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AN EXAMINATION

OF

SOME RECENT WRITINGS ABOUT IMMORTALITY.

By W. E. B.



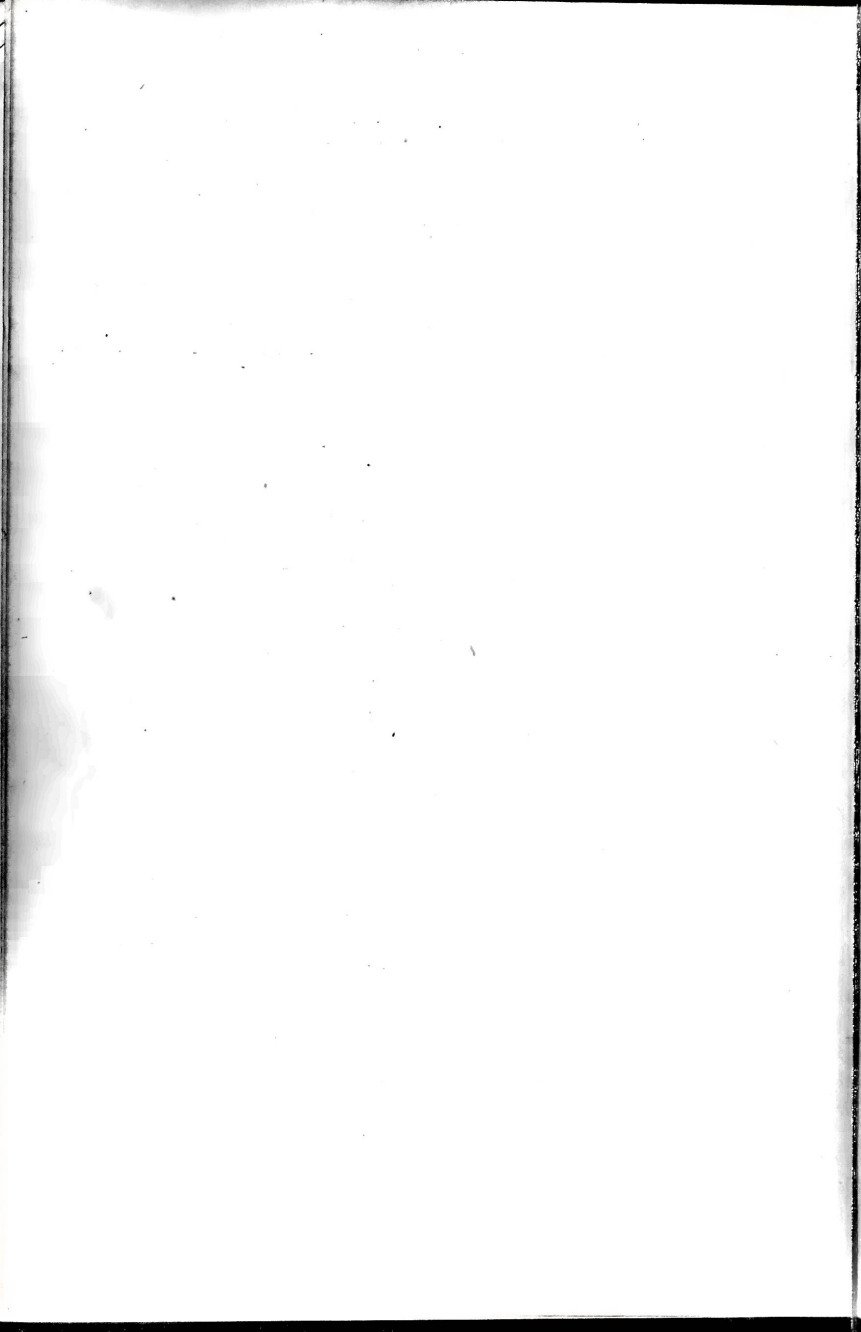
"Is it not unreasonable to expect to see clearly through such a veil as death?"

"Let me do the will of God, and be swallowed up in His work. Conscious that His goodness is perfect, let me spend not a thought on the contingencies of my future, which He will provide as His wisdom sees good."—F. W. NEWMAN.

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AN EXAMINATION
OF
SOME RECENT WRITINGS ABOUT IMMORTALITY.

- Modern Materialism and its Relation to Immortality. By John Owen, *Theological Review*, October, 1869.
- Practical Aspects of the Doctrine of Immortality. By Presbyterian Anglicanus, *Theological Review*, April, 1870.
- Immortality and Modern Thought. By John Owen, *Theological Review*, July, 1870.
- The Doctrine of Immortality in its Bearing on Education. By Presbyterian Anglicanus. Scott, Ramsgate.
- Is Death the End of all Things for Man? By a Parent and Teacher. Scott, Ramsgate.
- A Reply to the Question, "What have we Got to Rely on, if we cannot Rely on the Bible?" By Prof. F. W. Newman. Scott, Ramsgate.
- Another Reply to the Question, "What have we Got to Rely on if we cannot Rely on the Bible?" By Samuel Hinds, D.D. Scott, Ramsgate.
- A Reply to the Question, "Apart from Supernatural Revelation, What is Man's Prospect of Living after Death?" By Samuel Hinds, D.D. Scott, Ramsgate.
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MR OWEN'S first article was written in review of Professor Huxley's well known paper in the *Fortnightly Review* for Feb., 1869, "On the Physical Basis of Life." Mr Owen is very indignant with Professor Huxley for having asserted that the "matter of life" is composed of ordinary matter, "differing from it only in the manner in which its atoms are aggregated." Whether the Professor was or was not justified in making this assertion we may fairly leave him to settle if he can with Mr Owen. But after reading the after part of Mr Owen's paper, in which he elaborates an argument in favour of immortality which he expressly

declares to be quite unassailable by any materialistic objections, it is difficult to account for the reason of his indignation with Mr Huxley for this statement, and for other remarks about protoplasm. Future scientific inquiry may throw more light upon Professor Huxley's protoplasmic researches, and may either confirm or refute what his reviewer terms his "dogmatism" concerning them. With no pretence to scientific erudition, I should feel it to be presumptuous to hazard a prediction either way, and am content with a simple protest against Mr Owen's assertion of the probable finality of our knowledge in the direction referred to.

