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THE *SPECTATOR* A SINCERE CHRISTIAN.

II

[*The following is the second of the two articles by the late* REV. G. S. STREATFEILD, *on "The 'Spectator' a Sincere Christian," the first of which appeared in the last number of the* CHURCHMAN.]

ADDISON has many wise and weighty things to say about death and immortality.

He relates a story from pagan mythology (No. 483) of a mother making request to Juno that she would bestow upon her two sons the greatest boon that it is possible for the gods to confer. The goddess consented, and the next morning both were found dead. To regard this as a boon might be consonant with heathen sentiment, but is in direct contradiction, Addison would maintain, to Christian ideals. It may be observed that he assumes rather than attempts to prove man's immortality.

No. 575. A lewd young fellow seeing an aged hermit go by him barefoot, "Father" says he, "you are in a very miserable condition if there is not another world?" "My son," said the hermit, "but what is thy condition if there is?" Man is a creature designed for two different states of being, or rather two different lives. His first life is short and transient; his second permanent and lasting. The question we are all concerned in is this: in which of these two lives is our chief interest to make ourselves happy? . . . We make provisions for this life as though it were never to have an end, and for the other life as though it were never to have a beginning. . . . Nothing can be a greater disgrace to reason than that men who are persuaded of these two different states of being should be perpetually employed in providing for a life of three score years and ten, and neglecting to make provision for that which after many myriads of years will be still new and still beginning. (*Addison.*)

In a paper contributed by Mr. Henry Grove[1] to the *Spectator* (No. 626) an ingenious argument is maintained that man's love of novelty is a powerful evidence of his immortality. Man is never satisfied with what he has; he always craves something fresh:

To me it seems impossible that a reasonable creature should rest absolutely satisfied in any acquisition whatever without

[1] A learned and liberal-minded non-conformist. He contributed four papers to the eighth volume of the *Spectator*, Nos. 588, 601, 626, 635. No. 635 was republished by Dr. Gibson, Bishop of London. No. 626 was greatly admired by Dr. Johnson.

endeavouring farther; for after its highest improvements, the mind hath an idea of the infinity of things still behind worth knowing, to the knowledge of which therefore it cannot be indifferent; as by climbing up a hill in the midst of a wide plain a man hath his prospect enlarged, and, together with that, the bounds of his desires. Upon this account, I cannot think he detracts from the state of the blessed, who conceives them to be perpetually employed in fresh searches into nature, and to eternity advancing into the fathomless depths of the divine perfections. . . . To add no more—is not this fondness for novelty, which makes us out of conceit with all we already have, a convincing proof of a future state? Either man was made in vain, or this is not the only world for which he was made: for there cannot be a greater instance of vanity than that to which man is liable, to be deluded from the cradle to the grave with fleeting shadows of happiness. His pleasures, and those not inconsiderable neither, die in the possession, and fresh enjoyments do not rise fast enough to fill up half his life with satisfaction. When I see persons sick of themselves any longer than they are called away by something that is of force to chain down the present thought; when I see them hurry from country to town, and then from town back again into the country, continually shifting postures, and placing life in all the different lights they can think of, "Surely" say I to myself, "life is vain, and the man beyond expression stupid or prejudiced, who from the variety of life cannot gather that he is designed for immortality?"

Akin to the foregoing argument from the love of novelty is Addison's suggestion in No. 413 that man's delight in that which is eternal or limitless is closely connected with his thirst for the living God.

One of the final causes of our delight in anything that is great may be this. The Supreme Author of our being has so formed the soul of man, that nothing but himself can be its last, adequate and proper happiness. Because, therefore a great part of our happiness must arise from the contemplation of his being, that he might give our souls a just relish of such a contemplation, he has made them naturally to delight in the apprehension of what is great or unlimited. Our admiration, which is a very pleasing motion of the mind, immediately rises at the consideration of any object that takes up a great deal of room in the fancy, and by consequence will improve into the highest pitch of astonishment and devotion when we contemplate his nature, that is neither circumscribed by time nor place, nor to be comprehended by the largest capacity of a created being.

