

**THE ETERNAL  
CONFLICT. AN  
ESSAY; PP. 1-228**

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The Eternal Conflict. An Essay; pp. 1-228 by William Romaine Paterson (Benjamin Swift)

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**WILLIAM ROMAINE PATERSON (BENJAMIN SWIFT)**

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**ETERNAL CONFLICT**  
AN ESSAY

BY  
WILLIAM ROMAINE PATERSON  
( BENJAMIN SWIFT )



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*Se erro non credo veramente  
errare, et parlando et scrivendo  
non disputo per amor de la vit-  
toria per se stessa (perche ogni  
reputatione et vittoria stimo,  
nemica a Dio, vilissima, et senza  
punto di honore, dove non è la  
verità) ma per amor della vera  
sapienza, et studio della vera  
contemplatione, m'affatico, mi  
crucio, mi tormento.*



## INTRODUCTION

<sup>21</sup> Now, if we could look into the triumphant souls of the saints we would doubtless find that in the course of their progress they came through extraordinary hazards, and that one single moment longer in dallying, one backward glance towards lost joys and *die verlorne Schöne* of the world, one last kiss of the hand to the doomed cities of pleasure they were forsaking, would have cost them their aureoles. In this great doctrine of spiritual chances I am not skilled. But if I were a religious believer I would certainly vindicate for myself the right to believe that since the road to God is at best a cloudy road, a baffling and circuitous road, it may matter little to the Infinite Charity at which point of it death overtakes us. The old theory which made a man's immortal well-being depend on the exact spiritual condition in which he left the world ought to be repulsive to any one who considers the human soul to be worth immortality at all. For character is not

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merely an affair of chronological sequence, or of regular and consistent progression. Rather, it must be viewed under the form of an organism which, like every other organism, keeps returning upon itself through successive phases of health and disease. And on close examination it will be found that this ambiguous movement is characteristic of the highest type of spiritual life. For even the saints, if we are to believe their confessions and their prayers, had their moments of temptation and forgetfulness, their moods of uncharitable and bitter judgments when the old stain rose again through the whiteness of their lives. But supposing God had suddenly called them, are we to believe that their struggle and mastery and sainthood would have counted for nothing simply because in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump, they were found unprepared? And what right has any one who believes in God and immortality to believe in the finality of evil even in the case of a man whom death has plucked like a rotten fruit? Under so exalted a view of human destiny it might have been expected that man would not be considered merely like a withering plant which, once it has begun to wither, must only wither away. If this great belief were more to me than only a hope and a fearful looking for

of its reality, then indeed all the tormenting problems of human life would disappear. I would think of our destiny only under the form of some holy metempsychosis. I would believe neither in immortal stagnation nor immortal punishment, but in immortal progression. Only if the depths of cruelty in the universe were deeper than I had thought would I bring myself ever to accept the Christian doctrine of immortality, which for centuries shook and amazed the human soul. For the belief in a future state, which ought to soothe and comfort it, became its terror and scourge. During whole centuries the Church was turning the Empyrean into a kind of high hell, and holding out to her enemies a terrible gift of immortality combined with the fearful jibe, "He that is filthy let him be filthy still!" But if she had known the beauty of her own belief, if she had had the genius to transform and irradiate the dark doctrine of her Master, she would have tried to teach the world that the human soul is a thing of dawn, and that immortality is its last hope of rejuvenescence and transfiguration.

What surprises the outsider is, how little those make of it who hold this great belief. Once really possessed by the human brain it ought to dominate it. If the conviction of immortality were really a conviction the signifi- X