

IS THERE A LIFE BEYOND THE GRAVE?

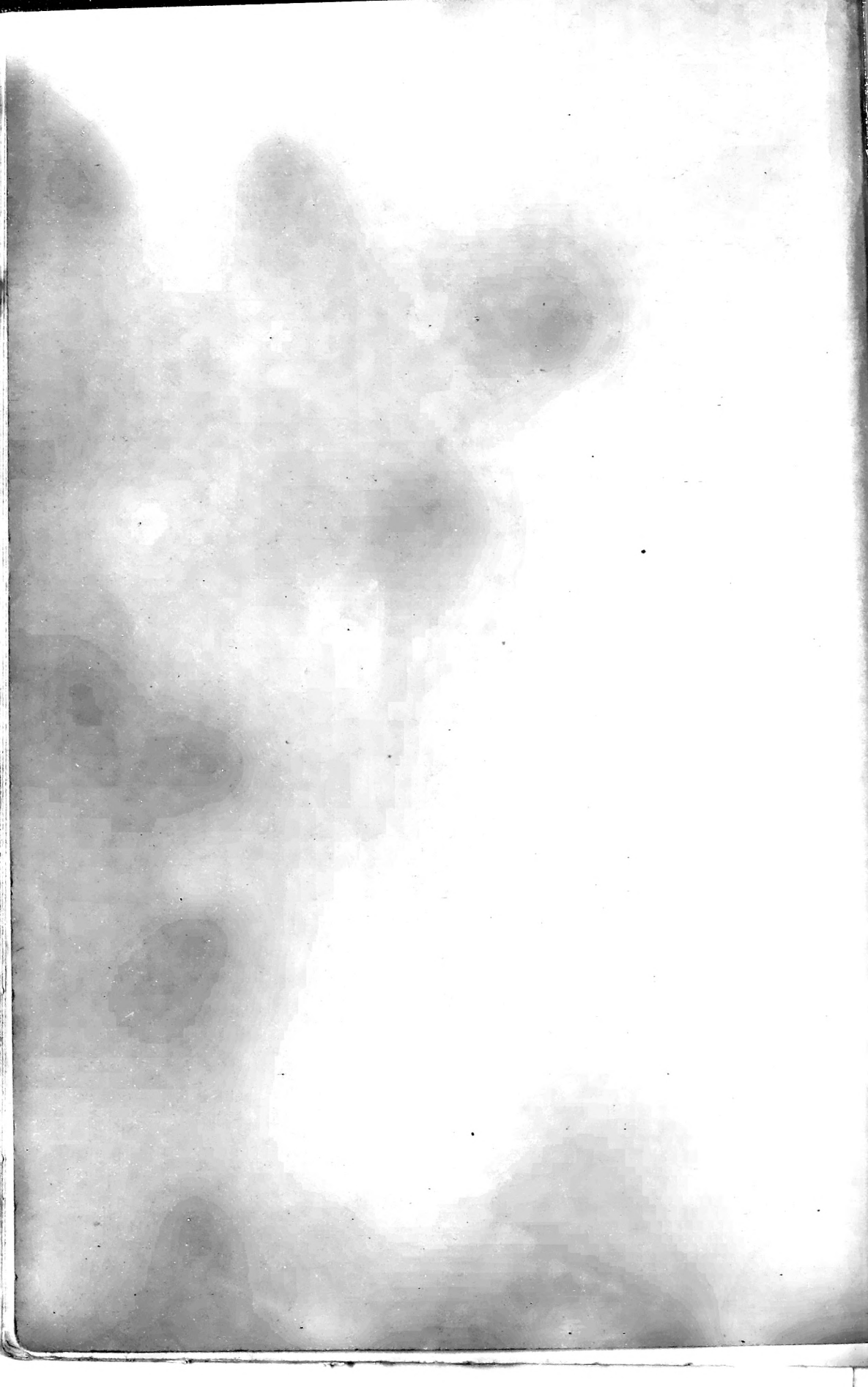
A Reply to Dr. R. B. Westbrook

By CHARLES WATTS,

*Author of "The Teachings of Secularism Compared with Orthodox
Christianity," "Secularism: Constructive and Destructive,"
"Evolution and Special Creation," "The Glory of Unbelief,"
"Saints and Sinners: Which?" "Bible Morality,"
"Christianity: Its Origin, Nature and Influence,"
"Agnosticism and Christian Theism: Which
is the More Reasonable?" "Reply to
Father Lambert," Etc., Etc.*

LONDON:
WATTS & CO., 17 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET ST., E.C.
1894.

PRICE THREE PENCE.



IS THERE A LIFE BEYOND THE GRAVE ?

