

**IMMORTALITY AND THE
FUTURE. THE
CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE OF
ETERNAL LIFE**

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H. R. MACKINTOSH

**IMMORTALITY AND THE
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ETERNAL LIFE**

IMMORTALITY *and* THE FUTURE

*The Christian Doctrine of
Eternal Life*

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TO
MY WIFE

PREFACE

THIS little book is meant as a first guide to those who are studying the problems of Eschatology, and who wish to do so in the full light of history and faith. These two interests, accordingly, have throughout been kept in view. By saying so much, I hope that I sufficiently indicate what is and what is not to be looked for in the pages that follow. The volume was planned and in great part written before the outbreak of war, but the subject of which it treats, and especially the great themes of death, immortality and the life everlasting, have now laid hold upon all hearts with new power. Evidences abound on every side that not for a century has interest in these matters been so widespread and so profound. The war has made a new heaven; let us trust that it may aid in making a new earth.

For kind help in reading proofs of the first edition I am under a deep obligation to my friend and colleague, the Rev. Prof. H. A. A. Kennedy, D.D., whose suggestions much contributed to improve the text.

Some part of the best literature for those who wish to pursue the study of this field is mentioned in the text or footnotes. Here let me name, as valuable and quite recent additions to the eschatologist's library, Prof. A. E. Taylor's essay on "Immortality" in the collection *The Faith and the War*, Dr. S. H. Mellone's *Eternal Life Here and Hereafter*, and Principal Griffith-Jones' *Immortality and the Faith*.

H. R. MACKINTOSH.

New College, Edinburgh,
1917.

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PART I
THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER I

ETHNIC IDEAS OF DEATH AND THE FUTURE

IN the vast field of religious history, so various in belief and custom, it is impossible to select more than a few characteristic types of ethnic "eschatology." These cast light on the Christian hope either by contrast or by their historical and preparatory influence.

(a) *Primitive Races*¹

Among primitive or savage races it is held universally that something or other in man does survive death. Three groups of ideas prevail, often combined at random or used alternately. (1) The corpse is considered still to be in some sense alive. It is given a place at meals and provided with food and drink; or has its sinews cut, lest it should revisit its old haunts; or its grave is heaped with stones, to keep it down; in its neighbourhood, men speak low. (2) Mingling obscurely with this is a notion of that which persists separate from the body—the man himself, grown invisible. It is not incorporeal, therefore

¹ Cf. Steinmann, *Jenseitsvorstellungen der primitiven Völker*.

not mere soul, but rather the whole man, only unseen. In Melanesia, the dead king's shade is conducted to the shore and bidden step on board an invisible skiff, which bears him to a distant land. Elsewhere the distinction between (1) and (2) is less clearly marked. The ghosts or shadows of the dead may be seen at sunset or in moonlight; their whispers are heard; their footsteps, even, may be detected in ashes strewn on the path. On the journey to the place of the dead they are exposed to peril and adventure. Giants may devour them; rocks beside the narrow way crush them suddenly; bridges gape and let them drop in the abyss. They may even die and dissolve in nothingness—this last, as is sometimes believed, after a series of deaths. This ghost-idea may have arisen from contemplation of the corpse, as devoid now of what made the living self; also from noises heard in the hut or house of the departed and thought to be his step or voice or sigh—tokens, that is, of his unseen presence. Nor must the great influence of dreams be forgotten: for the dream-world is as real as the living, and in its visions the *Doppelgänger* of the dead returns to friend or foe. (3) Mixed up with these two is the conception of a life-soul or life-substance. This is the principle of nutrition and growth, dwelling in the body as a finely material entity and leaving it with the last breath. It is the cause of life. Over it we have no power; it may at any time desert the body and have to be coaxed back. After death it may inhabit a bush or stone, a bird or butterfly or snake.

A like variety marks the posthumous fortunes of men. The dead haunt familiar places, the old hut and village; or as ghosts, often unfriendly, they dwell in the jungle and the dark; as grasshoppers, they flit round their graves; they may even be reborn into earthly life. Possibly owing

to a desire to put them farther off, there arose the idea of a land or kingdom of the dead, to which they travel. It may be situated in a distant island or deep under the sea; it may lie on the mountain heights or in the stars; it may be subterranean. All these notions occur, sometimes in conjunction. The existence of the dead, while they remain near their old home, is one of misery, for they need food, drink and warmth as much as ever, and depend for them on the attentions of the living. To satisfy craving they may even have to steal. In the distant paradise, as with the Kamtschatskaks and Chippewayas, it is different, and many luxuries are promised. But in essentials the soul-land resembles this life; there is farming and fishing and hunting, sometimes of an easier and more productive kind than here. In war, there are no mortal wounds. When, however, the soul-land is pictured as in two divisions, a better and a worse, the dead are not assigned to these on any principle we should call moral. What decides is their possession of "mana" or supernatural force—their ability of mind or body, and the position gained thereby in life. The distinction is a social one, though it is true that men killed in war, or in the chase, can count on special favour. But the childless are without hope; among certain animistic tribes, lepers have no prospect but that of slavery. Much also depends on proper burial; the unburied wander to and fro in a state of dangerous discontent. Usually there is no thought of future retribution for wrongdoing.

In general, we are left with the impression of an empty unattractive existence—shadowy and pitiless, and all but totally destitute of moral quality. Note specially that these animistic beliefs have really nothing to do with religion. They represent, rather, a primitive idea of the soul