Life Out of Death

ROBERT ALLEN ARMSTRONG
Professor of English
West Virginia University

This little booklet consists of parts of
Easter Day Addresses
given at different times by the author.

"If a man die, shall he live again."

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Introduction

When Xerxes had come to Abydos on his march to the conquest of Greece, he caused a throne of marble to be set on an eminence overlooking the city; and as he gazed down upon the tents and banners of the myriads who marched at his command, the men and horses in countless numbers, a numerous navy engaged in a sham battle to gratify him, the great bridge of boats which joined the two continents—his heart was distended with pride, and he exulted in the power of his army, five millions strong. But soon tears were seen to gush from his eyes, and when Artabanus drew nigh and inquired the cause, "I weep," said the monarch, "because one hundred years hence not one of these will be alive." Our days upon earth are indeed as a shadow. Death appears to hold undisputed sway. Every victory that life wins and prizes goes to swell the triumph of this king of terrors. His appearance for a single victim among a thousand puts an end to all banquets, paralyzes all doings, dominates all emotion. And yet death is a mystery. What! every man since creation's morning has died

and no living one knows about it? It is even so. But there are mysteries which the human mind takes on faith. There are unprovable things to which the human mind holds with unconquerable persistence. As Carlyle says, "There are things which refuse to be theoremed and diagrammed; which logic ought to know she can not speak of." So we must recognize that confidence in a future life has become an inveterate habit with us. This general belief is one of the immeasurable blessings of a Christian civilization.

But we are not always satisfied with this "general belief." In the presence of death we demand more evidence. If the heart stored with love is threatened with everlasting loss, the reason must search for an answer to the heart's appeal, must revive the old answers and seek for fresh assurance from them. One day in his old age, Dr. Lyman Beecher remarked, "I have been reviewing my evidences and I conclude that I have a right to hope." So must we review our evidences, for it is the vision of evidence—the speakable and the unspeakable—that carries conviction and comfort home to the heart.

Let us restate some of the things which give us a right to hope:

1. The desire for immortality constant, persistent, and universal.

2. It is a commonplace truth that life comes out of death.

3. Man's immortality is the necessary outcome of God's wisdom, for He has made man worthy of it.

Again, if the sun of man's life sets in this world never to rise on another shore:

4. Joy would be unexplainable.

5. Sorrow would be an unfathomable mystery.

6. Pain would be torture merely.

7. Man's thirst for knowledge would be only a delusion, a "will o' the wisp."

8. The moral order of the world would be nothing but a bewildering disorder.

9. Friendship and love would seem to be given only for more refined torture.

10. And last, but by no means least, there is comfort in the indisputable fact that Jesus rose from the dead.

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The desire for immortality is the most constant and universal of human longings. Ever since man lifted his face to the heavens and felt within him a desire for something higher, nobler, better; since he first felt the meaning of that fatal decree "Thou shalt surely die!" he has had his eyes turned towards the skies filled with an immortal hope.

"If all our hopes and all our fears
Were prisoned in life's narrow bound;
If travelers through this vale of tears,
We saw no better world beyond,
On what could check the rising sigh?
What earthly thing could pleasure give?
What mortal then would dare to die?
Or who could then endure to live?"

In all ages of the world the storm-tossed soul has longed for some haven of rest—some brighter, better, happier world where the sorrows, the sadness, the limitations, that distress us here shall no longer have power to vex the spirit, and where our souls may have

that clear vision, that sweet happiness, that complete satisfaction which comes to us here only as dimly as the dream that flees with the shadows of the night.

Even devils wish for immortality. Milton makes Belial to say, when it has been proposed that the fallen angles provoke God to such severity against them that he will annihilate them,

". . . . . that must be our cure,
To be no more? Sad cure! for who would lose
Though full of pain, this intellectual being,
Those thoughts that wander through eternity?"

The poet well expresses the universal desire, merging into belief, of mankind when he says:

When coldness wraps this suffering clay,
Ah, Whither strays the immortal mind?
It can not die, it must not stay,—
It leaves its darkened dust behind.

Or again in the words of the poet to his friend whose spirit had fled, we find this belief.

"Peace, peace, he is not dead; he doth not sleep:
He hath awakened from the dream of life.
Thou canst not see where he is sitting now,
Dust to dust—but the pure spirit shall flow
Back to the burning fountain whence it came,
A spark from the Eternal, which must glow
Through time and change unquenchably the same."