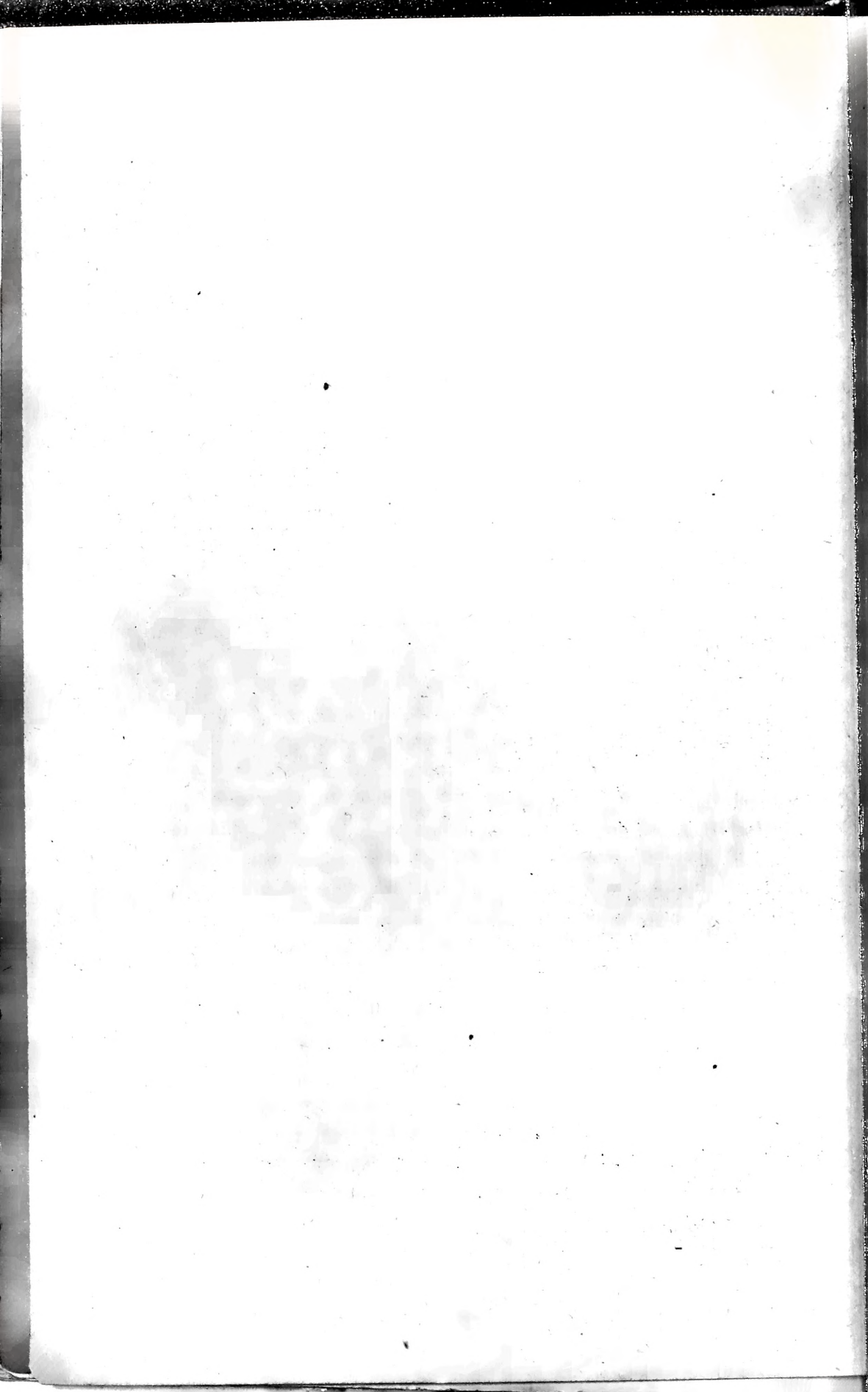
A Reply to Dr. R. B. Westbrook.

By CHARLES WATTS,

*Author of "The Teachings of Secularism Compared with Orthodox
Christianity," "Secularism: Constructive and Destructive,"
"Evolution and Special Creation," "The Glory of Unbelief,"
"Saints and Sinners: Which?" "Bible Morality,"
"Christianity: Its Origin, Nature and Influence,"
"Agnosticism and Christian Theism: Which
is the More Reasonable?" "Reply to
Father Lambert," Etc., Etc.*

LONDON :
WATTS & CO., 17 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET ST., E.C.
1894.

PRICE THREE PENCE.



Is there a Life Beyond the Grave ?

A REPLY TO R. B. WESTBROOK, A.M., D.D.

IT has been aptly remarked that it does not necessarily follow, because an opponent has been replied to, that his arguments have been answered. The truth of this statement never appeared to me so evident as when I read the comments of Dr. Westbrook (which appeared in SECULAR THOUGHT of the 2nd and 9th of December last) on my lecture, "Is there a Life Beyond the Grave?" Instead of endeavoring to refute my arguments, the doctor contented himself with presenting to the reader a conglomeration of meaningless phrases, contradictory statements, and reckless assertions. His article, moreover, was marred by undignified imputation, more indicative of an irritable schoolboy, who had undertaken a task which he found himself unable to perform, than of a debater who felt conscious of his ability to refute the arguments of his opponent. To designate my lecture as "flimsy argument," and to suggest that I "cavilled," but without attempting by any ordinary reasoning process to prove his statements, was a marked specimen of controversial weakness. Dr. Westbrook's elegant (?) remark, "Did he (Mr. Watts) not bellow and paw up the dirt, and rush around furiously with hay on his horns like a wild bull of Bashan, for an hour and a half?" was a proof that in his case "a firm faith in a future state" has not had a "salutary influence." Such vulgar imputations may be the result of an "evil spirit;" but it is opposed to that material refinement

and courtesy which as a rule characterize a real gentleman in controversy. The only "dirt" that I "pawed up" consisted in exposing the fallacies indulged in by those who assume a knowledge which they do not possess. That some of the "dirt" fell on Dr. Westbrook is clear from the blemishes that disfigure his reply to me.

The doctor commences by saying: "I do not accept the ordinary distinctions which are made in speaking of man, as consisting of a body and soul. The body is not the man, the soul is not the man, the mind is not the man; but it requires what is intended by these three terms, and much more, to make a man." Now, what is the "much more" here referred to? If there is something more in man than "body, soul and mind," the doctor should have stated what it is. Again, he says: "I make no distinction between the material and immaterial, the natural and the supernatural, as I do not know where to draw the line." Then, if he makes no distinction and if he knows not where to draw the line, why does he mention the "supernatural" at all, particularly when he further observes: "I can think of nothing separate from matter"? If he is correct in this last assertion, he by his own confession knows nothing of any "supernatural," and any "argument," therefore, drawn from such meaningless phrases must be "flimsy" indeed.