Addison meditates with great delight upon the immortality of the soul. With this confession he begins one of his finest essays, No. 111. In this, as in many of his papers, he maintains that faith

in immortality is the basis of morality. One argument for belief in immortality he pursues at some length, namely, the possibilities of progress found in God's rational creatures:

How can it enter into the thoughts of man that the soul, which is capable of such immense perfections, and of receiving new improvements to all eternity, shall fall away into nothing almost as soon as it is created? Are such abilities made for no purpose? A brute arrives at a point of perfection that he can never pass; in a few years he has all the endowments he is capable of; and were he to live ten thousand more, would be the same thing he is at present. Were a human soul thus at a stand in her accomplishments, were her faculties to be full blown, and incapable of farther enlargements, I could imagine it might fall away insensibly, and drop at once into a state of annihilation. But can we believe a thinking being, that is in a perpetual progress of improvements, and travelling on from perfection to perfection, after having just looked abroad into the works of its Creator, and made a few discoveries of His infinite goodness, wisdom, and power, must perish at her first setting out, and in the very beginning of her inquiries. . . . A man can never have taken in his full measure of knowledge, has not time to subdue his passions, establish his soul in virtue, and come up to the perfection of his nature, before he is hurried off the stage. Would an infinitely wise Being make such glorious creatures for so mean a purpose? Can He delight in the production of such abortive intelligences, such short-lived reasonable beings? Would He give us talents that are not to be exerted? capacities that are never to be gratified? How can we find that wisdom which shines through all His works in the formation of man, without looking on this world as only a nursery for the next? . . . There is not in my opinion a more pleasing and triumphant consideration in religion than this of the perpetual progress which the soul makes towards the perfection of its nature, without ever arriving at a period in it. (*Addison.*)

In No. 628, *Spectator* gives us the noble soliloquy on the subject of immortality from the lips of Cato in Addison's own tragedy.[1] In No. 537 we find the translation of a very fine passage from Cicero's *De Senectute* on the same great theme.

On the connection between faith and morality *Spectator's* mind is very clear; and this, as coming from one who has been characterized as "the foremost moralist of his day,"[2] is significant.

No. 459. If we look into the more serious part of mankind we find many who lay so great a stress upon faith that they neglect morality; and many who build so much upon morality, that they

[1] *Cato's Soliloquy*; Act V, Sc. i. Cato solus, sitting in a thoughtful posture: in his hand Plato's book on the immortality of the soul.

[2] Lecky *op. cit.*, Vol. ii, p. 99.

do not pay a due regard to faith. The perfect man should be defective in neither of these particulars. . . . One (conclusion) I am sure is so obvious that he cannot miss it, namely, that a man cannot be perfect in his scheme of morality who does not strengthen and support it with the Christian faith.

Compare with the foregoing No. 465. "There is nothing which strengthens faith more than morality. Faith and morality naturally produce each other." This No. of the *Spectator* deals with the best methods of strengthening faith. The whole essay is extremely edifying. In the following words the writer may seem to urge a counsel of perfection, but, coming from such a mind as Addison's, it is well worth attention.

Those who delight in reading books of controversy, which are written on both sides of the question on points of faith, do very seldom arrive at a fixed and settled habit of it. They are one day entirely convinced of its important truths, and the next meet with something that shakes and disturbs them. The doubt which was laid revives again, and shows itself in new difficulties, and that generally for this reason, because the mind, which is perpetually lost in controversies and disputes, is apt to forget the reasons which had once set it at rest, and to be disquieted with any former perplexity, when it appears in a new shape, or is started by a different hand. As nothing is more laudable than an inquiry after truth, so nothing is more irrational than to pass away our whole lives, without determining ourselves one way or other in those points which are of the last importance to us. There are indeed many things from which we may withhold our assent; but in cases by which we are to regulate our lives, it is the greatest absurdity to be wavering and unsettled without closing with that side which appears the most safe and the most probable. The first rule, therefore, which I shall lay down, is this, that when by reading or discourse we find ourselves thoroughly convinced of the truth of any article, and of the reasonableness of our belief in it, we should never after suffer ourselves to call it in question. We may perhaps forget the arguments which occasioned our conviction; but we ought to remember the strength they had with us, and therefore still to retain the conviction that they once produced. The writer illustrates his point by the story of Bishop Latimer at the Conference of Divines, who left the argumentative part of the discussion to younger disputants, who were in full possession of their parts. As for himself he only repeated to his adversaries the articles in which he firmly believed, and in the profession of which he was determined to die. It is in this manner that the mathematician proceeds upon propositions which he has once demonstrated; and though the demonstration may have slipped out of his memory, he builds upon the truth, because he knows it was demonstrated. This rule is