The main portion of Mr Owen's constructive arguments in favour of immortality seem to differ from those which the most thoroughgoing materialist might advance, chiefly, if not solely, in nomenclature. If he would use "force" always, as he does generally, in place of "spirit," all, or nearly all that he advances with any pretence of logical demonstration, could be endorsed by an advocate of materialism. Mr Owen thus states his argument in its briefest terms:—"The spiritual force of the universe is eternal; man is an unit of that spiritual force; therefore man is immortal." The conclusion of this syllogism is somewhat incorrectly stated. It should be, "therefore man is eternal," and the necessity which Mr Owen evidently felt of substituting one word for the other fairly illustrates what appears to me to be the fallacy of his syllogism. Man as man, that is as a combination of what is commonly distinguished as matter and spirit, is not an unit of any purely spiritual force, any more than man as man is eternal. Mr Owen's meaning would probably be better represented as follows:—The spiritual force of the universe is eternal; the spiritual force of man is an unit of the spiritual force of the universe; therefore the spiritual force of man is eternal. This argument from a spiritualistic standpoint is of course unassailable. The materialist would simply substitute *material*

for *spiritual*, and would then adopt the altered syllogism as his own. The real dispute is whether there exists any spiritual force in the universe (and inclusively in man) at all. If then it be possible to demonstrate scientifically by protoplasmic researches or otherwise that what are now termed spiritual or mental forces are precisely similar to material or physical forces, it seems that, after all, Mr Owen's claim for the security of his argument from materialistic refutation would fall to the ground. In fact he admits this when he says:—"If, indeed, it could be proved, as the materialist assumes it can, that the force we call vital or mental is of precisely the same nature with what he terms physical forces, no doubt the question might be regarded as settled, so far at least as the human claim to immortality is concerned (although even in that case the *mind*, which finds expression through the laws of the universe, would be left unaccounted for by his theory, and an eternal witness against its unlimited application)." But Mr Owen goes on to state his belief, and "that of those who have most closely surveyed it from either side," that the gulf between matter and mind "is primordial and utterly impassable." It is plain then at the outset that although his arguments may help to strengthen the convictions of those who already have faith in immortality, they can be of no avail with people whom materialistic probabilities or possibilities have rendered doubters, since they rest on an assumption which begs the question. He makes this plainer still as he proceeds; for not only does he assert that—"Whoever . . . recognises, whether in the operations of nature, or in the course of history, or in the constitution of his own being, a peculiar spiritual force which cannot even in imagination be conceived as identical with such material force as electricity or magnetism, will always find a firm standing ground whereon to build his hope of immortality;" but he actually goes so far as to

assume "the *undeniable fact* (the italics are mine) of man possessing within him such a spiritual force, by whatever name it is called, so distinguished from all other forces of which he can have any cognisance." It is not much to claim that an argument is impervious to the assaults of opponents so long as it rests upon an assumption which they at the outset deny. The parenthesis of a previous quotation from Mr Owen to the effect that on the materialistic basis "the *mind* which finds expression through the laws of the universe would still be left unaccounted for," exposing as it does the most hopelessly weak point in the materialistic theory, gives a far sounder foundation to what, for want of another name, we term spiritualism than does the argument on assumption that Mr Owen deems so thoroughly impregnable. This is in effect the "design argument," which, in spite of a vast amount of denial and ridicule, remains, and will remain, a stronghold, if not the chief stronghold of anti-materialistic faith.

Further on in his article, Mr Owen pleads for "the recognition of the essential unity of all spiritual forces." Why not of all forces spiritual or otherwise? Must not the creative or initiative force of the universe include within itself, or contain the germs of, the physical and organic as well as the mental and "spiritual" forces which we are cognisant of? If this be admitted, the syllogism of Mr Owen before quoted must be extended, so as to include all material as well as spiritual forces as units of the force of the universe.

In concluding his paper, Mr Owen remarks :—"No scientific discovery will ever suffice to prove that historical progress is the creature of physical forces, or that virtue is an amiable manifestation of heat or electricity. Hence the ground taken by Bishop Butler in the well-known chapter of the *Analogy*, will always be that which the more thoughtful of the defenders of immortality will choose to occupy—the ground of pro-

bability supported by analogy. . . . Recognizing as we do the scientific impossibility that the least part of a physical force should be annihilated, we have endeavoured to prove the analogical improbability that any, even the smallest part, of divine energy can be entirely and irreparably lost." The conclusion, then, to which Mr Owen's clever arguments bring us is, that all force is immortal. But does not his analogy carry us too far—at least, if we wish to be convinced of individual immortality? No particle of matter is annihilated although it is transformed, any more than an unit of force is lost when it is transmuted. Then, does not the argument from this analogy lead us to suppose that as matter in the form of a human body certainly does not everlastingly retain its individuality, so neither does the force individualized in a human mind or spirit? In spite of some remarks by Mr Owen to the contrary, this seems to me to be the only logical conclusion of his argument from analogy. He indeed admits that to him "this question of personal, individual existence in a future world is of mere secondary importance compared with the grand fact of such existence," and he quotes with approval Schleiermacher, whose arguments might comfort a Buddhist, but would scarcely give consolation to a Christian. *Nirvana* is not that for which those bereaved by death so passionately yearn. The hope of immortality would lose by far its strongest and sweetest intensity with all but a few, at any rate amongst the western nations, and would probably perish entirely with the majority, if "incorporation into the divine substance" could be proved to be the only Heaven we may reasonably aspire to.