Dr. Westbrook alleges that I admit that the doctrine of a future life "is beyond the limits of controversy. If he (Mr. Watts) has any logical argument that could be used against the theory of a future life would he not have produced it?" I have made no such admission; on the contrary, my lecture was a proof that, in my opinion, the doctrine *did* come within "the limits of controversy." Surely there is a difference between debating a doctrine and admitting that what the doctrine represents is capable of demonstration. "The fact is," as the doctor observes, "it is easy to cavil." As to my producing arguments against the theory of a future life, that is

precisely what I did in my lecture ; but whether they were "logical" or not the doctor made no effort to show. For instance, I pointed out that the term "soul" has never been defined ; that, if we possess one, it is not known in what part of the body it is to be found, or when it enters or when it leaves the human frame ; that the only "soul" known is the brain of man, and if that brain does not properly exercise its functions, the manifestations of life will be proportionally impaired. In proof of this I referred to persons in lunatic asylums who had diseased brains, whose judgment was dethroned, and whose reason had deserted them. Had the soul, I asked, in their case lost its power of control ? If so, what is its value ? When a drunkard becomes intoxicated and loses all control over himself, has his soul lost its power ? Again, as regards the "soul" leaving the body, I enquired if it did so immediately at death, if it goes straight to heaven or hell, without waiting for the judgment day ? If it does not leave the body till some time after death, how can a decaying body retain the soul ? To any one of these questions the doctor did not even attempt to give an answer.

Further quoting from "The Creed of Science," by Professor Graham. I showed that science taught that immortality is not and cannot be proved, that the chief function of the brain is that which is known by the term "mental activity," that nothing is known, and nothing can be known of a life beyond the grave. In support of my contention I produced the evidence of several scientific men, concluding with the testimony of the late Professor Tyndall, who said ; "But to return to the hypothesis of a human soul, offered as an explanation or a simplification of a series of obscure phenomena. Adequate reflection shows that, instead of introducing light into our minds, it increases our darkness. You do not, in this case, explain the unknown in terms of the known, which is the method of science, but you explain the unknown in terms of

the more unknown." Now, upon all this Dr. Westbrook was silent in his reply, and he coolly asserted that I produced no "logical argument" against the theory of a future life. If what I did produce were illogical, why did not the doctor endeavor to prove this was so ?

I am further charged with denying a future life, whereas in my lecture I distinctly stated in answer to the question, "If a man die shall he live again?" that by its very nature, and by the very nature of our mentality, it is utterly impossible to give a definite opinion pro or con. Referring to Spiritualism, I said that I had studied it for five years, and had found nothing in it; not that I wished to deny that there might be something, but—depending on my own reason and judgment, by which I stand or fall—I had found nothing. But, says Dr. Westbrook, "What does this prove? Why, that Mr. Watts did not find anything in Spiritualism! But does his failure show that nobody else ever succeeded? Does he know every thing?" Of course my failure to discover anything in Spiritualism only proves what I stated, that I found nothing in it. It is not my custom to dogmatize as to what others have seen, or thought they have seen. I am reminded that I don't "know everything." That is so, and in this particular the doctor and myself are on equal terms. I am asked if I can "mention one thing which man actually desires, which has not a palpable existence." Certainly I can. Men desire universal happiness, justice for all, and a fair distribution of wealth, but these conditions have no "palpable existence."

I repeat that it is impossible to long for that of which nothing is known. The doctor takes exception to this, but he gives no instance to prove that I am wrong. If, as he says,—“Life beyond the grave is this: a continuation of the present life, nothing more, nothing less,” then the future is not another life, and the doctor has to show how the “continuation of the present life” can go on in the absence of the conditions

that we know are necessary to its manifestations now. We have positive proof that the body, including the brain, the heart and the lungs, are indispensable to what we term life : let it, therefore, be shown how this life can continue when the body and its organs have disappeared. The doctor, however, refutes himself, for he says that in the next world we shall be "as the angels," and not subject to the conditions that govern us here. If this will be so, it will be another life after all, inasmuch as existence here is not regulated on the "angelic" principle, therefore, continuity ceases.

Apart from such "flimsy arguments" as the above, the doctor bases his belief in "a life beyond the grave" upon the opinions of great men, the alleged universality of the belief and the general desire that is supposed to exist for such a life. As these objections to the Agnostic position involve probably the strongest arguments that can be urged in favor of a future life, I shall examine them one by one.

Dr. Westbrook, in his reply, does not content himself by modestly asking, "Is there a life beyond the grave?" but he positively asserts that there *is* such an existence. This is a bold allegation, to prove the truth of which will require more knowledge than the doctor has hitherto given evidence that he possesses. What is meant by the term "life"? Our answer is, that we only know of it as "functional activity" in organized existence, such as we behold in the animal and vegetal kingdoms. The question, however, of a future life concerns chiefly man, who possesses an organism and functions of various kinds. Before we can accept as true, the statement "there is a life beyond the grave," we must have some knowledge of the conditions of that supposed existence, and whether or not they are suitable to man as we now know him. But up to the present we have not met any one who possesses the required knowledge, and, therefore, no information is forthcoming as to the nature of a future life. We certainly

decline to accept the proposition as being self-evident. If, as the doctor alleges, there is presumptive evidence in favor of a future life, the most that can be reasonably argued is that there *may be* such a life. Of course we do not contend that a visit to the planet Mars would be necessary before we could believe that life existed there, but we do assert that some kind of communication with the inhabitants would be necessary before we could positively allege that human life was there. It is not unreasonable to demand at least reliable testimony in matters beyond our experience. It is one thing to have a mind open to conviction, and quite another to meet the man who can convince us. When similar evidence is presented in favor of a future existence to that which obtains for the operation of natural law throughout the universe, and when such evidence can be tested by the ordinary rules of observation and experiment, the question of a life beyond the grave will deserve serious consideration.

