

never come into being, without them it would soon cease to be. The theologian avoids the risk of subjectivity by never losing sight of historic fact.

But in truth the risk, whether of subjectivity or of narrowness, is far less now than it used to be. Take away from the historic doctrines that living experience of which they are the outgrowth, make them mere dogmas, lifeless forms, relics of an age long past and of an outgrown type of thought, and then the spirit of man will seek its expression elsewhere. Then each man will be an experience to himself

and a mystic to others. But make your systematic theologian an interpreter; let him unfold to the men of the present the meaning of the past; let him show them that the Christian doctrines, even in their most scholastic form, are the outgrowth of a living experience and witness to eternal verities; and then the human soul will take these materials and fuse them in the crucible of its own living experience, bringing forth things that are new undoubtedly, but that are in vital harmony with the universal experience and with universal spiritual facts.

Life after Death.

BY THE RIGHT REV. C. J. ELLICOTT, D.D., BISHOP OF GLOUCESTER.

‘Shall the dust praise Thee?’—Ps. xxx. 9.

THESE sad and even bitter words from one of the sweet singers of Israel show to us, with almost terrible force, how deep were the shadows which rested on the saint of the old Covenant when the end of our mortality, and the fear that end carried with it, pressed heavily on the soul. And that fear, that outcome and heritage of sin, lingers now, even though Christ has brought life and incorruption to light, and has abolished death for ever. That it is so, all experience seems sadly to confirm. That there is a dread of death in the background of almost every heart, arising commonly from some doubts as to the reality of a continued existence, is a serious truth, which no sober observer of human nature would feel disposed to deny. That it exists in Christian hearts, even though the inspired writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews solemnly declares that the dear Lord passed through death that He might deliver all who were under the bondage of this fear—that it so exists, who of us who looks into the depths of his own soul could consistently doubt?

On such a subject, then, it may not be unprofitable to meditate, more especially as within the last few years several works, some of real importance, have been written on the subject of life after death and the questions connected with it. Most of them appear to deal with the subject independ-

ently of Holy Scripture, and to review the arguments—some of them reaching back to remote antiquity—for the continuance of a personal existence after its earthly termination. These arguments no reasonable man can regard with indifference. Some of them are of real use in confronting the inferences of materialism drawn from the ultimate return of the body to the elements of which it was originally formed: ‘Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.’ Others appeal, often very successfully, to inner convictions of a continuance of a personal existence which seem to be a very part of our sentient selves. Further, it may be added, that Science itself, which has so often been regarded as in antagonism to Faith, has contributed some considerations in favour of our survival after death which have been found to exercise an influence over minds to which no other form of argument has seemed, even transiently, to appeal. It is impossible, then, to regard with indifference these non-scriptural arguments for continuity of existence, but, at the same time, it seems perfectly clear that none of them, nor all of them combined, can do more than make survival after death a reasonable probability. It is Scripture, and Scripture only, that can convert that probability into certainty. It is only through the gospel brought home to the heart of the humble,

hoping, but as yet incompletely convinced, seeker after truth, that the holy mystery of immortality can be fully realized and believed in with that unwavering conviction which faith absolutely demands.

Still it may not be unprofitable briefly to review the non-scriptural arguments for man's unending existence that appear to have made the deepest impression on the human mind, as they may, in many cases, just exercise that prevenient and preparatory influence which may make the reception of the fulness of scriptural truth more easy and more permanent. Of these arguments there are three that certainly deserve our consideration—the argument from the nature and constitution of all things around us or, as it is commonly entitled, the constitution of the universe; the argument from moral considerations; and the argument from the general consent of mankind.

The three arguments when taken together do plainly create in any fair judging mind a strong presumption that our existence does not terminate with bodily death; but they suggest but little as to the nature of the continued existence. The first argument, for instance, from the constitution of things around us, does seem very powerfully to bring home to us that, where the universal principle is conservation, and continuity through transformation and change, man and man's nature cannot possibly be exempted from its operation. What reason can there be for thinking that the principle breaks down and becomes inoperative in the case of things endowed with life? If it does not break down, this question certainly has to be answered: Whenever death puts a stop to bodily activities and works great changes in the fabric in which the bodily activities were exerted and manifested, what has become of that to which these activities were due? If there is to be conservation everywhere, though confessedly with change, then surely, that which acted, call it by what name you like, must be somewhere, and survive, though obviously under changed conditions. Annihilated it cannot be, such a conception being fundamentally opposed to everything that is observable in the nature and constitution of things. This argument is of real importance and power in confronting the assertion of materialism that when man dies he perishes. It is, however, of but limited value in regard of the question of what that is, which survives. It certainly predisposes

us to accept the all but universally prevalent belief that man consists of two parts, the material, to which we give the name of the body, and the immaterial, to which we give, somewhat loosely, the name of the soul. It helps us, then, to identify the something that survives with the soul, but on its after existence it throws no light whatever. That light must be sought for elsewhere.