"Presbyter Anglicanus," in his paper on *The Practical Aspects of Immortality*, is more occupied in pointing out the effects that would result from the acceptance of Mr Owen's conclusions, than in controverting his arguments. It is always a subject for

regret when a controversialist introduces to the consideration of a question the bias which inevitably results from taking into account the practical results of the acceptance of such or such a conclusion, instead of criticising it from the purely philosophical stand-point of whether it is true or false. But in those portions of his essay in which "Presbyter Anglicanus" brings his clear common sense to bear upon the mysticism of a portion of Mr Owen's argument, deprecates the introduction of scriptural teaching as of any supernatural authority, and points out the unphilosophical nature of the theory of immortality for the righteous and annihilation for the wicked, he has done good service. He has, however, in my opinion, done anything but good service to the cause of a pure morality in those remarks of his which point to the doctrine of a future life as the only sound basis of moral teaching. "That the whole moral as well as the religious training of Englishmen," he states, "rests on the belief of the continued existence of each individual man after death, no one will probably dispute. Whether we regret the fact or not, the fact itself is patent; and the remark applies equally to the instruction given by men of all schools of thought (for it will not be pretended that at the present time there is any systematic instruction to the young based on the professed negation of continued life)." In making this statement, "Presbyter Anglicanus" seems entirely to ignore the Utilitarian school; for although the Utilitarian philosophy is not systematically taught to the young on a large scale perhaps, it certainly has at the present time some influence upon the moral training of Englishmen. The separation of ethics from theology is one of the most promising signs of the times, and I confess it is with surprise that I find "Presbyter Anglicanus" holding to the old mischievous combination. I altogether fail to see that if we tell the young "that acts tend to make habits, that habits determine our character and affect

our spiritual condition indefinitely,—if we tell them that right is to be done at whatever cost, and that success here is to be to us as nothing in comparison with our growth in all good and kindly qualities,—we are using language every word of which implies not only human immortality, but the continued existence of each individual being whom we address.” It is as well, however, to observe that the signification of the expression “success here” involves a considerable portion of the question at issue. That it is best in the only true sense to be and do the best we can, is an axiom of pure and enlightened ethics. If the majority of men are not yet sufficiently enlightened to receive it, let us try to educate them to it, and not *teach down* to them a more sensual philosophy. It is a pity that one so advanced in enlightened thought as “Presbyter Anglicanus” undoubtedly is, should not know what reply to make to one with “a mind not yet matured,” “if he asks us why he should cause himself trouble and discomfort by seeking to reach a high standard of action, when life would be easier and pleasanter, and probably more successful, by contenting himself with a lower one, &c.” One who intelligently believes in the *present* moral government of the world would reply that life is not—cannot, in the order of Divine Providence, be easier, pleasanter, and more successful in the highest and only true sense of those terms to the man who contents himself with a low ideal, than to him who strives to live up to a high one. For, are not the eternal and divine laws of morality something more than, or rather, quite different from mere arbitrary restrictions upon the inclinations and pleasures of human beings? Should we not, on the contrary, believe that we are only forbidden to do that which is in the real sense injurious to us collectively as the great family of God’s creatures, and to each of us individually as a member of that family? Does not the highest sense of ease, pleasure, and success consist in living in

accordance with our noblest instincts and tendencies? Is there not, for instance, a far nobler, sweeter ease in the knowledge acquired at the cost of much labour than in the gross indolence that rests stupidly content in ignorance? Is not the pleasure derived from the perhaps at first tiresome cultivation of music, or of poetry, or of pure intellectuality, far superior to the delights of the palate, or to the gratification of any of the comparatively gross sensual faculties? And is not the success of a noble, beautiful life, such as is in accord with all the most exalted attributes of our nature, far more gratifying and satisfying than the mere satiety of acquisitiveness, of love of fame, or of desire for power? To teach the converse of this—to teach that this life is in itself a failure, and that a supplementary life is necessary to compensate for the bankruptcy of this is, in my opinion, one of the worst forms of infidelity. I hold with Mr Owen, and against "Presbyter Anglicanus," that whether we believe or doubt future existence as individuals, we should live precisely the same, that, to take the lowest view, virtue *pays* in the only true and extended sense of the word, and that consequently the belief in personal immortality can have no influence whatever upon a rightly conceived and inculcated system of morality.

Mr Owen, in his reply to "Presbyter Anglicanus," puts this truth concisely before his readers, when he says:—"Our most advanced and enlightened thinkers have arrived *at last* at the conclusion that the morality founded upon the assumed weal or woe of a future world is not of the most noble or disinterested character; and hence there have been various attempts to place Christian ethics upon another and a sounder foundation, adopting either the Utilitarian basis of the welfare of humanity, or else insisting on the divine and *a priori* immutability of ethical distinctions." And again:—"In all our teaching (*i.e.*, to the young) on this subject, we should studiously avoid basing the simplest

ethical teaching upon their possible destiny in another life. Our better aim, as well as that most in harmony with the nature of the proof we assign to immortality, would be to instil into them mere unselfish and elevated rules of conduct, teaching them that, *in any case*, it is better to be virtuous than the reverse, and that the present is sacred, and has its hallowed duties quite irrespective of what the future may happen to be." He well enforces this when he states:—"Nothing is more certain than that a child" (and he might have added, a man also) "lives in the present, and is influenced mainly by present and immediate considerations. Hence the reward that is future, or the punishment that is distant, has but little effect on his conduct. Present sanctions, such as honour, truth, goodness, are therefore far better fitted to make an impression on his character, than those which are derived from a remote future with which he has little or no sympathy." A practical illustration of the truth of this last statement is afforded by the fact that an honourable "man of the world," who is but little if at all influenced by doctrinal theology, is really, as the popular estimate assumes him to be, more trustworthy in all that relates to honour, truth, and magnanimity, than is the representative "religious" man, as the term is commonly applied.