Life Out of Death

There is an old Greek legend which says that when the god Apollo was banished to earth by Jupiter, he disguised himself and became a shepherd in the service of Admetus, King of Thessaly. He was so touched by the king's kindness to him that he desired to show his gratitude by the greatest gift he could bestow upon a mortal. So he asked the council of the gods to bestow immortality upon Admetus. They agreed to do this but upon one condition; when the time came for Admetus to die, he should offer some one else to die

in his stead. When the hour came which the fates had appointed for Admetus to die, his beautiful young wife, Alcestis, offered herself as a sacrifice in his place; and by her death she made him immortal.

These Greek legends are not idle stories; they are not simply fables for the amusement of the lover of fiction. Many of them teach truths that lie at the very heart of things. This one teaches us that life comes out of death; that there can be no life without its price of death.

This is the same truth which the divine Master taught when he said,—"Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."

This is a fundamental law in the world: All good, all progress, all things that are desirable, must pay their price. All nature

brings the truth home to our minds and hearts. We look forth on a bright spring morning; the velvet leaves glisten in the sun, the flowers nod to us in their beauty, nature spreads a carpet of green for us to tread upon; and as we look upon this vision of verdure, life, and beauty—we ask ourselves the question, Must all these really die? It is a depressing thought; it comes like a blight over our spirits. But it is true. All of this brightness, beauty and perfume could not be if it had not been for the death and decay of thousands of other trees and flowers, yes, these plants must send their roots down into the mould that has been formed by the death and decay of other trees and flowers that once grew and rejoiced in the light. The leaf waves today, the grass springs up, the flower opens its beauty to the sun because, and only because, they inherit the life that was sacrificed for them. Life has come out of death. The history of the world shows us that political liberty has always had to pay its price in blood and treasure; it has

always been bought at the sacrifice of ease, of comfort, of home, of life itself. And it is just as true in the spiritual world that life comes out of death.

"Alas for him who never sees
The stars shine through the cypress trees!
Who hopeless lays his dead away
Nor looks to see the breaking day
Across the mournful marbles play!
Who hath not learned in hours of faith,
The truth to flesh and sense unknown,
That Life is ever lord of Death,
And Love can never lose its own!"

God's Wisdom and Man's Worth

Man's immortality is the necessary outcome of God's wisdom and man's worth. The wonderful preparations that are made for man in the world in which he lives, the magnificent endowments which are his, certainly show us that he was intended for a life longer than a few miserable days. Would you consider that builder a wise man who would bring marble from across the seas, and build a strong foun-

dation for a house, who would bring fine-grained and perfumed woods from every clime—who would ravish every sea for precious stones to ornament his house—and yet would never complete it?—would never put it under roof or make it a permanent structure? Yet, if God has made man without making him immortal, he has done that very thing. He has made a world of beauty for him to be in; He has diversified it with inspiring mountains and charming valleys; carpeted it with never-fading green; covered it with "a brave, o'erhanging firmament," "a majestical roof fretted with golden fire." Surely wisdom would not so waste beauty, grandeur and wealth on the insignificant creature of an hour.

And God has not endowed him as if he were the creature of an hour. He has made man in His own image—"a little lower than God, and has crowned him with glory and honor." He has given him thoughts that go out to the farthest star that watches the night;

a memory that holds its records like words graven upon the eternal rock; a spirit of inquiry that would pierce even beyond the shadow of death; an imagination that can create mimic worlds; a faith that trusts though the sun be darkened and the moon be turned into blood; a hope that reaches beyond the veil and seizes upon the very throne of God. "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason; how infinite in faculties; in form and moving how express and admirable; in actions how like an angel; in apprehension how like a God!" Can it be that this magnificent creature is but the quintessence of dust?

The Meaning of Joy

This is a joyful world. Go forth in the early morning and look upon the awakening earth; the golden shafts of sunlight beat upon the hills; the lark sings at heaven's gate; the flowers open their bright eyes to greet the new day; the hills break forth into singing, the trees of the field clap their hands and your

heart is filled with laughter like sunshine on the deep sea. But why should you be glad? Tomorrow you die. If the sun of man's life sets in this world never to rise on another shore, isn't all this joy mere mockery? Some one has likened man's life in the world to a mote in a sunbeam in a darkened room. The mote is seen but a moment in the sunbeam; it comes out of the darkness on one side, flashes into the light, disappears in the darkness. Are joy and gladness fit moods for a creature like this?

