Blackrock. Sunday May 3, 1908 2nd aft Easter

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2 Tim i, 10 .. who hath abolished death, & brought life & immortality to light thro' the gospel.

I want to speak to you today about immortality.

What we mean by the word 'immortality' is this – that when we die, death is not the end of us, but that we go on living in the unseen world.

Nowadays, every one believes in immortality, except those who have deliberately given up the belief for philosophical reasons. There was a famous French philosopher named Comte, who founded what he called the Religion of humanity = one of his doctrines was that our earthly life was our whole life, and that when we die, we cease to be altogether. One of his leading followers was

the great novelist of the middle of last century, George Eliot; and perhaps the most notable of his followers today is Mr Frederick Harrison, the president of what is known as the Positivist Society.

Now except for the Positivists, and "the scientific people who hold that man has no soul at all, and who with their followers call themselves Materialists", there is no one today who does not believe in immortality. That is to say (whatever the form of their belief may be), practically everyone believes that there is to be something MORE to follow after we have died.

There is nothing strange in this. It is an instinct of human nature. Where we

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you go through the wide world, you find people believing that the spirits of the dead are real things - that the dead are not annihilated, but that somehow or other, somewhere or other, the dead continue to exist. This instinct has to be crushed and conquered by those scientists and philosophers who adopt the theory that there is no life after death.

There is nothing necessarily Christian ~~at~~ about the belief in a survival after death. It is, I say, a human instinct, and has very little to do with religion at all. The Chinese and Japanese fully believe in the continuance of the spirits of the dead: they, indeed, have made a religion out of the belief - ~~[illegible]~~ Chinese religion is little

more than the worship of departed ancestors. American Indians believe in a happy hunting ground. Both in Greece in ancient times, and in India today, the belief is very common in what is called transmigration of souls, i.e. that the souls of the dead pass from one body to another, so that a man's soul may be punished for a bad life by being made to inhabit the body of an animal in the next life.

Take again the Hebrews. As I have often told you, their beliefs about the future life were not doctrines revealed to them, but were national & traditional ideas. They did not believe that when a man died, a soul (so to speak) or spirit passed out of his body.

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They believed that the man himself, in a kind of shadowy, phantom-like form, continued to exist in the gloom & dust of death in a place called Sheol, where good & bad were huddled together, without distinction, cut off from God's hand & even from His memory.

Now, all these different national views about the life after death makes two things very clear. First, it is a human instinct to believe in a life after death. When you believe in it, you are not doing violence to your natural propensities - you rather do violence to them when you say you won't believe in it. There is in the mere existence of the instinct

a certain argument in favour of the reality of the life after death. It is unlikely that the cry for continued existence would be so universal, were there not something real, corresponding to it, to justify and satisfy it.

And the other thing that is made clear is this.

Though human nature believes in a future life as a FACT, it knows next to nothing about it. Fantastic ideas, grotesque ideas, ideas that to us seem absurd are to be found everywhere and are solemnly believed.

And no one can with authority contradict any one or other.

If you were to lay before a scientific investigator all the evidence we

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have, to demonstrate the kind of thing that the life after death is, he would tell you that there is nothing whatever to show whether even there is a heaven, a hell, a purgatory, a happy hunting ground, an "isles of the blest", or whether one of these idea is more true than any other.

And I could not say he was wrong. The whole subject is shrouded in impenetrable blackness. Try to follow the course of a spirit as it leaves a dying body, and you can't do it. Stand by the bedside of one you love, and as the breath quits the tired body, you and they part company. You cannot tell - probably you can't conceive - what is the experience of your friend

in the first five minutes soon after death. It is all impenetrable mystery. You know nothing. You are baffled at the very start. As far as the outward appearance of things is concerned, there is nothing to distinguish the death of a man from the death of an animal. The soul gives no token of its passing. Anyone who likes to say there is no such thing as a soul at all can say it, and we have no tangible evidence to confute him with.

There are many people today who call themselves agnostics, that is to say, people who say it is impossible to know about these subjects, who say "There may be a soul, or there may not - there may be

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" a life after death, or there may not.
" There is nothing to prove it, one
" way or the other" — and they are
people who are far from wanting
in intelligence. Even the
writer of Ecclesiastes has it —
" That which befalleth the sons of men
" befalleth beasts, even one thing
" befalleth them: as the one dieth,
" so dieth the other — yea, they have
" all one breath, and man hath no
" preeminence above the beasts.
" All go unto one place — all are
" of the dust, and all turn to dust again.
" Who knoweth the spirit of man
" whether it go upward, & the spirit
" of the beast whether it goeth downward
" to the earth? All is vanity."

