

**THE WORLD'S GREAT
SERMONS. IN TEN
VOLUMES. VOLUME VI: H.
W. BEECHER TO PUNSHON**

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The World's Great Sermons. In Ten Volumes. Volume VI: H. W. Beecher to Punshon by
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GRENVILLE KLEISER & LEWIS O. BRASTON

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The World's Great Sermons

VOLUME VI

H. W. BEECHER TO PUNSHON

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HENRY WARD BEECHER
IMMORTALITY

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

HENRY WARD BEECHER, preacher, orator, lecturer, writer, editor, and reformer, was born at Litchfield, Connecticut, in 1813. He was by nature and training a great pulpit orator. Mr. Beecher kept himself in perfect physical condition for his work. He has described a course of vocal exercises which he pursued in the open air for a period of three years. "The drill I underwent," he says, "produced, not a rhetorical manner, but a flexible instrument, that accommodated itself readily to every kind of thought and every shape of feeling."

He had deep sympathy for all men, and this with his intense dramatic power often carried him into the wildest and most exalted flights of oratory. Phillips Brooks styled him the greatest preacher in America, and he is generally regarded as the most highly gifted of modern preachers. He was fearless, patriotic, clear-headed, witty, and self-sacrificing. Dr. Wilkinson calls him "the greatest pulpit orator the world ever saw." He died in 1887.

H. W. BEECHER

1813—1887

IMMORTALITY¹

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.—I Cor. xv., 19.

THIS is not the declaration of a universal principle: it is biographical and personal. And yet, there is in it a principle of prime importance. It is true that Paul and his compeers had sacrificed everything that was dear to man for the sake of Christ. Paul had given up the place that he held among his countrymen, and the things which surely awaited him. He had consented to be an exile. Loving Palestine and the memory of his fathers, as only a Jew could love, he found himself an outcast, and despised everywhere by his own people. And the catalog that he gives of the sufferings which he felt keenly; which perhaps would not have been felt by a man less susceptible than he, but which were no less keen in his case—that catalog shows how much he had given up for Christ. And if it should turn

¹ From "Plymouth Pulpit Sermons." By permission of the Congregational Sunday-School and Publishing Society.

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out that after all he had followed a mere fable, a myth; that Christ was but a man; that, dying, He had come to an end; that He stayed dead, and that there was no resurrection, no future, but only that past through which he waded, and that present in which he was suffering, then, surely, it would be true that of all men he was most miserable.

This is the biographical view; but it may be said of all men, in this respect, that no persons can so ill afford to lose faith of immortality as those who have had all their affections burnished, deepened and rendered sensitive by the power of Christianity. When Christianity has had the education of generation after generation, and has shaped the style of its manhood, and ordained the institutions by which its affections have been enlarged and purified; when, in short, generations of men have been legitimately the children of Christianity, to take away from them the faith of immortality would be a cruelty which could have no parallel in the amount of suffering which it would entail.

It is not necessarily true that men without a hope of Christianity would have no incitement to virtue—certainly not in the ordinary way in which it is put to us. Abstractly, it is said that virtue is its own reward—and it is. If there was enough of it to amount to anything, it would be a great, an exceeding great, reward; but where it is a spark; a

HENRY WARD BEECHER

germ; where it is struggling for its own existence; where it bears but a few ripe fruits, the reward is hardly worth the culture. If all that we get is what we have in this life, it is but little.

Many men are favorably organized and favorably situated; they have an unyearning content; things seem good enough for them; and they do not understand why it is that persons should desire immortality and glory—that is, at first. In general, I think there are few persons that live long in life who do not, sooner or later, come to a point in which they wake up to the consciousness of a need of this kind. It is not always true in the case of persons of refined moral and intellectual culture that they are conscious of needing a belief in immortality; but a belief in immortality is the unavoidable result and the indispensable requirement of all true manhood. When you look at growth, not in each particular case, but largely, as it develops itself in communities; when you consider it, not only in a single individual, but in whole communities, as they develop from childhood to manhood, or from barbarism through semi-civilization to civilization and refinement, the law of development is always away from animal life and its sustaining appetites and passions toward the moral and the intellectual. That is the direction in which unfolding takes place.