



"TRUTH BEARS THE TORCH IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH."—*Lucretius.*

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Robert G. Ingersoll and the Fight Against Death

An Address at an Ingersoll Memorial Meeting Held at McMinnville, by the Liberals of Yamhill County, Oregon, Sunday, October 29, E. M. 299.

BY T. B. WAKEMAN.

FELLOW LIBERALS AND FRIENDS:

This is a "Memorial Meeting", and that fact, together with the appropriate and touching remarks which have already been made, show that we are today taking part, in our humble way, in the sublimest, the most terrible battle of all time,—the fight of Man against Death. The fact of Death, who can deny? All of the ages of learning, the grace, the beauty, the pathos of the old world seem to have blossomed out in the English poet Gray and his "Elegy in a Country Church Yard". Can we ever forget the exquisite tenderness with which it admits the inevitable?

"For who to dumb forgetfulness a prey
This pleasing anxious being e'er resigned,
Left the warm precincts of the cheerful day,
Nor cast one longing, lingering look behind.

"The boast of heraldry, the pomp of power,
And all that beauty, all that wealth e'er gave,
Await alike the inevitable hour,
The paths of glory lead but to the grave."

In a similar way, the learning, grace and tenderness of our New World blossomed out in our poet Longfellow and his "Psalm of Life", but he could only repeat the admission, if possible, more exquisitely:

"Art is long and time is fleeting,
And our hearts, tho' strong and brave,
Still like muffled drums are beating
Funeral marches to the grave."

Yes, the fact of Death—the inevitable!—that, how shall Man defeat, escape, avoid? Man has answered by what are called his "immortalities", and tireless have been his hopes and efforts to make some of them seem to him real and reliable.

Pitiable were those first efforts of the Egyptian lovers away back in the dim twilight of civilization. How carefully with precious gums and spices and jewels did they envelop and enclose the beloved form against the day when the breath, the spirit (spiritus) would require it again in a higher life! How patiently did they build the caves and pyramids and temples for their memory, and homes for their re-

turn? Then how patiently did they await that return through the long, long, silent ages? But, alas! no return ever came, and so their hope and civilization died away. And next arose the Greek Temple, the Roman Mausoleum, and the Druid Henge,—all glorious dwellings, raised first for the returning lost and loved—but never tenanted except by the owl, or death and fame.

Then the Christian Apostle Paul came 1800 years ago and said the Ideal Christ, whom he never saw but with the eye of the spirit, would come from the heaven above, during the lives of those to whom he was then speaking, and would bring down and marry to Palestine the New Jerusalem and kingdom of the Heavenly Father in which no death should be; and for which even Abraham and those patriarchs of old who died in faith should be resurrected, and with "coelestial" bodies enjoy coelestial bliss forever! There never was a single provable fact back of this "epileptic hallucination." It was a craze of faith, hope and love, with no foundation but ignorance. Yet how mightily has it swept through the centuries! The rise of the Sun of Science has made its Faith burn dimly now, but still millions sacrifice with half faith at its shrines, because they can not break the dream-habit of hope that this phantom story may enable them to face Death in some way, with the shout, "O Death, where is thy sting? O Grave, where is thy victory?"

Pitiable was all this then, more pitiable now—when only the dazed or blind can fail to see through the transparent illusion. Some give this illusion symbolical meanings, but to talk of it as fact and reality is to repeat the fancies, cries and prattle of the childhood of our race. The rotating Earth of the New Astronomy, circling the Sun and following Him at the rate of ten miles a second—three hundred millions of miles a year,—has no "firmament" where the God of a coelestial empire holds his court, and to which his Son could have ascended to bring down a new Jerusalem of any kind upon this earth. Nor does the "coelestial

body" fare better under the New Chemistry and Biology. Every single element of the body is "of the earth earthy" and indestructible; and because INDESTRUCTIBLE, matter can not "in the twinkling of an eye," be changed into any other matter, or "coelestial body", or "spirit".

Nor can "spirit" escape by claiming immateriality, or claiming to be mind, thought or soul of some kind. For all of these faculties are found to be concomitant-correlatives of the changes in, and, therefore, properties of, protoplasm—existing only, as far as we now know, on the surface of our mother earth, and of which the human race is the most glorious form, yet physically subjected to its changes and deaths. Until some one can find life that is not a property of protoplasm; or can find under the laws of correlation two differing results from the SAME correlation, so that life may be a correlative-concomitant of protoplasmic changes, and yet something else—until this can be done, which is inconceivable, for nature can never have two lines of correlates doing the same thing, we are simply talking the inconceivable when we talk about the continuance of personal consciousness after death. Thus to the returned soul of the Egyptian, and the consciously continued soul of the Christian, Science alike says her farewell!—both are impossible.

But then let us look further at the inquiry, cannot death be escaped or avoided, if not defeated?

The oldest and chiefest hope of the escape of death has been by FAME—by a glorious continuance in the mouths and so in the hearts and heads of mankind. This hope has become the mainspring of glorious exertions—for good and ill. The poets Horace and Shakespeare (in his sonnets) have each boasted:

"A monument I rear more enduring
than brass."

But Alexander and Cæsar have sought to do the same by the sword instead of the pen, and death by millions reaped the harvest of their single lives! And yet to each, in so far as he wrought for fame only or chiefly, fame was but a temporary vanity that ended to him with his days. Death was not defeated nor escaped by the conqueror. Rather the hero made his own inevitable death a horror, by the millions he had sacrificed to death to obtain an illusory but impossible escape from his darkening shadow. "The glimpses of the moon" over "this bank

and shoal of time"—what folly to trust them! How soon do they let fly the highest, brightest meteor of fame into the dark and eternal silence. Thither, even Homer (sacrosanct), must follow his Achilles, the hero he glorified.

Thus to sum up, we find that prior to A. D. 1600, that is, Era of Man 1, man knew of no real immortality. All of those which he thought he had were simply selfish illusions, which could only breed selfish degradation for a time, or lead to a never-ending and loathsome satiety—the fate of Tithonus.

How the millions of the East have thought and suffered in hopeless efforts to reach a deadening Nirvana by which to escape the horrors of conscious immortality! But every Theosophist and Spiritualist assembly shows even they have thought and suffered in vain, for, as Prof. Huxley says, they have only added new horrors to the old conception of immortality. Thus, prior to the ERA OF MAN, every phase or conception of immortality was at bottom an illusion based upon ignorance, and in its effects on its believers morally and humanly a degradation or a horror.

But as the illusions drop is there no escape from Death?

Prior to the incoming of the ERA OF MAN, A. D. 1600, with its new astronomy, new scientific, secular and human life, no escape was possible, because under the Christian theology and dispensation, there was no conception of HUMAN PROGRESS. There was no movement even, except backward, towards Eden, or upwards to the heaven above—to which all were to ascend to be saved—except the great mass of our condemned race, who were to drop through into hell beneath the earth! There was no conception of the actual distribution, age and immensity of mankind on the earth, nor of their past history, nor of human earthly progress in the future. There was no conception of Truth or Progress, and consequently none of human goodness, or true and realizeable immortality prior to A. D. 1600. Even the most advanced of mankind were heaven-hunters, dreamers of and workers for a sky-immortality which we now know to be impossible, and morally defective beyond expression.

Since theology consecrated the Era of Man by the burning of Bruno and Servetus, a mighty change has come over the more intelligent part of the collective soul of MAN; and this resulted because Man then