Mr Owen seems to me to be a less reliable guide when he reverts to his mysticisms—when, for instance, in reply to the declaration of "Presbyter Anglicanus" that he does not understand what is meant by Schleiermacher's definition,—“In the midst of the finite to be one with the Infinite, and in each passing moment to have eternal existence, that is the immortality of religion,” he says:—"If 'Presbyter Anglicanus' could by possibility have asked Schleiermacher himself what was to be understood by these words, he would probably receive for a reply, that they were to be interpreted not by the intellect, but by the feeling."

Nothing seems more certain than that feeling (*i.e.*, sensation) alone can interpret no theory; and the appeal to the feelings, so common with those who are pushed beyond the confines of logic by a sound argument against vague or otherwise unsubstantiable theological doctrines, is unworthy of a careful thinker like Mr Owen. Equally objectionable is his further elucidation of Schleiermacher's formula, that "it is a necessary deduction from his (Schleiermacher's) definition of religion; *i.e.*, it consists in 'the consciousness of the eternal,' in the *feeling* (my italics) of permanency, so to speak, which underlies our transitory existence." To this it must be objected that there is no such *intuition* as "consciousness of the eternal," and that all belief is the result of thought, and not of feeling, although our sentiments may welcome, and to some extent give support to, a faith that is in consonance with them.

In disavowing the inferencé of *Presbyter Anglicanus*, that if we accept Schleiermacher's definition of immortality there are few who can hope for it, Mr Owen affirms:—"It must be borne in mind, the spiritual energy with which we, on behalf of our race, claim kindred, is revealed by more than one variety of manifestation. On the one hand are its ethical elements, duty, patience, love, self-denial; and on the other, its intellectual elements, imagination, foresight, hope, and desire." If then he admits the intellectual elements to kinship with the "spiritual energy" which gives in his opinion a title to immortality, it is evident that the brutes may put in their claim; for whether or not we allow that the lower animals possess any of the ethical elements, we cannot deny that some of them at least show capabilities of imagination, foresight, hope, and desire. Indeed Mr Owen sees that his arguments tend in this direction, and further on in his paper, after speculating upon probable differences in the condition of those who will enjoy a future

existence, he says :—" And if this were once thought reasonable and in accordance with what we now observe of God's operations in this world, one great difficulty connected with a belief in a future existence would be obviated ; for we might then reasonably extend it to imperfect types of intellectual or moral growth, whether among our own race or among races of animals which we, often unworthily, call ' inferior.' " Why not down to the lowest of the animals ? It would be difficult to find any creature of which it could be absolutely declared that it possesses no " intellectual elements " whatever. At least it would be impossible for us to draw the line ; and as animal and vegetable life in certain forms are said to be indistinguishable, and as, further, organic force in its simplest stage is as far as we can judge by observation, identical with what is at present distinctively termed physical force, Mr Owen's arguments once more lead us to a conclusion so broad that they lose all value as supports to the belief in individual immortality—namely, to that of the eternity of all forces.

In some further remarks in reply to those arguments of *Presbyter Anglicanus* against which I have strongly protested, Mr Owen is most eloquent and impressive, and it would be easy and pleasant to quote largely from them. They are in the main an enlargement upon the principle that " evil is essentially antagonistic to the divine energies which govern the world," and that therefore there is a firm basis for ethics altogether apart from the doctrine of future retribution.

There is no portion of Mr Owen's essay so weak as that in which he exhibits a leaning towards the illogical theory of the annihilation of the wicked. This theory is of course strikingly incompatible with that in which he bases the claim to immortality upon the possession of some intellectual or moral elements akin to the spiritual energy of the universe. But he

veils the inconsistency in a cloud of mysticism. He argues that "if there are individuals who do not exhibit in any form or in the very least degree the spiritual force of which we have been speaking, then we are fully prepared to "grant that nothing but non-existence can be predicated of such beings. But it must be borne in mind that this is not annihilation as commonly understood. Annihilation is generally used of the entire extinction, the reducing to nothingness of *what once had existence*. We, however, predicate of such individuals as we have above mentioned, not their final extinction, *but their present non-existence*" (my italics). It is to be presumed that Mr Owen means their *spiritual* non-existence in some mystical sense. Having spoken of them as individuals, he cannot of course mean to affirm their individual non-existence. Then their annihilation as individuals would after all be "the reducing to nothingness of what once had existence," the vulgar conception of annihilation which Mr Owen disclaims. But this is probably another of the beliefs that are "to be interpreted not by the intellect, but by the feeling;" for it is obvious that there is nothing very rational in it. The method of simply denying the existence of an obstruction to the reception of a doctrine is, no doubt, very convenient for the purposes of argument. It has, however, in this case one drawback which, to thinkers not mentally intoxicated by a wrapt contemplation of German mysticism, detracts somewhat from its value, and that is its utter unintelligibility. It is, moreover, difficult to imagine why Mr Owen need have troubled himself to introduce this extraordinary proposition. It certainly was not necessary to the purpose of his argument, since, according to his definition of the title to immortality, the "non-existent" being becomes a mere myth, the veriest madman, by the possession of *imagination*, having a claim to everlasting life.

In taking leave of Mr Owen as a contributor to modern theories of immortality, I can only declare the

impression which a careful and unprejudiced consideration of his essays leaves upon my mind. It is this, that however strong he may be against materialists—and no doubt materialists as well as spiritualists assume a great deal that they cannot sustain by proof—his elaborate arguments give but little support to the only doctrine of immortality which ninety-nine out of every hundred perhaps of his readers would care to have substantiated.