absolutely necessary for weaker minds, and in some measure for men of the greatest abilities; but to these last I would propose, in the second place, that they should lay up in their memories, and always keep by them in readiness, those arguments which appear to them of the greatest strength, and which cannot be got over by all the doubts and cavils of infidelity. . . . There is still another method, which is more persuasive than any of the former; and that is an habitual adoration of the Supreme Being, as well in constant acts of mental worship, as in outward forms. The devout man does not only believe, but feels there is a Deity. He has actual sensations of Him; his experience concurs with his reason; he sees Him more and more in all his intercourses with Him, and even in this life almost loses his faith in conviction. (*Addison.*)

To this essay is appended the fine hymn beginning,

"The spacious firmament on high."

513. The Saturday paper of October 18, 1712, contains reflections on death, purporting to come from the pen of his "worthy friend the clergyman." After quoting, at some length, from Dr. Sherlock's[1] treatise on Death, he continues:

Let a man's innocence be what it will, let his virtues rise to the highest pitch of perfection attainable in this life, there will still be in him so many secret sins, so many human frailties, so many offences of ignorance, passion and prejudice, so many unguarded words and thoughts, and in short, so many defects in his best actions, that, without the advantages of such an expiation and atonement as Christianity has revealed to us, it is impossible that he should be cleared before his Sovereign Judge, or that he should be able to "stand in His sight."

The paper ends with a hymn composed during illness:

"When rising from the bed of death."

289. Again, in No. 289, we have reflections on death. I give two extracts.

Upon taking my seat in a Coffee-house I often draw the eyes of the whole room upon me, when in the hottest seasons of news, and at a time perhaps that the Dutch mail is just come in, they hear me ask the coffeeman for his last week's bill of mortality.[2] I find that I have been sometimes taken on this occasion for a parish sexton, sometimes for an undertaker, and sometimes for a doctor of physic.

[1] William Sherlock, 1641–1707. Dean of St. Paul's, author of *Practical Discourse concerning Death.*

[2] Bills of mortality, containing the weekly number of christenings and deaths, with the cause, were first compiled by the London Company of Parish Clerks (for 109 parishes) after the Plague in 1592. The age at death was not given until 1728. Bills of mortality were superseded in 1836 by the official records of the Registrar-General (H.M.).

In this, however, I am guided by the spirit of a philosopher, as I take occasion from hence to reflect upon the regular increase and diminution of mankind, and consider the several various ways through which we pass from life to eternity. I am very well pleased with these weekly admonitions, that bring into my mind such thoughts as ought to be the daily entertainment of every reasonable creature; and can consider with pleasure to myself, by which of those deliverances, or as we commonly call them, distempers, I may possibly make my escape out of this world of sorrows into that condition of existence, wherein I hope to be happier than it is possible for me at present to conceive. . . . The truth of it is there is nothing in history which is so improving to the reader as those accounts which we meet with of the deaths of eminent persons, and of their behaviour in that dreadful season. I may also add, that there are no parts of history which affect and please the reader in so sensible a manner. The reason I take to be this, because there is no other single circumstance in the study of any person, which can possibly be the case of every one who reads it. A battle or a triumph are conjunctures in which not one man in a million is likely to be engaged; but when we see a person at the point of death, we cannot forbear being attentive to every thing he says or does, because we are sure that some time or other we shall be ourselves in the same melancholy circumstances. The general, the statesman, or the philosopher, are perhaps characters which we may never act in, but the dying man is one whom sooner or later, we shall certainly resemble. (*Addison.*)

In No. 90 Addison starts the Platonic conception of future retribution.

There is not in my opinion a consideration more effectual to extinguish inordinate desires in the soul of man than the notions of Plato and his followers upon that subject. They tell us that every passion which has been contracted by the soul during her residence in the body remains with her in a separate state; and that the soul in the body, or out of the body, differs no more than the man does from himself when he is in his house, or in the open air. When therefore the obscene passions in particular have once taken root, and spread themselves in the soul, they cleave to her inseparably, and remain in her for ever, after the body is cast off and thrown aside. As an argument to confirm this their doctrine, they observe that a lewd youth who goes on in a continued course of voluptuousness, advances by degrees into a libidinous old man; and that the passion survives in the mind when it is altogether dead in the body; nay, that the desire grows more violent, and (like all other habits) gathers strength by age, at the same time that it has no power of executing its own purposes. If, say they, the soul is most subject to these passions at a time when it has the least instigations from the body, we may well suppose she will still retain them, when she is entirely divested of it. The very

substance of the soul is festered with them, the gangrene is gone too far to be ever cured; the inflammation will rage to all eternity.