Now I have said all this,

in order to show you where we stand in this matter when we are thrown back on the knowledge we are born with. We have no knowledge - we are thrown back on the instincts & imagination of the human race. No wonder death has such terror. Terror for those who are dying, when they realise that they are simply going out into the unknown, leaving the old familiar faces, the bright sun, and the day's work. Their nature cries out, & cries in vain, against surrendering all that has twined itself round their heart. Few of us have not felt something of the sting of death.
And death has its terror for those who remain. There is the

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parting from those we have loved. the knowledge of that terrible "never more". There is nothing sadder in all literature than a poem written by a Latin Poet just at the time of our Lord, upon the death of his brother, bidding him in (what Tennyson calls) his "hopeless woe" an everlasting farewell. There is no doubt about it – death is a riddle without a key – a mystery shrouded in shadow, for the whole of mankind – both those who have to die and those who have lost friends in death.

That is the whole distance that our unaided faculties can carry us. There are some

indeed who make a study of spiritualism, and think they have succeeded in opening and maintaining communication with spirits of the departed by various signals such as rappings: but not a single result has been achieved which provides solid standing ground.

But God has not left us to the mercies of our own unaided faculties. God has given us light upon this "darkest of all mysteries" through His Son Jesus Christ. St Paul tells us that our Saviour Christ has abolished death, & brought life & immortality to light through the Gospel."

All this revelation depends upon the great truth we commemorate at Easter, viz. the Resurrection of our Lord.

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What does the Resurrection do for us in this connection? It is a voice coming to us from the other side of death, and the grave. Christ was not merely rescued from death, and his natural end postponed a few more years. He died, and He passed through death, and therefore we know that in one case at least a human soul has got the better of death. Death was not an end of him - death could not keep him dead - He broke out from it, in the power of an endless life. And what has happened in ONE case may happen in others.

But it might be said "This one was the Son of God.

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We must not argue that what happened to the Son of God could necessarily happen to us.
No, of course not. But we are not confined to such a precarious argument. We have a great deal more to go on than that, if we have faith. We have the words, the promises, the assurances of Jesus Christ. For instance, "Because I live, ye shall live also". In other words, Christ is the Life, and His Life is the Source of Life for His people who trust in Him.
We don't merely know that Christ's having risen is a sign that every human soul will rise — that may or may not be a valid argument: but we know, on the

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authority of Christ's own word, than in Him we have eternal life. No one, whose heart is bound up with the unlying Christ, can die eternally: to be one with Christ, is to have life in ones own self.

I daresay we might go a good deal further: but that is far enough for my purposes today. Christ is the Resurrection and the Life: all who pass away in the faith and fear of Christ have eternal life in Him. And from the Epistles of St Paul we are given to understand that the life of the world to come is not merely a life of disembodied spirits. But that when the great Consummation comes in God's own good time, our souls will

be once again clothed in bodies - not corruptible bodies such as these, liable to all the changes & chances of mortal life, but spiritual bodies, bodies glorified in some such way as this body was glorified after the Resurrection, bodies which will be capable of recognition by those who knew us on earth.

But remember this is matter of faith. I believe in what I have said, on the strength of Christ's Resurrection, which seems to confirm the natural instinct I feel for life after death. I can't PROVE it. But if I fail to believe in the Resurrection, I lose my one witness to the life beyond the grave. Without Christ, the future is guesswork from beginning to end.

Before I close, let me speak about two points in the text.

(1) Christ has "abolished" death. But how? People die as much as ever they did before He rose. But for those who believe in Him, death has been robbed of its worst sting. There will indeed always be a sting in death, as long as there is sin in us. We are bound to think too much of the old familiar life we die out of, and too little of the new life we are being born into. But Christ has delivered those who through fear of death are subject to bondage. Through faith in Him, we know that death does not mean extinction — we know that we shall meet again

those who have died in His faith and fear. For He is the Good Shepherd. He is Lord of life and death - both sides of the grave are alike to Him: and it is as easy for Him to gather our souls there as it is here.

But it is only as we possess a personal union with a living Master & Friend that we shall really find the terror of death abolished: only so shall we be able to say "Tho' I walk thro' the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil."

Christ must be very REAL to us, if He is to be able to help us look death in the face, and go on without quailing.

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(2) Christ has brought life & immortality to light thro' the Gospel. But don't think that all Christ did was to show that there is an existence after death. He came to reveal life – life eternal. The life Christ declares to us is a spiritual thing – a thing which brings us near to God. It would mean very little to us that we learnt from Him to believe in a future life, if that life did not mean a life with God. Eternal life means far more than everlasting, unceasing life: it tells of the quality much more than of the quantity of the life. "This is the life eternal, said Christ "Himself," that they may know Thee "the only true God, & Jesus Christ ὃν ἀπέστειλας."

And so, let us remember that it is only in Xt that we are promised eternal life. It is only when our hearts are bound up with the great heart of Xt our Lord, that life is assured to us. I don't say others people will not live after death, I simply say I have no knowledge about them. The one certainty that we have from Christ is that "He that follows Him shall have the light of life" I can't tell you anything about that life beyond the one fact that it is life in the conscious presence of Christ. Beginning here, it continues there - and the living Xt whom we have loved & served here is our guarantee that that unknown life is a blessed life.

Our knowledge of that life is small
The eye of faith is dim.
It is enough that Xt knows all
and I shall be with Him.