Presbyter Anglicanus, in his pamphlet on "The Doctrine of Immortality in its Bearing on Education," written mainly in further reply to Mr Owen, whilst with some reason complaining of misrepresentation of his views through miscomprehension, goes on to repeat what I agree with Mr Owen in considering to be false and mischievous theories concerning the basis of morality. After in effect disclaiming the pessimism of those who conceive of this world as a "vale of tears," in which the good man has much the worst of it, and the wicked man triumphs, and from which the good man must hopelessly turn off his eyes, and look to that future life in which alone he can hope for compensation for the wrongs of this—after affirming his belief that the divine "purpose which runs through all the ages," and which "must be accomplished," "is the highest good of every creature, and that this highest good lies in the absolute harmony of the human will with the will of God" (p. 6)—after declaring that he has "nowhere spoken of either restraint or punishment, or even of suffering, except in that sense in which (he supposes) even M. Comte or Mr Congreve would assert that the wilful disregarding or violation of our duty brings with it, generally or always a sense of dissatisfaction, remorse, or wretchedness" (p. 8)—after all this it is passing strange that Presbyter Anglicanus should still contend "that no teaching which positively asserts that death is the end of existence to the individual man can furnish an effectual motive, that no ethical system can be based upon it, and that any

ethical system which is said to be consistent with it lies really on a foundation of treacherous and shifting sand" (p. 11). The explanation of the apparent inconsistency between the last quoted utterance and the preceding extracts, lies evidently in the fact that Presbyter Anglicanus does not believe that the divine purpose—the highest good of every creature, is ever completely accomplished in this life, nor even that it is best in the only true sense, to be and do one's best as far as this life only is concerned. Now there is, perhaps, no harm in teaching that this divine purpose is not *completely* accomplished here, but that there is a future life in which it culminates in a fruition of bliss which is far beyond what any one pretends can be enjoyed in this life ; but to teach, either directly or by implication, that it is not best to be and do one's best here, even if there be no life to come, is, in my opinion, a mischievous error, involving as it does involve the *infidel* (although "orthodox") assumption that the spirit of evil is triumphant in this world. Presbyter Anglicanus is further indubitably teaching this erroneous doctrine, when he says that "we dare not tell" the thoroughly vicious and degraded, "that they and many generations after them must, if they care to get out of their slough of filth, toil on with heroic energy *for next to no recompense here* (the italics are mine) and no recompense whatever hereafter" (p. 12). I trust indeed that we dare not tell them any such terrible falsehood. I agree with Presbyter Anglicanus too, that we should "feel the inhumanity of telling" "those for whom their physical life here is one of protracted and hopeless suffering," that "they have the highest consolation for their years of agony in the thought that *their patience, hope, and faith are all to go for nothing* (my italics) (p. 12). But does Presbyter Anglicanus think that patience and hope ever do go for nothing, even if a faith, possibly mistaken may ? And does he regard physical disease

(often, though not always in itself a punishment for evil conduct) as a virtue that in justice demands a reward?

In making these latter remarks, however, I am far from underrating the terrible difficulty which all thoughtful men must feel in the contemplation of these lives of protracted suffering (as in the contemplation of many other *apparently* absolute evils of this world), especially when traceable to no error of the sufferers themselves. The visiting of the iniquities of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth generation is, unfortunately for an easy faith, as true as it is scriptural. Nevertheless, this does not affect the question before us, for the difficulty remains, whether we believe in a future life or not, since happiness in future life would not prove the justice of punishing an individual here for sins that are not his.

I pass on with pleasure to those eloquent passages in which Presbyter Anglicanus gives us the reasons for his faith in immortality, and I gladly recognise in some of them a far more forcible plea for individual immortality than can be extracted from the ostensibly more philosophical arguments of Mr Owen. I say in *some of* the passages, because in others the plea is based upon the same erroneous views of life which have above been combated. Presbyter Anglicanus holds that the doctrine of immortality "by no means rests only on the foundation of probability supported by analogy," since "the reduction of a proposition into an absurdity is taken as a proof of its converse; and the direct negation of immortality . . . involves a series of absurdities which shock alike our mental and moral sense" (p. 18). I gladly admit the full force of this passage:—"It is shocking that the love which has withstood the waves of a thousand griefs, temptations, and disasters, and whose flame has burnt clearer and purer with advancing years, should be rewarded with extinction," except that I must demur to the use

of the word *rewarded*. It is shocking to believe that this love should ever be extinguished; but surely it brings its own reward in this life. Equally forcible is this:—"It is shocking that the thoughts, the aspirations, and yearnings of the wisest and best of men should be a mere delusive dream—that the words which bid us hope and strive on because we cannot know here the fulness of blessing which God has prepared for them that love Him, should be a mere cheat and a cruel deception." But with regard to the other passages (see pp. 18 and 19 of the pamphlet) let me ask—do the inferior forms of life have full scope and exercise any more than man has? How about the worm crushed under foot, or cut through with the spade? Is there not a claim for "compensation" here if anywhere? And are not the faculties of animals "extinguished" sometimes "just when they are rising into vigorous activity?" Again, is iniquity ever truly successful? And do "striving, and effort, and purpose, and will" ever go for nothing even in this world?

The writer of the pamphlet, "Is Death the end of all Things for Man?" goes over much the same ground as that traversed by *Presbyter Anglicanus* in the papers already noticed, and his position on the question exhibits in the main the same strength and the same weakness.

Professor F. W. Newman in his Pamphlet disclaims the authority of Scripture as an argument for immortality, and in reply to those who complain that the discrediting of that authority has robbed them of a "delicious dream," he eloquently observes: "The true heaven does not consist in aspirations quite ridiculous in puny man, but rather in self-forgetfulness; in that faith which says, 'Let me do the will of God, and be swallowed up in His work. Conscious that His goodness is perfect, let me spend not a thought on the contingencies of my future, which He will provide as His