In this, then (says the Platonist) consists the punishment of a voluptuous man after his death. He is tormented with desires which it is impossible for him to gratify, solicited by a passion that has neither objects nor organs adapted to it. He lives in a state of invincible desire and impotence, and always burns in the pursuit of what he always despairs to possess. It is for this reason (says Plato) that the souls of the dead appear frequently in cemeteries and hover about the places where their bodies are buried, as still hankering after their old brutal pleasures, and desiring again to enter the body that gave them the opportunity of fulfilling them. Some of our most eminent divines have made use of this Platonic notion, so far as it regards the subsistence of our passions after death, with great beauty and strength of reason. (*Addison.*)

In No. 447 Addison returns to this solemn truth that as a man sows he must expect to reap.

In short, Heaven is not to be looked upon only as a reward, but as the natural effect of a religious life.

On the other hand, those evil spirits, who, by long custom, have contracted in the body habits of lust and sensuality, malice, and revenge, an aversion to everything that is good, just, or laudable, are naturally seasoned and prepared for pain and misery. Their torments have already taken root in them; they cannot be happy when divested of the body, unless we may suppose that Providence will in a manner create them anew, and work a miracle in the rectification of their faculties. They may, indeed, taste a kind of malignant pleasure in those actions to which they are accustomed, whilst in this life; but when they are removed from all those objects which are here to gratify them, they will naturally become their own tormentors, and cherish in themselves those painful habits of mind which are called in scripture phrase, "the worm which never dies." (*Addison.*)

No. 543, dealing with the proof of God's wisdom in creation, is a very fine piece of writing. It is of course framed on the obsolete lines of Paley's *Natural Theology*, but Addison wrote thirty years before Lamarck was born, and a hundred and fifty years before *The Origin of Species* saw the light. The following extracts will give some idea of the argument:

Those who were skilled in anatomy among the ancients, concluded from the outward and inward make of an human body, that it was the work of a Being transcendently wise and powerful. As the world grew more enlightened in this art, their discoveries gave them fresh opportunities of admiring the conduct of Providence in the formation of an human body. Galen was converted by his dis-

sections, and could not but own a Supreme Being upon a survey of this His handywork. There were, indeed, many parts of which the old anatomists did not know the certain use; but as they saw that most of those which they examined were adapted with admirable art to their several functions, they did not question but those, whose uses they could not determine, were contrived with the same wisdom for respective ends and purposes. . . . The body of an animal is an object adequate to our senses. It is a particular system of Providence that lies in a narrow compass. The eye is able to command it, and by successive inquiries can search into all its parts. Could the body of the whole earth, or indeed the whole universe, be thus submitted to the examination of our senses, were it not too big and disproportioned for our inquiries, too unwieldy for the management of the eye and hand, there is no question but it would appear to us as curious and well contrived a frame as that of an human body. We would see the same concatenation and subserviency, the same necessity and usefulness, the same beauty and harmony, in all and every of its parts, as what we discover in the body of every single animal.

The more extended our reason is and the more able to grapple with immense objects, the greater still are those discoveries which it makes of wisdom and providence in the works of the creation. A Sir Isaac Newton, who stands up as the miracle of the present age, can look through a whole planetary system; consider it in its weight, number and measure;[1] and draw from it as many demonstrations of infinite power and wisdom as a more confined understanding is able to deduce from the system of an human body. (*Addison.*)

Addison's grandest and maturest thoughts of God are perhaps contained in No. 565, which he heads with Dryden's paraphrase of Georg. IV, 221:

> " For God the whole created mass inspires
> Thro' heav'n and earth and ocean's depths: He throws
> His influence round, and kindles as He goes."

From the thought of man's insignificance, which he expresses in the words of the Psalmist (Ps. viii. 3, 4), he turns to that of the infinity of God.

If we consider Him in His omnipresence, His being passes through, actuates, and supports the whole frame of nature. His creation, and every part of it, is full of Him. There is nothing He

[1] We may find in these words the tacit acceptance of the theory of gravitation. This great discovery of Newton was not universally accepted in Addison's time. It was even disputed by Leibnitz. See Lecky, *History of England in the Eighteenth Century*, Vol. iii, p. 6.

