing ere death laid hold on them — Keats, Shelley, Byron, Burns, and Poe. Remember the men of genius whose sun was eclipsed at noon — Shakespeare, Lincoln, Robert Louis Stevenson. Recall those who, though they lived their fourscore years, went down to death with eyes undimmed and mental vigor unabated. No man who ever lived and wrought to truth and righteousness exhausted his capacity at eighty or could exhaust it at twice eighty. He only exercised it transiently and passed away. These are life's "withheld completions."

Now if we know anything about nature, she is infinitely economical. Science itself declares nature never takes anything out of one kingdom without putting it into another. That is the law of conservation. If that is correct, he is right who says, "There is no death. What seems so is transition."

The first right we have is a fair chance to

come to ourselves, to our best selves. God guarantees that right to a moth or a fly. A fly comes to itself; all there is in its nature is permitted to unfold itself and come out. But a man does not come to himself here. The majority of men have scarcely any idea of the potent and splendid faculties slumbering in them. Shall God bring out all there is in an insect that flits for an hour in the summer twilight, and then to the best and loftiest being He has made — the being to whom He gave the rule and dominion of this world, and whom He has crowned with glory and honor — shall He give him no chance to come to himself? Sir Isaac Newton, when he was an old man, said he did not know how he appeared to other people but to himself he seemed like a little child, picking up a few pebbles of truth here and there upon the shore, while the great ocean of undiscovered truth lay unexplored before him.

JUSTICE DEMANDS IMMORTALITY

Man's spiritual desire for immortal happiness is almost universal; no race or tribe even partially civilized has been found without it. It is as persistent as it is inescapable; it grows stronger as the race advances. Some beliefs are outgrown; they belonged to the world's childhood. But the greatest thinkers of the ages have been the strongest advocates of man's immortality — Socrates or Saint Paul, Sir Isaac Newton or John Wesley.

Moreover this belief is strongest in our best moments. When the heart is purest and the mind clearest and our spiritual natures come in closest touch with God, then it is that the hope of future existence looms largest. Such longing must be of divine implanting. The beast does not have it; only man is thrilled by it. The nearer we approach to God the more we are conscious of it. It cannot be a delusion. God makes provision for the gratification of all legitimate desires; light for the eye, music for the ear, food for the stomach, knowledge for the mind, love for our life. In addition to these, He has given a thirst for that which the world cannot supply — a longing for a life beyond the grave. Who can think that He would supply the wants of the beasts and the needs of our own lower nature and would leave the highest craving of the soul unprovided for? Has He so made us that our worst moments are our truest, and all our best hopes false?

The almost universal belief in a future life is suggestive. The literature of the ancient world has its own intimations that the soul of man will survive death. Socrates stated before his judges: "Be of good cheer about death, and know as true this one thing: that to a good man, living or dead, no evil can happen; and that he and his are not overlooked by the gods. Neither has this that has happened to me come by chance, but this is clear to me, that to die now and be released is better for me." In the Book of Wisdom II, 23 we read: "God created man for incorruption and made him an image of His own proper being." Also in III, 1-4: "Righteous men's souls are in God's hands and torment shall not touch them. They seemed in the eyes of the foolish to be dead. And their departure was reckoned as injury, and their going forth a calamity. But they are in peace. If in the sight of men they were punished, their hope is full of immortality."

Belief in a future existence is, in short, one of the few great truths that has had inherent force to make its way through all the ages. In the highest, purest spirits of these ages this faith has been a flame.

Spiritual faith is as essential to society as it is to the individual. It is as natural and necessary as the law of self-preservation to the brute. The state needs the stimulus of this faith in enforcing order. All that is noblest in man is inspired by this faith — benevolence and philanthropy, heroism and martyrdom. It prevents more crimes than all law books and courts. Is it possible that God has so constituted the race that it can only be governed by a lie? If not, the universal sense of immortality must be based on truth.

Victor Hugo, after threescore and ten years of life, in the ripeness and maturity of his splendid genius, thus proclaims the moral necessity of immortality:

What is it that alleviates and sanctifies toil, that renders men strong, wise, patient, just, at once humble and aspiring, but the perpetual vision of a better world, whose light shines through the darkness of the present life? For myself, I believe profoundly in that better world; it is the supreme conviction of my reason, as it is the supreme consolation of my soul.

The inequalities of earthly rewards and punishments form a strong presumptive argument for a future state of conscious existence.