wisdom sees good." This is an epitome of the sublimest piety and faith. "But," he proceeds, "I am gravely sensible that there is another view of immortality in which self is quite forgotten; in which the enlargement of men's destiny beyond the grave is viewed as ennobling our nature and assuaging the grief with which we see human afflictions end in dark moral degradation. Such a doctrine of immortality is encumbered with severe logical difficulties to a Theist, but with fewer (I think) *than with those which meet a Biblical Christian*" (p. 13). And surely it seems to me this view of immortality is encumbered with fewer difficulties than any other. Then follows a frank and manly divulgence at once of the faith and the "honest doubt" of an honest man. "In my book called 'Theism,' I have elaborately developed all the arguments which commend themselves to me. When I read them, I find them very powerful. Some of them are even short enough, if sound, to generate vivid electric faith. The discomfort to me is, that they do not wholly refute, they rather outweigh, arguments on the other side; and where you deal with a balanced argument, you strike the balance differently, I believe, in different frames of mind. Perhaps when I am too much pre-engaged by sense, and too little devout, the spiritual arguments for immortality lose force with me. Whether that is the explanation I cannot tell; but I frankly confess that what at one time I think to bring full conviction, at another time seems overbalanced by objections. I do not at all imagine that I have solved the problem. I sometimes think that the half faith which I sustain may be precisely the thing most wholesome to men; and, indeed, is it not unreasonable to expect to see clearly through such a veil as death? Let your complainant exercise the grace of waiting for light, and of hoping that more light may dawn on our successors than God has yet granted to us" (pp. 13, 14). This is truly a noble confession of faith and of doubt

such as no mind but a large, brave and honest one would ever have made. We feel as we read it that a great soul has revealed itself to us, strengthening our belief to a far greater extent than volumes of half sincere though more positive dogmatism can. Here at any rate we have a mind which does not despair of morality because it cannot *demonstrate* a future life. And there is a faith beyond the faith of all the creeds in the trust that the good Spirit, in whom we live, and move, and have our being, has given to us all the light that is necessary to guide us here, and that to Him belongs the care of us hereafter. And this faith will enable each one of us to say with the grand old Scotchman in *Alton Locke*, "I have long left the saving of my soul to Him who made the soul." (I quote from memory).

Dr. Hinds, in the first of his two interesting tracts, reminds those who ask what we have to rely on if we cannot rely on the Bible, that a question of like import, and of equally vital interest to those who asked it, has been answered in modern times to the satisfaction, at least, of all Protestants. That question was, "If we cannot rely on the Church, what have we got to rely on?" The reply was, "The Bible," and an infallible Bible accordingly was substituted for an infallible church. Dr Hinds proceeds very ably to advocate the giving up of the assumption, "that God must have provided an infallible teaching of religious truth," and to warn those who manifest a want of faith by asserting that they recognise no foundation for religion apart from the Bible, to be on their guard "against substituting a vain and presumptuous prying into the hidden things of the Lord, for the desire to know Him by seeking to conform to His will" (p. 13). He thinks that "the tree of knowledge in the garden of Eden, the craving after which caused Adam and Eve to be banished from the tree of life, may serve as an emblem to us." For, "we too, in our eager pursuit after forbidden knowledge, may find ourselves wander-

ing far away from the life which is destined otherwise to nourish and prepare us for heaven" (p. 14). It is only, thus, indirectly that this pamphlet bears upon the subject of immortality, which is directly treated by Dr Hinds, in his "Reply to the Question, Apart from Supernatural Revelation, What is Man's Prospect of Living after Death?" Dr Hinds limits the scope of his reply to the question of *individual* immortality, stating that to this only "our thoughts and aspirations are directed," and that "to believe that we shall revive from death in total oblivion of any previous existence, would be as little consolatory as to believe that the extinction of life is final." "The question, therefore," he writes, "which I am requested to consider must be whether, excluding from the inquiry all supernatural revelation on the subject, there is any reason for believing that death is a passage to a new phase of life, on which we enter with the consciousness of personal identity with our former selves" (p. 1). Proceeding to answer this question, Dr Hinds says, "Our reasonable course is to see, in the first instance, what light is thrown on the subject by the analogy of creation. And it must be admitted that the result is disappointing to our hopes and wishes. There is no annihilation of any part of the material universe, so far as we can observe. . . . The process which is going on, and has gone on, as it would appear, through successive ages, is the continual disintegration of the several substances of which the world is composed, and the working of them up into new combinations. . . . We do not perceive, as in the case of the material substance, what becomes of the principle of life; but this principle is no less than the component parts of the human body, or of a rock or tree, a portion of the elements on which creative power is exercised. Arguing then from what takes place in the case of these elements which are seen and felt, to that which is not an object of the senses, we should

infer that the same law of creation must be applicable to that also, unless it can be shown that there are different laws for the two. That the one is visible and tangible, the other not, is a difference which does not imply that the law of creation is not uniform" (pp. 1, 2). I quote thus at length because it is impossible to put into fewer words the sense thus simply and clearly conveyed.

Dr Hinds goes on to discuss the question whether there is anything in our human nature to lead us to suppose that the analogy does not hold good with us, "whatever may be the fate of the inferior creatures." He decides that the possession of a reasoning faculty gives us no title to individual immortality, since it is apparently shared in an inferior degree by the brutes, and only characterizes man "as the highest in the scale of that manifold creation, the general law of which is that of a continual dissolution of its elements, and a recombination of them." He thinks that as far as the argument from analogy goes, we must conclude that the same law holds good with mind, even as, although less palpably than it does with matter. But he argues, "there is a surer resting place for our hope, in the *desire for personal and conscious immortality* which the Creator has made part of man's nature." For, not only does the possession of this desire "distinguish us from all the rest of earthly creation," but we are justified in arguing from it, "that the Creator would never have made it a part of our nature, if the object to which alone the desire is directed were unattainable." (p. 5.) This argument is repeated with even greater force a little further on: "the strength of the argument lies as I have observed, in our conception of the divine nature as revealed to us in creation. To suppose that the Creator has made man with a strong desire as part of his nature, and that the object on which alone that desire can be exercised, does not exist, is as inconsistent with what we know of Him and His ways, as