See Article in CHURCHMAN of January and April last, " Addison as a Student of Nature."

has made that is either so distant, so little, or so inconsiderable, which He does not essentially inhabit. His substance is within the substance of every being, whether material or immaterial, and as intimately present to it as that being is to itself. It would be an imperfection in Him, were He able to remove out of one place into another, or to withdraw Himself from any thing that He has created, or from any part of that space which is diffused and spread abroad to infinity. In short, to speak of Him in the language of the old philosopher, He is a Being whose centre is everywhere, and His circumference nowhere.[1]

In the second place, He is omniscient as well as omnipresent. His omniscience indeed necessarily and naturally flows from His omnipresence; He cannot but be conscious of every motion that arises in the whole material world, which He thus essentially pervades and of every thought that is stirring in the intellectual world, to every part of which He is thus intimately united. Several moralists have considered the creation as the temple of God which He has built with His own hands, and which is filled with His presence. Others have considered infinite space as the receptacle, or rather the habitation of the Almighty; but the noblest and most exalted way of considering this infinite space is that of Sir Isaac Newton, who calls it the sensorium of the Godhead. Brutes and men have their sensoriola or little sensoriums, by which they apprehend the presence, and perceive the actions of a few objects that lie contiguous to them. Their knowledge and observation turn within a very narrow circle. But as God Almighty cannot but perceive and know everything in which He resides, infinite space gives infinite room to infinite knowledge, and is, as it were, an organ to omniscience. (*Addison.*)

Addison follows up these thoughts on this profound and mysterious subject in No. 590. Here he deals with the conception of eternity and with the Being of God in relation to it. His words are full of wisdom, and have as much meaning for us to-day as for those who first read them; though we venture to think (and the thought is suggested by the author himself) that it was but a limited company of Addison's original readers, who could have intelligently entered into the full meaning of his language. The following extract will give some idea of the nature and value of this disquisition.

Having thus considered that eternity which is past, according to the best idea we can frame of it, I shall now draw up those several articles on this subject, which are dictated to us by the light of reason, and which may be looked upon as the creed of a philosopher in this great point.

[1] One is reminded of Tennyson's *Higher Pantheism.*

First, it is certain that no being could have made itself; for, if so, it must have acted before it was, which is a contradiction.

Secondly, that therefore some being must have existed from all eternity.

Thirdly, that whatever exists after the manner of created beings, or according to any notions we have of existence, could not have existed from eternity.

Fourthly, that this Eternal Being must therefore be the great Author of nature, "The Ancient of Days," who, being at an infinite distance in His perfections from all finite and created beings, exists in a quite different manner from them, and in a manner of which they can have no idea.

I know that several of the schoolmen, who would not be thought ignorant of anything, have pretended to explain the manner of God's existence, by telling us that He comprehends infinite duration in every moment; that eternity is with Him a *punctum stans*, a fixed point; or, which is as good sense, an infinite instant; that nothing with reference to his existence, is either past or to come; to which the ingenious Mr. Cowley alludes in his description of heaven.

> "Nothing is there to come, and nothing past,
> But an eternal *now* does always last." [1]

For my own part, I look upon these propositions as words that have no ideas annexed to them; and think men had better own their ignorance, than advance doctrines by which they mean nothing, and which, indeed, are self-contradictory. We cannot be too modest in our disquisitions, when we meditate on Him, who is environed with so much glory and perfection, who is the source of being, the fountain of all that existence, which we and His whole creation derive from Him. Let us, therefore, with the utmost humility acknowledge, that, as some being must necessarily have existed from eternity, so this Being does exist after an incomprehensible manner, since it is impossible for a being to have existed from eternity after our manner or notions of existence. . . . In the first revelation which He makes of His own being, He entitles Himself, "I AM THAT I AM"; and when Moses desires to know what name he shall give Him in his embassy to Pharaoh, he bids him say, that "I AM hath sent me unto you." Our great Creator, by this revelation of Himself, does in a manner exclude everything else from a real existence, and distinguishes Himself from His creatures as the only being which truly and really exists. The ancient Platonic notion, which was drawn from speculations of eternity, wonderfully agrees with this revelation which God has made of Himself. (*Addison.*)

[1] From Cowley's epic poem, *Davideis*.