Very much the same may be said of the second of the three arguments to which I have alluded. This second argument for existence after death is founded on moral considerations which are felt by many to be of great force and cogency. What, for example, can be more perplexing to every thoughtful mind than undeserved suffering, or successful wickedness, or the countless enigmas in poor mortal life, which seem almost incompatible with any real belief in an overruling Providence, and, in many and many cases, make men doubt the existence of any moral governor of the world? Do not these things all force upon the mind the conviction that there must be an after-life, in which right and wrong will ultimately be dealt with, and the stern law of consequences be fully carried out in all the issues and developments of the future?

This argument, like the first, though founded on very different considerations, is an argument for a survival after death which no serious and reasonable man could lightly set aside; but except indirectly and allusively, it throws no light on the after-existence of that which survives—that immaterial part of our nature which we have agreed to speak of as the soul. It does, however, by the very nature of its argument, imply that in the after-existence the great principle of moral retribution will certainly prevail. Of the state of the soul and the nature of its existence, we are, so far as this argument is concerned, as ignorant as ever.

There is, I said, a third argument for a life after death, which certainly cannot be left unnoticed. It is, however, very different in its nature from the two we have already considered. It is in effect this—that if we deny an existence after death, we place ourselves in opposition to what may be correctly spoken of as the conviction or persuasion of the whole human family. It was once considered that races were in existence in which no trace of any conception of existence after death could possibly be found. But I believe I am correct in saying that recent investigation has tended to show, that dim and imperfectly realized

as the conception of an after-existence may be in some of the lowest races of mankind, none can now be correctly described as absolutely devoid of it. This third argument is thus an argument that is considered by many to be the greatest and most persuasive of all. But great and persuasive as it may be, it supplies us with nothing that throws a real light on the state of existence after death. Apart from Christianity, every race has its different conception of the after-life, some of these conceptions presenting aspects of a higher and more spiritual character, but the greater part mere continuity under more favourable circumstances than those which were met with during earthly existence.

We have now reviewed these non-scriptural arguments for a future life, and they are probably the best that the mind of man has yet been able to put forth. But what light have they cast upon the myterious future of human existence? They have made it probable, even highly probable, that there will be an after-life, but have they supplied any solid grounds for the belief that this after-life would be life indeed? Could the really earnest and anxious soul be satisfied with the mere assurance of survival after death? Nay more, could it rest even on such a future as is disclosed to us by the Old Testament? What opportunities does the Old Testament future indicate for a life, after death, of service to Him who called us into being? What realms does it point to in which there will be the power of exercising, for the honour and glory of God, all those faculties that we are conscious, even in this poor earthly life, are the highest and noblest elements in our composite nature? These and a thousand similar questions are called up in every devoted heart when the subject of existence after death is occupying the foreground of our meditations. We soon find, if we have any spark of true religion in the soul, that all our spiritual interest is in that of which the arguments we have reviewed tell us absolutely nothing. They may show that it is probable that there will be a life after death, but on the real and essential nature of that life, its intrinsic character, that which alone makes it worth living, they give no indication whatever. These mysteries can only be disclosed by Revelation, and it is to Revelation, and especially to Him who has brought life and incorruption to light, that we reverently and finally turn. He it is who alone can give to the anxious soul the answers which it is seeking to obtain. And

the answers are these, that man does verily live after death; and that, to every loving and believing heart, the nature of that life after death *is life with Him*. On Him and our relations with Him the whole mystery of our future absolutely depends.

In practice we do not sufficiently realize this relation to the Person of the Risen Lord. When shadows fall around us, and anxious questions arise (and they will arise in the very best of us) as to a real continuity of existence after the grave has received its dead, we commonly fall back on persuasions which seem to cling to our humanity, that all things cannot and will not end here; or to a general feeling that, as Scripture stands pledged to the teaching of a life after death, we may rest upon its testimony, and dismiss our anxieties as to our future.

But, as all experience shows, when the dread of death is resting on the soul, we need something far more reassuring than persuasions and arguments. What we need is heart-whole belief not in reasonings, but in a blessed and adorable Person, who has verily abolished death, and is Himself so eternally the Resurrection and the Life, that whosoever liveth and believeth in Him shall never, never die. This is what we need, and what we must pray for. The whole mystery of the life after death, our anxieties, our hopes, and our reassurances, are all centred in Him. In Him is life, and the life is the light of man here and hereafter. Assuredly the lesson which our present thoughts bring home to us is this—that until we not only believe in Christ, but can truly feel that we are in Him and He in us, the fear of death will still linger in the soul.

Our meditations here may close. They have led us to Christ, and have shown us that in Him and with Him no dread of death, no anxiety as to a future existence can ever find a place in our spiritual life. Our beloved Elder Brother will never forsake us; He tasted death that He might sustain the parting spirit as it enters into the unknown realm of the waiting world of the departed. He passed through those realms, and vouchsafed to know the mystery of the unclotted state that He might comfort us while thus waiting in that mystic world for His blessed and long-promised return. Yea, and when the clouds at length bear Him down to this poor earth, His voice will call us forth; we shall be robed with the body like unto His glorious body, and at last realize—Immortality.