to suppose that He might have given His creatures eyes when there was no visible object, or ears when there was no such thing as sound," (p. 6.) This, then, is an argument from analogy after all, only the analogy is between one intellectual conception of the truth of which we have ample evidence, and another which we desire to substantiate, and not between a set of observed physical laws, and a spiritualistic theory. The former, if it be sound, warrants us in sustaining a firm hope of personal immortality; the latter leads us to quite a different conclusion. It will be observed, however, that this argument of Dr. Hinds rests upon an undoubted belief in an intelligent Creator and Sustainer of the universe, and consequently that to one who has no such belief, it possesses no cogency. And it is well to recognize the fact that it is impossible in the present state of knowledge to bring forward any arguments in favour of individual immortality, that have any force with a pure materialist. As pointed out in a preceding portion of this paper, Mr Owen's arguments prove from analogy, as far as an argument from analogy can prove anything, universal indestructibility, and the materialist would be the first to admit this; but they possess no validity if urged in favour of individual immortality. The analogy to be of any use in this direction, must be based, like that employed by Dr. Hinds, upon a Theistic foundation. Indeed, we are fully warranted in saying that a belief in a personal God is indispensable to a faith in personal immortality. For these reasons it seems to me that Mr Owen has greatly underrated the effect which a future development of such speculations as those of Mr. Huxley on Protoplasm, may have upon the only faith in immortality which is cherished by the vast majority of religious thinkers, in what are called Christian countries at least. For my own part, however, I have no fear that the course of future scientific inquiry will ever substantiate the theories of those gross materialists

who deny the immanence of a great Intelligence in the universe. No Theistic theories seem to me so utterly wild and unreasonable as those of the Antitheists. And so long as a reasonable belief in a moral and intelligent Creator remains, so long will the true analogical argument of Dr Hinds possess a force which cannot be denied. But, forcible as it is, this argument may, even on a Theistic basis, be disputed. In the first place it may be questioned whether the desire for personal immortality is so nearly universal as to justify us in considering it to be a part of our nature; and in the second place, it may be argued that even admitting this, it does not follow that such a desire will be realized in accordance with our present conceptions. As to the first of these objections, it must be admitted that we have ample evidence to prove that some primitive races of mankind have no belief in a future state of existence, and it is more than doubtful whether the ancient Jews had. Nay, it may even be that some who are advanced in the religious thought of the present time, look upon the idea of a life that will never, never end, with more of dread than of delight. I sometimes think that if it were not for the relatives and friends whom we lose by death, most of us would have but little, if any, desire for a future life. We cannot bear the thought of parting for ever from those we love, and this makes us cherish the hope of meeting them after death. This last consideration, however, only serves to strengthen Dr Hind's position.

With regard to the second objection that, admitting the desire for immortality to be a part of our nature, it does not follow that such a desire will be realized in accordance with our present conceptions, there is much that may be urged in its favour. The Indian's happy hunting ground is as truly an ideal of future existence for him, as our hopes of Heaven are for us. If his conception seems gross to us, may not ours seem

equally so to those who will live in a more enlightened age to come? Is it not possible that our yearning for an extension of our poor individual lives beyond the grave, may embody after all only a less gross ideal of immortality than that of the Indian? Mr Owen at any rate seems to have some such idea as this.

But Dr. Hinds thinks we have another indication of personal immortality in "*the universal craving for spiritual communion*" with God. And he goes on to remark: "However diverse may be the shapes which the effort to satisfy this craving has taken, and still takes, they all testify to the fact, that the Creator has made the craving a part of man's nature." (p. 6). This craving, he says, is not fully satisfied in this life. However devout a man may be, and however great the comfort which he derives from the measure of intercourse with God that is vouchsafed to him here, there is no true and full communion, since "*there is no reciprocity.*" For, although Christians believe that God does in some way answer prayer, and may "substitute faith for conscious fruition of a Divine intercourse with them when they address Him," yet there is not that interchange of communication which we call communion when we speak of intercourse between man and man, and for which Dr Hinds thinks there is a natural craving.

The measure of force which this argument may claim must obviously vary greatly with different minds, and even with the same mind in different states of feeling. I fear that the vast majority of human beings have no *conscious* yearning for communication with the Divine Being, though that is no proof that it is not an undeveloped tendency of their nature—a tendency perhaps stunted and all but destroyed by the influence of gross and demoralising theological theories. As soon as man emerges sufficiently from a state of brutish savagery to speculate upon the origin of all

that he sees around him, he naturally begins in some sense to feel after God ; but the religious sentiments must be considerably developed before he will be conscious of any longing after divine communion. Such yearning, when it does come, is apparently the result of thought combined with religious love and veneration. It can scarcely be considered as a definite instinct of our nature, though it may be a natural tendency, that only develops itself when our noblest faculties have become paramount. And is it not possible that the highest state of religious thought and sentiment would give to us a satisfactory consciousness of actual *reciprocity* in a strong sense of direct communication between the Divine Spirit and our own ? May it not be that our present conception of communion with God is after all a low one, and that a higher one is possible to us, which would be capable of completely satisfying our religious aspirations ? That, Dr Hinds might reply, would be heaven itself, and if it could be attained here, no future state would be necessary to satisfy the longing after divine communion. But then, he might justly urge, the cessation of such a heaven in death would be even more dreadful and incomprehensible than the cessation of our life under existing conditions ; and, besides, how about those who had died with the longing still unsatisfied ?