The doctor's proposition, although put in the positive form, is really an assumption, based on the fact of the continuity of life on our globe. But what is understood by such continuity? Simply a succession of animated forms of existence, beings who continue to possess the attributes of life, in whom the living principle appears in a series of individual representations. But a life beyond the grave involves much more than this; it assumes a continuity of life in the same individual, a condition of which we know nothing. Man exists generation after generation, but every succeeding one is new. Life on this globe ceases in the individual man when his organism becomes disintegrated and when its functions are unable to continue their operations. Death is a condition the very opposite to that of life; both therefore cannot be conceived as being one, as the doctor's contention requires. A living dead man is a contradiction, for it is a self-evident fact that if man always lived he would never die. Death occurs every moment, but we have

no instance of the perpetual continuation of one living individual. A body in action must be present, somewhere, but when it has disappeared in the grave and gone to ashes, it is no longer an organized body. In other words, a body must act where it is, or where it is not. It cannot act where it is, in the grave, for there its functions have ceased ; it cannot act elsewhere because it is not there to act. This appears as self-evident as that the whole is greater than the part. The denial that a future state has been proved is held to be the converse of the proposition that there is one, and therefore it is equally unphilosophical and presumptuous. People fail to discriminate between the thing itself and what is said about it, although there is a manifest difference between the two cases. What we deny is the validity of the evidence, the conclusiveness of the reasons given in support of the theory of a future life.

The doctor relies much upon what great men have said and written on the subject. Of course the opinions of eminent men are entitled to respect, but they are also open to dispute, inasmuch as all men are fallible. Great men have entertained the most erroneous and childish ideas. We must not confound Newton and the apple with Newton and the Bible, nor Faraday the chemist with Faraday the Muggletonian. Our estimate of great men is based upon what they do or what they prove. When they defend the abominations of slavery and witchcraft, or when they give their support to miracles and orthodox doctrines, because they are sanctioned by the Bible, we change our estimate of them. Great men have held mistaken views about creation, the laws of motion, and the possible disappearance of all existing things, but that is no reason why the humblest of their fellow men should endorse their mistakes. Professor Wallace's views on development may be accepted, if the facts he submits prove his case, and so also may his other views be accepted for the same reason. But in our

opinion his contentions in reference to a future life cannot be proved by candid investigation and sound reasoning.

The alleged universality of opinion is quoted by Dr. Westbrook as a proof of the reality of a future life. The fact is the belief in all kinds of error has been general in all ages and in all nations. Because the multitude once believed in the moving sun, in the stationary earth and in the existence of angels and devils, it is no conclusive proof to us that their belief was correct. Have we then the audacity to reject the verdict of ages, and to declare that the majority of men have been mistaken? On certain matters we do so most decidedly, for the reason that nothing is clearer to-day than that our forefathers were wrong upon many things which were objects of "universal belief." The notion that the stars were drawn by the gods or guided by spirits, has had to give way before the discoveries of attraction and gravitation, and the creation theory is refuted by the facts of evolution. Those who base their faith in a future life on the common beliefs are like the man who is said to have built his house upon the sand. The flood of science will sweep all false beliefs away, as surely as the morning sun disperses the vapors of the night.

The doctor fires off his syllogistic cannon and he supposes that we are fatally wounded. But it is not so, for we would remind the doctor that the value of a syllogism depends mostly upon the first premiss. For instance, take the following: "The future will be a continuance of the present, the present is manifest and undisputable, therefore, so is the future." Now if the first premiss were proved, the conclusion may follow, but as it is only an assumption, based on general belief and on great men's opinions, the conclusion is also of the same nature, and is a part of the assumption. Dr. Westbrook ought to know that the greatest absurdity might be made to appear feasible to the uneducated mind by the syllogistic mode of pleading. For instance, "Nothing is better than heaven, a

chop is better than nothing, therefore a chop is better than heaven."

It is commonly held that any conception formed by man must have a corresponding reality somewhere. Yet the conception which was formed as to the origin of things has been shown by modern researches to be absolutely groundless in reality. Modern investigation has exploded the old theories of the genesis of things. Men have had to unlearn much that the dame schools taught and that the Sunday-school endorsed. Take the illustration of the general conception of the dragon. We may be able to trace the idea to some extinct animal, but that does not prove the existence of the dragon or attest the truth of the belief that such an animal ever existed. If an artist paints a picture of the Devil it is perfectly certain that his Satanic Majesty never sat for the portrait.

Perhaps the strongest element in the argument for a future life is derived from what is called the desires of mankind. These, it is said, must be accounted for, which we think can easily be done. We submit that the instinctive love of life found in man is sufficient to explain the desire for its continuation. No doubt there is some connection between desires and their realization in reference to things that are attainable, for the very desire may be a factor in the sum of the causes that enable us to realize our ideal. But the mere fact of having the desire is no evidence that its realization will follow. A desire for food and comfort is very general, but many are destitute of both. The longing that all members of the human family should be equally well off is extensive, but such an enviable state of things does not exist. We must not, in reasoning, take refuge in incongruities. Those who argue that without an endless future, this life is not worth having, must regard the present existence as being exceedingly defective. Why, then, should its continuation be desired? And yet the doctor argues for a prolongation of such a life. If it is said that in

another world there will be a change for the better, we ask, where is the proof that any improvement will take place? It is another instance that the wish is father to the thought. Endless existence and interminable motion may be laws of thought which it is impossible to banish from our minds, although we are unable to conceive of an infinite past, which is involved in the statement. But it is otherwise with the *forms* of existence that possess life, these can be conceived of as coming to an end. Intense heat or intense cold may terminate all living things in a brief space of time. The truth is that it is only dreamers who contend that any part of the compound being called man will

“flourish in immortal youth,
Unhurt amidst the war of elements,
The wrecks of matter, and the crash of worlds.”