But is it not true that there is something in joy that tells of a fairer world, a happier clime? Do we not feel when the purest and fullest joy floods our souls—that our lips have just touched the brim of the cup? Is there not within us that which asks for more—hopes for more—which foretells deeper draughts? It was Plato's belief that when we are born into this world we bring with us some of the joy and gladness and light which were ours in that brighter world whence our spirits

came; that sometimes we catch glimpses of the glorious light of that happy land; sometimes its music rings in our ears; sometimes its joys thrill our hearts; sometimes its visions bless our sight. We know that this is true. We know that sometimes our joy is made more complete because on us are thrown some gleams of that light which never was on sea or land. Can it be that God meant humanity to be a great Tantalus: He was immersed to the lips in a stream of clear, sparkling water—but when he tried to drink, the water receded from his parched lips. Over his head hung grapes delicious and golden, but when he reached for them, they were drawn away. Do you think that God puts the cup of joy to man's lips to tantalize him? Nay, let us rather believe that the few moments of joy and gladness which are ours here are but the foretaste of sweeter draughts from deeper springs.

Again, if life is not prolonged beyond the years of the world's sorrow and pain, then pain is torture and sorrow is meaningless distress. Pain is nature's warning that one of her laws has been broken. But if the end of her ways is only death—why prolong the torture? Can nature be so cruel? Can it be that—

"Man, her last work, who seemed so fair,
Such splendid purpose in his eyes,
Who rolled the psalms to wintry skies,
Who built him fanes of fruitless prayer,"

"Who trusted God was love indeed
And love creation's final law—"

"Who loved, who suffered countless ills
Who battled for the True, the Just—"

Can it be that all this suffering is in vain? No, let us trust the larger hope—

"That nothing walks with aimless feet,
That not one life shall be destroyed
Or cast as rubbish to the void
When God hath made the pile complete;

"That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shriveled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain."

And is sorrow meaningless? Unless the afflictions of the world can work out for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory—then, love is not nature's final law. The storm-tossed mariner on the rough sea of life, whose ship is the helpless prey of waves that run mountain high, who has lost rudder and compass and chart, longs for some friendly shore where he may anchor and be free from alien winds and threatening waves. Shall his cry go unheeded? Are we all only children crying in the night with no language but a cry? May we not rather believe with the poet:—

"There is a day of sunny rest
For every dark and troubled night
And grief may bide an evening guest,
But joy will come with morning light."

And again, man is given a desire for knowledge. He wants to know. He searches the heavens above, the earth beneath and the waters under the earth, to satisfy his craving for knowledge. He analyzes the sun, he weighs it, he knows its chemical constituents, he can measure its heat, its light. He sends his thought out along a beam of light that comes from the farthest star and determines its velocity and the direction of its movement. He takes a sunbeam as his measuring rod and determines the distance of all the stars. He formulates laws to explain their movements and government. He calls the chief of these gravitation. What is gravitation? I don't know. You don't know. Nobody knows. We can go so far and are there compelled to stop. Does this satiate our desire for knowledge? It increases it a thousand fold rather. Have we not often stood on the shore of the ocean of truth and strained our eyes looking out over its mist-hidden waves? Have we not

wished that we might sometime lay aside this tenement of clay that our free spirits might wing their flight to its utmost bounds? Now, we say: "This appears to be true;" then we should say: "I know this is true!" Then we should meet truth face to face! Then we should rejoice in a cloudless vision of perfect knowledge! Then we should know things—matter, spirit, thought—as they really are and not as they seem to be now, in all their evasiveness, delusiveness, dimness, grotesqueness—results of the imperfect light of the world and our own clouded vision. Then we should see with open eyes!

Do you think that this longing is a delusion? Must we not rather believe that when this muddy vesture of decay no longer shuts our spirits in that a light brighter than that of the sun shall fall upon us and we shall know even as we are also known?

Man believes in retribution. It seems to be in the very constitution of man to believe that "whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap." And so the ancients believed in the goddess Nemesis, whose business it was to follow and punish any one who transgressed against the laws of justice and good order in the universe. She was a relentless goddess; no one was ever allowed to escape her pursuit. Now, we know that in this world men do elude her. Many evil men escape from the proper punishment of their own evil doings. It is true that many sins carry their own punishment. The avenging goddess uses the sword of retribution while yet the crime is fresh in memory. But how often, oh, how often, does wrong seem to have control—wrong on the crest of the wave of prosperity, right almost overwhelmed by the turbulent billows of distress!