Human life is too brief to exemplify divine justice. Let the curtain drop with Herod presiding with his adulterous Queen by him and John the Baptist beheaded, with Paul in prison and Nero on the throne of empire; let existence cease with Booth at large and Lincoln dying with the fatal bullet in him, and there is no justice in the universe, no God worthy of respect. But to the spiritually-minded, there is no question here. We believe that the ethical element is supreme in the God of the universe. His justice blossoms into love. His benevolence furnishes a future life for man; it provides a way of blessing as well as a way of expiation. The Tribunal of Eternity has no part in the horrors of man's injustice unto man.

At the last we come to an authority and evidence that is not as the authority and evidence of man. To those to whom the Bible is a sacred witness, its profound affirmations of the future life are of overwhelming significance. In the Old Testament less is said of it than in the New, but the import is the same. For this Enoch and Elijah were translated; for this the Psalmist

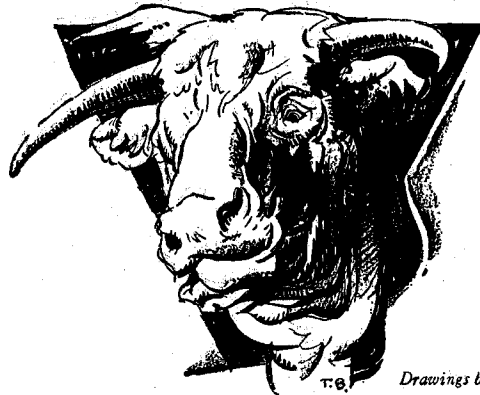
prayed when he wished to be delivered from men who have their portion in this life: "As for me, I shall behold thy face in righteousness; for this is the declaration: 'God hath set eternity in thy heart — thy heart shall live forever.'" For this, in a sense, is the whole story of the New Testament written.

I used to be afraid of death; but I am not now. Why? Jesus the Christ died and was buried. Roman soldiers guarded his tomb. But as it began to dawn toward the first of the Sabbaths, a light streamed out of heaven, the seal of the Roman Empire was broken, the stone moved from its place; Jews and Romans and Christian disciples were startled by the stately footsteps of Almighty God moving among the graves to "abolish death and bring life and immortality to life." He breathed upon the world a new hope in life and death, and wrote over that empty sepulchre, and over all our other graves: "I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die."



Woodcut by Charles A. Willimovsky

Taming the Great BULL



Drawings by Thomas Benrimo

by **JOHN T. FLYNN**

I
AN OFFICIAL of the Stock Exchange on tour last spring paused in a very small Western town to deliver an inspirational talk to the Chamber of Commerce. In an interval during the luncheon the President of the Chamber whispered to his distinguished visitor his amazement at the sale of a New York Stock Exchange seat that very morning at an advance of \$35,000 over the price paid the preceding week.

"Indeed!" breathed the Wall Street guest. "And how, may I ask, did you learn that already away out here?"

"Why," replied the host, "I heard it this morning over the radio in the fire house."

Another traveling observer found himself during the summer on Nantucket, thirty miles out in the Atlantic, where, he says, "Not since the last Nantucket whale ship returned to her home port in 1870 and the market price of whale oil and bone was chalked upon the door of the shipowner's warehouse, had the islanders been interested in quotations." But this summer he found a branch brokerage office there and a ticker supplanting the whale oil price list, so that the sons of the Puritans at play might not be out of touch with the seething cauldron

that never stops bubbling down in Wall Street.

Still another traveler found in a Southwestern village the local market wizard established in his radio shop. There he was prepared to wager, with anyone who had a mind to engage him, from one cent to ten cents a point on the rise and fall of certain stocks in blocks of from five shares up to a hundred. Thus out on the prairie a gambling yokel brought to his bucolic neighbors the blessings of a put and call market and settled daily on the radio quotations.

Similarly, over all the surface of the land the waters of the great bull market prevailed. Wall Street, once a narrow road between Trinity Church and the docks — a graveyard at one end and a river at the other — is now a great financial highway circling around the country, passing through every city and town and hamlet, crossing all the countless Main Streets and galvanizing them where it touches into a fiery energy of speculation. Or perhaps it is a street no longer. Wall Street is a continent.

It is impossible to picture the so-called Coolidge Bull Market without using a bewildering language of millions and billions. A few broad brush strokes may suffice. In 1924 the volume of trading had almost doubled its 1921 total. Last year it had doubled the 1924 record. In six years, then, it had multiplied four times.