Many persons who do not admit that Secularism is the best philosophy of existence, acknowledge that its principles are excellent so far as this life is concerned ; but they assert that those principles are insufficient to sustain its believers in the hour of death. With a view of showing that this position is not a sound one, and that it misrepresents the Secular views as to death, we purpose answering the following three queries, which are frequently put by our opponents.

1. What are the Secular views in reference to death ?
2. Is there sufficient reason to justify the Agnostic attitude as to a future life ?
3. Is the Secular position a safe one ?

In the first place, what are the Secular views as to death? They are these. That there is not sufficient evidence to justify the assertion that there is, or that there is not, a life beyond the grave. Many centuries ago, an oriental sage is said to have asked, “If a man die, shall he live again?” Although many generations have passed away since the supposed query

was submitted, no definite or satisfactory answer has been given. It is a problem to the solution of which the philosopher has devoted his wisdom, the poet has dedicated his poetry, and the scientist has directed his attention, and yet the problem remains unsolved. Secularists, therefore, agree with Thomas Carlyle when he said: "What went before, and what will follow me, I regard as two impenetrable curtains which hang down at the two extremities of human life, and which no man has drawn aside." The Secularists adopt, in reference to a future life, the Agnostic position, and they refuse to dogmatize, either *pro* or *con.*, upon a matter in reference to which, with the present limited knowledge in the world, it is impossible to know anything. Mr. Hugh O. Pentecost thus puts the case: "The Freethinker looks at death just as it is, so far as we know anything about it—the end of life. He does not hope, nor expect to live after death. He admits that he may, just as there may be a planet in which water runs up-hill. He therefore maps out his life with absolutely no reference to alleged heavens or hells, or to any kind of spirit world. He goes through this world seeking his own welfare and knowing, from the open book of history and his own experience, that he can promote his own welfare only by promoting the welfare of every other man, woman and child in the world; knowing that he cannot be as happy as he might while anyone else is miserable. He knows that death is as natural as birth. He knows that, as we were unconscious of our birth, we will be unconscious of our death. He knows that, if death puts a final end to him as a person, as science seems to prove, it cannot be an evil. He suffered nothing before he was; he will suffer nothing if he ceases to be. He will not even know that he is dead."

The Secularist accepts this Freethought view of death. He is not sufficiently dogmatic to assert there is an existence beyond the present one, neither is he presumptuous enough to say there is not. *Knowing* only of one existence, Secularists

content themselves therewith, feeling assured that the best credentials to secure any possible immortality is the wisest and most intellectual use of the life we now have. They further allege that, to the man who is sincere and true to his conscience through life, " hereafter " has no terrors. The man who has lived well has made the best preparation to die well, and he will find that the principles which supported him in health can sustain him in sickness. When the last grand scene arrives, the Secularist, having done his duty, lies down quietly to rest, and sleeps the long sleep from which, so far as we know, there is no waking. What has he to fear? He knows that death is the consequence of life, that nothing possesses immortality. The plant that blooms in the garden, the bird that flutters in the summer sun, the bee that flies from flower to flower, and the lower animals of every kind, all pass into a state of unconsciousness when their part is played and their work is done. Why should man be an exception to the universal law? His body is built up on the same principle as that of everything else that breathes, and his mental faculties differ in degree, but not in character, from theirs. He is subject to the same law as the rest of existence, and to repine at death is as absurd as it would be to weep because he did not live in some other planet or at some other time. Nature is imperative in her decrees, and must be obeyed. Death is the common lot of all. The atoms of matter of which one organism is made up are required for the construction of another, so they must be given up for that purpose, and to repine at it argues an ill-tutored mind. The work is done, and if it has been done well there is nothing to fear, either in this or any other life. Such are the views of Secularists as to death, and, holding such views, they can die without fear, as they have lived without hypocrisy.

Now as to the second query—Is there sufficient reason to justify this Agnostic position? It must be understood that

this position not only admits the "don't know," but it goes further, and alleges that as we are at present constituted, we cannot *know* of anything beyond the present life. Moreover, be it observed, our position is still more comprehensive than this; for we contend that the facts of existence do not substantiate the positive statement that there *is* a life beyond the grave. Professor Graham, in his "Creeds of Science," in giving a summary of modern scientific opinion on this subject, observes: "And now what is the scientific doctrine of the great theme of immortality? Is there any hope for man? In one word, No. For any such hope, if men must continue to indulge in it after hearing the scientific arguments, they must go elsewhere—to the theologian, the metaphysician, the mystic, the poet. These men, habitually dwelling in their several spheres of illusion and unreality, may find suggestions of the phantasy, which they persuade themselves are arguments in favor of a future life; the man of science, for his part, and the positive thinker, building on science, consider no proposition more certain than that the soul is mortal as well as the body which supported it, and of which it was merely the final flower and product. . . . Our modern physiologist has ascertained that thought is but a function of the brain and nerves. Why should it not perish with these? . . . Why should it not collapse with the general break-up of the machinery? Why should it not cease when no longer supported by the various physical energies whose transformations within the bodily machine alone made its existence possible? . . . But science, for her part, finds no grounds for the beliefs of theology or metaphysics in a future life—beliefs, moreover, which she regards as little comforting at the best. . . . Science, we think, has made out the dependence of our mind and present consciousness on bodily conditions, so far as to justify the conclusion that the dissolution of the body carries with it the dissolution of our present consciousness and memory, which are reared on the bodily