Job looked out on the world and his heart grew bitter within him when he saw the in-

justice which is allowed under the sun—and he registered his burning protest in the impassioned words:

Wherefore do the wicked live,
Become old, yea wax mighty in power?
Their seed is established with them in their sight,
And their offspring before their eyes. Their houses are safe from fear,
Neither is the wrath of God upon them.
. . . . . .
They send forth the little ones like a flock,
And their children dance.
They sing to the timbrel and the harp
And rejoice at the sound of the pipe.
They spend their days in prosperity,
And in a moment they go down to Sheol.
Yet they say unto God, Depart from us for we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways,
What is the Almighty that we should serve Him?

There is only one way to clear up this mystery—only one way to satisfy man's notion of justice. You don't believe that God put into man a standard of right and wrong—a notion of justice that is contradicted by the

order of things in the world where He has made man live. Man's conception of justice, of reward, of punishment, must have some truth about it. We know that man's notion of justice is a delusion, a brain-sick fancy—if somehow, somewhere, "somewhen" there is not a balancing of the accounts of this world.

Do you say there is no need of such a balancing in a world like this? In a world where low cunning, and trickery win the day over manly and straightforward dealing; where high character is pushed aside to make way for foreheads of brass? In a world where vice in gilded robes goes unrebuked; where might is more than right; where society is often only a pretense, politics a game of petty schemes, and where business interests are considered superior to the rights of humanity; in a world where Herod sits on the throne and Christ hangs on the cross? Isn't it all the veriest mockery unless there shall be a day of reckoning?

Shall we not rather believe that there is a great Judge who sits clothed in majesty, throned in light, sceptred with omipotence—who is eternally just—in whom there can be no variableness nor shadow of turning—who will call before Him all men and show by His judgments that however mysterious His government of the world has been, that Right is forever Right, that Wrong is eternally Wrong.

Yes, we must believe with the poet that:—

In the corrupted currents of this world
Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,
And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself
Buys out the law; But 'tis not so above.
There is no shuffling; there the action lies in its true light.

Do we not believe in the sentiment expressed by Lowell in the words:

Right forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne,
But that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown
Standeth God within the shadow, Keeping watch above his own?

Does not the justice of the decision between Dives and Lazarus appeal to every mind? "Dives, in the world thou hadst thy good things and Lazarus likewise evil things; now he is comforted in Abraham's bosom and thou art tormented in this flame." Retribution, Retribution, is written large in the moral order of the world. There must therefore be a resurrection of the dead and a final judgment.

Love's Demand

And, again, if there is no resurrection of the dead—love and friendship are the most cruel delusions. Ever since that decree went forth, "Thou shalt surely die." Love has sought for a resurrection. When the dear one lies cold in death; when those feet wont to run on errands of love and mercy, are motionless forever; when that tongue which dropped the honey of kind words is silent; when those eyes that once gave back messages of love—are closed to the light of day;

when the cold clods of the valley fall upon that form once instinct with life and responsive with emotion—then heart strings are broken and with tear-dimmed eyes man looks up to the heavens and asks in bitterness of soul that question of most interest to all mankind—"If a man die, shall he live again?" Is not this yearning in itself a proof of mortality? Does God give us love simply to torture us with the separation from the one beloved? Can he take pleasure in tantalizing us? I cannot believe it. And yet what would the stricken soul not do for a positive assurance that the longing for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still—shall be satisfied in some land where there shall be no night, no sorrow, no tears, no death, no parting?

Don't you know that if all the crowns of all the kingdoms of all the world were placed at the feet of the grief-stricken one and offered in exchange for the positive assurance of a glad meeting with loved ones—he would spurn them all!

What was the secret? It was faith in the immortal life that gave them this conquering courage. It was the realm invisible that supported the long line of martyrs and reformers without whose names history would be robbed of half its splendor. What if bloody Nero lived in a golden house, while Paul was chained in a dungeon of the Mamertine prison! What if Lorenzo dwelt in a palace and wore purple, while Savonarola lived in a garret and ate crusts! What if bloody Mary lived at ease while Cranmer suffered at the stake! What if the early Christians died in the arena while the blinded populace looked on and applauded!

The early heroes of Christianity endured their perils and pains, seeing afar off the life and the land that are invisible—seeing by faith the house not made by hands eternal in the heavens! Did they fear death? Hear them answer:

"There is no death! What seems so is transition.
This life of mortal breath
Is but a suburb of the life Elysian
Whose portal we call death!"

As one has said: "He who goes down into the grave is as one who goes down into a great ship to sail away to some rich and historic clime." But a divine form stands upon the prow, a divine hand holds the helm, a divine chart marks the voyage, a divine mind knows where the distant harbor is. In perfect peace the voyager may sing:

"For though from out our bourne of time and place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my pilot face to face
When I have crossed the bar."