basis. At least, it raises apprehension in the highest degree that this will be the case. Again, Science – partly by what Darwin has established, partly by other evidence, only recently accessible, respecting the low state of the primitive man—has brought the human species into the general circle of the animal kingdom in a sense far more deep and essential than was formerly dreamed of ; and she has thereby deepened the belief, though without producing absolute conviction, that the arguments proving a possible future life for man hold likewise for the lower animals ; so that, if man be judged immortal, they should be also, and if they be mortal, so also is man. Thirdly, Science has called attention to the fact that there is something like a general law discoverable in the history of Species, that they all have their terms of years, though the term is usually a long one, and that probably, therefore, the human Species itself, as well as all other existing Species, will disappear, giving place to wholly different, though derivative types of life. And all these things taken together undoubtedly tend strongly to produce the conviction that death closes the career of the existing individual.” In support of the conclusions here arrived at, Professor J. P. Lesley says : “ Science cannot possibly either teach or deny immortality.” Professor Lester F. Ward observes that, “ So far as science can speak on the subject, consciousness persists as long as the organized brain, and no longer.” And Professor E. S. Morse writes : “ I have never yet seen anything in the discoveries of science which would in the slightest degree support or strengthen a belief in immortality.”

It is alleged that the “ soul ” is the “ thinking principle.” If this be so, wherein is man’s superiority over the lower animals, so far as immortality is concerned ? Herbert Spencer, Dr. W. B. Carpenter, and many other eminent writers, have contended that the reasoning powers in man differ only in degree from those in the general animal kingdom. In other words, if the above allegation be correct, the lower animals, as they possess

the "thinking principle," have "souls," and will live for ever. Indeed, Bishop Butler granted this, for he assures us "that there is no true analogy in all nature which would lead us to think that death will prove the destruction of a living creation." Moreover, we read in the Bible: "For that which befalleth the sons of man befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity." Besides, the thinking principle, so far as we know, depends upon a material organization for its manifestation: is it, therefore, not reasonable to conclude that when the organization is destroyed the principle will no longer exist? When the cause is gone the effect must cease.

Those persons who dogmatically assert that there is a future life, erroneously confound something they call a "soul" with the mind, and they then assert that the mind is a distinct entity. Now as Dr. Wigan observes: "The mind every anatomist knows to be a set of functions of the brain, differing only in number and degree from the intellect of animals. Of the mind we know much, but of the soul we know nothing. Can the mind, then, be a thing *per se*, distinct and separate from the body? No more than the motion can exist independent of the watch, and all the arguments of theologians and metaphysicians on this subject are founded on the confusion of terms." It is said that a future life is proved by the fact that development has been always taking place in the organic kingdom. First came animals low in the scale, then of higher and higher type, and so on up to man. Why, then, it is asked, may not man pass at death into a still higher condition? Now the merest tyro in logic can recognize that there is no analogy whatever in the two cases. The higher animals are not the lower in another stage, but an improvement upon them, a new individuality. The only argument that could logically be drawn from the development theory on this point

is that after man beings of a still higher order might make their appearance, but then they would no more be individual men of a previous age than we are the Iguanodons of the "age of reptiles." Besides, all the changes that we know of in the organic kingdom have taken place upon the earth, whereas the condition which believers in a future life contend for is to be in some far-off land of shadows occupied by what is termed "disembodied spirits." The case of the caterpillar is frequently given as an illustration of changes from a lower to a higher state of existence. But the caterpillar becomes transformed into the butterfly before our eyes ; we can see it in both conditions, and can observe the process of change going on. The butterfly is an improvement upon the caterpillar in point of organization, but in every other respect they are both similar. Both are material, and each is liable to destruction and decay. The spirit, however, that is supposed to be evolved from the human form at death, is said to be immaterial and immortal, and, therefore, totally unlike that material organization from which it has escaped. The change is not observed. The body dies and the elements of which it was composed pass into other forms—this is all that we see and all that we know. Beyond this everything is mere conjecture and vague speculation.

As to how the belief in a future life originated, the statement of Professor Graham is a pertinent explanation. He says : "A strange and extravagant fancy that arose one day in the breast of one more aspiring than the rest, became soon afterwards a wish ; the wish became a fixed idea that drew around itself vain and spurious arguments in its favor ; and at length the fancy, the wish, the idea, was erected into an established doctrine of belief. Such, in sum, is the natural history of the famous dogma of a future life. Not by any means, however, was it a primitive and universal belief of all nations. Arising probably at first with the Egyptians, it was only after a long

time taken up by the Jews, then, or possibly earlier, by the Greeks, with whom, however, the life held out, thin and unsubstantial even at best, was far from being desirable. It was only in the Christian and Mohammedan religions that the notion of a future and an eternal life was fully developed, and that the doctrine was erected into a central and an essential article of belief.

We now come to the third query—Is the Secular position a safe one? Our answer is, Yes; for by making the best of this life, physically, morally, and intellectually, we are pursuing the wisest course, whatever the issues in reference to a future life may be. If there should be another life, the Secularist must share it with his opponent. Our opinions do not affect the reality in the slightest degree. If we are to sleep forever, we shall so sleep despite the belief in immortality: and if we are to live for ever, we shall so live despite the belief that possibly death ends all. It must also be remembered that if man possesses a soul, that soul will be the better through being in a body that has been properly trained; and if there is to be a future life, that life will be the better if the higher duties of the present one have been fully and honestly performed. Secularists are, therefore, safe so far, inasmuch as they recognize it to be their first duty to cultivate a healthy body, and to endeavor to make the best, in its highest sense, of the present existence. Now, in reference to the supposition that we may be punished in case we are wrong. Our position is, that if there be a just God, before whom we are to appear to be judged, he will never punish those to whom he has not vouchsafed the faculty of seeing beyond the grave because they honestly avowed that their mental vision was limited to this side of the tomb. Thus the Secularists feel quite safe as regards any futurity that may be worth having. If the present be the only life, then it will be all the more valuable if we give it our undivided attention. If, on the other hand, there is to be another life, then, in that

case, we shall have won the right to its advantages through having been faithful to our convictions just to our fellows, and in having striven to leave the world purer and nobler than we found it. As to the feeling of consolation, which is said to be derived from the belief in a future life, we are safe upon this point also. For if there be a life beyond the grave, we have the conviction that our Secular conduct on earth will entitle us to the realization of its fullest pleasure. Moreover, this conviction is not marred by the belief that the majority of the human race will be condemned to a fate "which humanity cannot conceive without terror, nor contemplate without dismay."

Finally, Secularism asserts that, if we are to have an immortality, it ought to be one in which we can mingle with the purest of the earth, for the anticipation of it would fill our minds with delight and would afford us the assurance that in quitting this stage of life it would only be an exchange for one purer and loftier. But, pleasing as this ideal may be, consolatory as it would undoubtedly prove, it is useless to forget that our present knowledge teaches us that such hopes are only poetical, such anticipations only imaginary. We therefore sternly face the truth, and as some of us cannot believe in a future life, we seek to realize the worth of this one by striving to correct its many errors. And in so doing we are achieving the safest of all rewards—the consciousness that while here on earth we are working with sincerity and fidelity to secure that heaven of humanity, the comfort, happiness, and welfare of the human race.

Through the lack of careful study, many errors obtain and strange misconceptions exist as to what the terms "matter" and "spirit" signify. We desire, therefore, to endeavor to explain what they really mean, and how far, and in what way, they have any relation to human conduct. For instance, are they both existences of which we have any knowledge? and if

the "thinking principle," have "souls," and will live for ever. Indeed, Bishop Butler granted this, for he assures us "that there is no true analogy in all nature which would lead us to think that death will prove the destruction of a living creation." Moreover, we read in the Bible: "For that which befalleth the sons of man befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath: so that a man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity." Besides, the thinking principle, so far as we know, depends upon a material organization for its manifestation: is it, therefore, not reasonable to conclude that when the organization is destroyed the principle will no longer exist? When the cause is gone the effect must cease.

Those persons who dogmatically assert that there is a future life, erroneously confound something they call a "soul" with the mind, and they then assert that the mind is a distinct entity. Now as Dr. Wigan observes: "The mind every anatomist knows to be a set of functions of the brain, differing only in number and degree from the intellect of animals. Of the mind we know much, but of the soul we know nothing. Can the mind, then, be a thing *per se*, distinct and separate from the body? No more than the motion can exist independent of the watch, and all the arguments of theologians and metaphysicians on this subject are founded on the confusion of terms." It is said that a future life is proved by the fact that development has been always taking place in the organic kingdom. First came animals low in the scale, then of higher and higher type, and so on up to man. Why, then, it is asked, may not man pass at death into a still higher condition? Now the merest tyro in logic can recognize that there is no analogy whatever in the two cases. The higher animals are not the lower in another stage, but an improvement upon them, a new individuality. The only argument that could logically be drawn from the development theory on this point

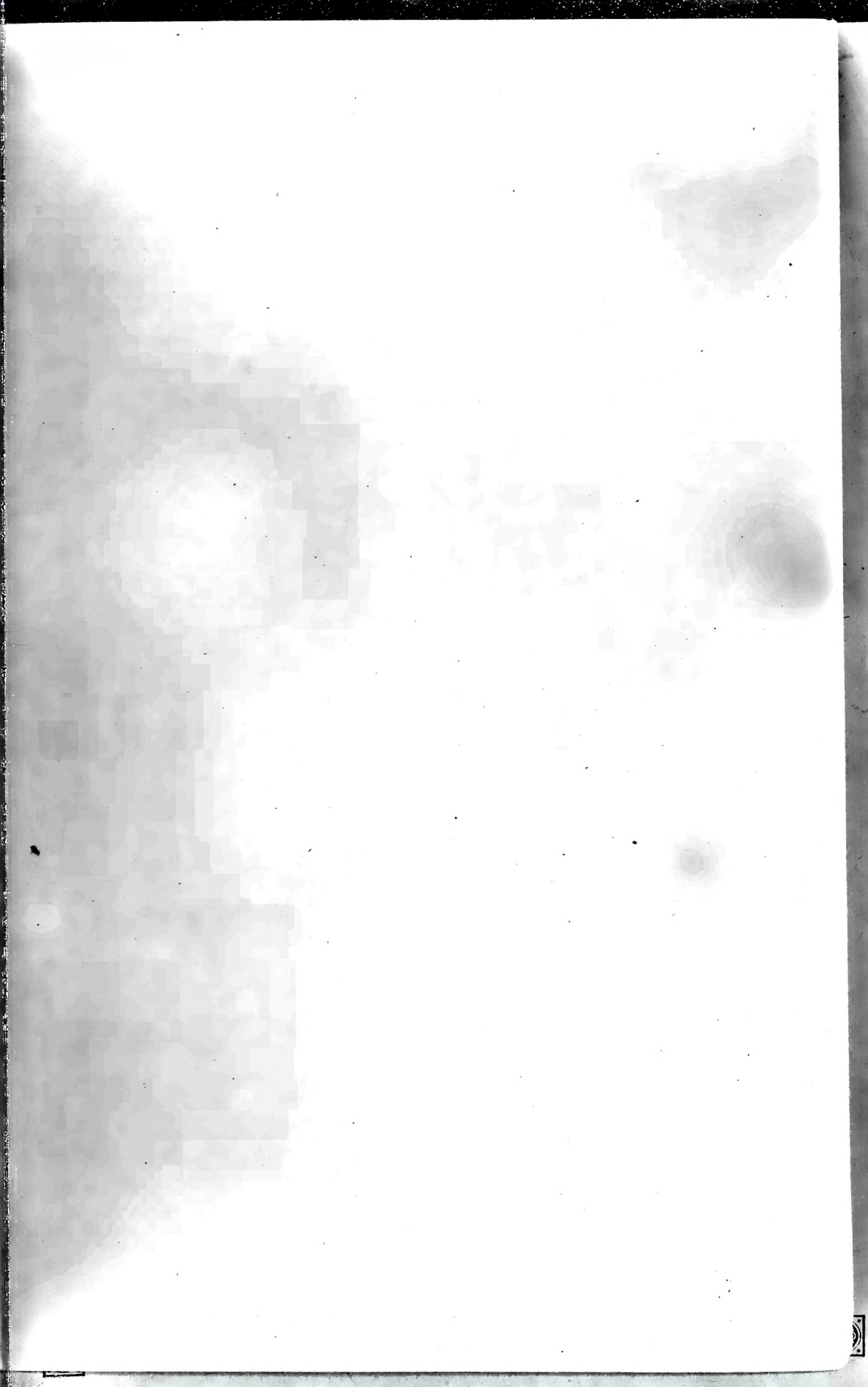
exercises an influence over any or all of the three, it must follow that this spirit must be some force that can operate without any medium connecting things that have no affinity or relation to each other. This is equivalent to saying that we can transmit a message to America, not only without a cable, but without any conductor at all. To postulate spirit as the unknown cause of known effects, is simply another way of expressing our ignorance of what that cause is. But we submit that these assumptions amount to a clear contradiction, because they imply that after we have eliminated from the totality of existence, all entities, and their attributes and functions, there yet remains spirit. To think of something apart from everything is beyond our power, and to think of spirit in relation to anything, is to make it an entity or an attribute.

Matter may be defined as "that which occupies space and is cognized by the senses." But what is spirit? If it can be cognized it must be material, and if it cannot be cognized it is to us as nothing. We are aware that spirit has been defined as "refined matter," but in that case it would be material. We can, therefore, only act consistently when we accept the decision of the human intellect as applied to every proposition submitted to us. We cannot, if we act wisely, repudiate its authority in judging of the highest conception of things. This is our standard of appeal upon all matters material, or so-called spiritual. We accept what appears true, after the most rigorous criticism, and we reject every error immediately it is discovered. For instance, we regard two truths as being established so far as our present knowledge extends—the indestructibility of matter, and the invariable order of nature. By nature we mean all that is, because, so far as is known, it has no limit in space or time. The term spirit is not included in this definition, for the reason that we have no conception of what it is. If it exist, its claims to belief can only be established by one

method, that of observation and experiment. Should its claims be thus successfully proved, Spiritualism will then cease to be distinguished from Materialism, inasmuch as it will then be within our conception of the established order of things. We fail to see how there can be two different kinds of truth in the sense of there being one that we can apprehend by our understanding, and another that we cannot. We are aware that theologians assert that there are two kinds of truth, one within the reach of reason, and the other above it ; but we cannot believe this theory, as no sufficient reason has been given to justify us in accepting such a proposition. In reference to such preposterous claims, we ask the following pertinent question—If there is a truth above or beyond the reason of man to comprehend, how can it become known ? Of course our inability to understand such a truth does not prove its non-existence, but it disposes of our relation to it ; and consequently it is no truth to us.

In science it is the practice to explain things in materialistic terms ; and to adopt spiritualistic phrases is in our opinion not only of no advantage, but it tends to the confusion of ideas and leads many minds into the region of obscurity. We see no justification for ceasing to speak of matter as a form of thought and of thought as a property of matter, so long as our object is to indicate what we think and feel. The main point that we are anxious to insist upon is that no unknown power or powers should be appealed to for the purpose of explaining the facts of existence when we are cognizant of forces that are sufficient to achieve the object. Moreover, an unknown power can only be of practical service to us if its manifestations admit of verification, which those of spiritualism do not. We therefore rely upon truths that are demonstrated by material processes, for they give potency and dignity to nature ; that nature, be it observed, that may be termed the mother of all.

From her bosom we derive the sustenance of life, the panacea for woes and wrongs, and the solace for misery and despair that too frequently crush the hopes of man and rob humanity of its highest glory and its noblest service.



Works by Charles Watts.

The Bible Up to Date.

16 Pages and cover.

Price 2d. ; by post, 2½d.

- The Teachings of Secularism Compared with Orthodox Christianity. 1s. ; by post, 1s. 2d.
- Christianity ; its Origin, Nature and Influence. 4d. ; by post, 5d.
- Secularism : Destructive and Constructive. 3d. ; by post, 4d.
- The Glory of Unbelief. 3d. ; by post, 4d.
- Saints and Sinners—Which ; 3d. ; by post, 4d.
- Agnosticism and Christian Theism : Which is the More Reasonable ? 3d. ; by post, 4d.
- A Reply to Father Lambert's "Tactics of Infidels." 6d. ; by post, 7d.
- Theological Presumption ; an Open Letter to the Rev. Dr R. F. Burns, of Halifax, N.S. 16 pages, 2d. ; by post, 2½d.
- Nature and the Supernatural ; or, Belief and Knowledge. 3d. ; by post, 4d.
- The Horrors of the French Revolution : their Causes. 3d. ; by post, 4d.
- Evolution and Special Creation. 3d. ; by post, 3½d.
- Happiness in Hell and Misery in Heaven. 3d. ; by post, 3½d.
- Science and the Bible : Wherein they Differ. 4d ; by post, 5d.
- Bible Morality. The Teachings of the Bible shown to be Contradictory and Defective as an Ethical Guide. 3d. ; by post, 3½d.
- Secularism : Is it Founded on Reason, and Is it Sufficient to Meet the Needs of Mankind ? Debate with the Editor of the Halifax *Evening Mail*. 1s. ; by post, 1s. 2d.

WATTS & CO., PUBLISHERS,
17 JOHNSON'S COURT, FLEET STREET, LONDON, E.C.