Dr Hinds further urges : “ There is this peculiarity, too, about man, which, *if there is no future state for him, makes him an anomaly in creation.* In all other living creatures completeness characterises the Creator’s work ; in man, *incompleteness.* . . . The individual is almost a different being, according as his spiritual part has been cultivated by education and other social influences ; progress of the inner man marks the history of the human race ; and still there must be an incompleteness in the work of his Creator, until he reaches that further stage of existence in which the

desires that distinguish him from all other animate beings on earth shall be provided with their appropriate objects, and shall be fully developed in the realization of those objects" (pp. 8, 9). It would be impossible for a theist to deny the force of this argument. The atheist would reply that our desires are now superstitiously misdirected, and therefore have no claim to realization. This, then, like the rest of Dr Hinds' arguments, is calculated to strengthen the conviction of the theist and spiritualist, but would have little if any weight with the atheist and materialist. For the latter, probably, Dr Hind does not write. The plea for a future life to compensate for the inequalities of this, I have already noticed in my remarks in reply to *Presbyter Anglicanus*. The argument, considered by itself, has the fault of proving too much, if it proves anything. Dr Hinds puts it before us concisely enough, when he writes: "There are inequalities in the divine government of the world which would seem to be inconsistent with the divine nature and attributes as otherwise made known to us, unless there is another life to complete the present, in which their inequalities are to be redressed" (p. 10). But animals, and even vegetables, are subject to the unequal conditions of existence here equally with man, although they cannot, of course, be said to *suffer* equally with man on that account. The poor donkey, half starved and otherwise brutally treated; the dog, chained for the greater part of his existence to a kennel in a back yard; the half-killed pigeon, and the often hunted fox,—all made wretched for the use or sport of man, have surely, according to this argument, a claim for future compensation, even if the plant, stunted and starved on the barren rock, has not.

One more argument Dr Hinds briefly notices, namely, that which he draws from "the belief in the occasional apparition of dead men." Dr Hinds thinks that whether this belief be a delusion or not, its existence

is "one more evidence of the strong craving after that future world of continued life, which God has made a part of our nature" (p. 12). The same remark applies to the modern belief in so-called spiritualistic manifestations. "Spiritualists," as the believers in these alleged manifestations, with rather arrogant distinctiveness, term themselves, claim for their new "revelation" that it has rescued hundreds of sceptics from the doubt of immortality. Whether this be correct or not, it is certain that many thoughtful men, in their desire for certain evidence of independent spiritual existence, were disposed to inquire with eager hope into the nature of the manifestations, but soon became disgusted with the imposture and buffoonery that are so intricately mixed up with them, even if there *be* anything genuine.

In concluding my imperfect review of this and the other essays noticed, I wish to enlarge a little upon the objection which I have taken to each and all of them, namely, that they start from the spiritualistic thesis, instead of endeavouring first to prove it. By this method the real opponents of the belief in immortality are merely *passed*, and are not *encountered*. The primary question in dispute is not whether the soul is immortal, or whether it dies with the body, *but whether there be a soul to live or die*. The Materialists are the real opponents of the doctrine of immortality, and they deny the existence of the spiritual entity called the soul. They deny that there is anything in man beyond matter and force. The sublimest thoughts and the devoutest aspirations are to their conception only *brain in action*. It is useless to deny the strength of their position, for they have much to urge in its favour which it is difficult, if not impossible, entirely to refute, though it may be possible to overrule on the ground of superior probability. Their arguments may be briefly stated as follows:—We observe (they say) that the character of a man depends upon the size and

conformation of his brain, and the nature of his temperament. If certain brain organs are defective in the individual, we observe a corresponding defectiveness in his mental and moral manifestations. Very defective mental organs invariably co-exist with idiocy, and deranged ones with insanity. A brain otherwise defective—defective in what are termed the moral organs, again, always indicates a low state of moral sensibility in the possessor of it, and a derangement of these organs manifests itself in what is called moral insanity. The health of the body obviously influences not only the intellectual but also the moral characteristics. A blow on the skull benumbs all mental activity. Sleep, drunkenness, over-eating, over-working, fasting, and semi-poisoning distinctively influence what Spiritualists term the "soul." If there be a spiritual entity in man, it seems then that it is merely a characterless spiritual force which can only manifest itself in accordance with the constitution and varying conditions of the corporeal organism. This we prefer (for want of a better name) to call vital force, and we see nothing more spiritual in it than we recognize in chemical, electric, muscular, or nervous force. We fully admit the indestructibility of all matter and force. Matter decays and forms new combinations, and force is thereby transmuted. We see no evidence of any different result with regard to what we call the moral and intellectual organism, and what you Spiritualists term the soul. Therefore we find no ground for belief in personal immortality. In reply to all this the Spiritualist may say:—You Materialists assume too much when you infer from the fact that what we call the soul can only manifest itself by means of the material organs of the brain, that there is nothing but these organs to be manifested—or nothing beyond what you term vital force. In all probability it is the character of the soul which determines the characteristics of the mental organism, and not *vice versa*. Or, even if it be otherwise, it is

obvious that if the Supreme Spirit Himself were to become the occupant of a human frame, He could only manifest Himself by means of the human faculties of the particular individual so occupied. Each one of us is able to think about his bodily frame and ailments as something belonging to rather than constituting *himself*. From this it seems reasonable to infer that there is something within, and distinct from mere brain matter which so speculates. The individual consciousness, or, in metaphysical terminology, the *ego*, is able to take cognizance of and speculate about the material brain organs through which alone it (or he, or she) can be outwardly manifested—speculate even about their possible future derangement. Does not this fact of consciousness prove that there is an indwelling individual spirit—not a mere vital force—which permeates the human organism, and acts upon and through it, even as we believe there is a Divine Spirit permeating, and acting upon and through the material universe?

Much more might be urged on either side. Self-consciousness is said by some to be distinctively human, but this is a very questionable assertion. The Materialist sees in it nothing more than thought turned inward. He has, too, some questions to ask which it is very difficult for the Spiritualist to answer. For instance, he asks when the soul first takes up its abode in the human frame. Is it in the foetus at the instant of conception, and if not, at what stage in the growth of the foetus, the child, or the man? Inability to reply adequately to a question, although a serious drawback to a constructive theory, is not, of course, a proof against it. But then the issue seems to be nothing more than a balance of probabilities, and I fear that this is the only available issue for us in the present state of knowledge. For my own part, I do not feel qualified to give full force to either side of the controversy, and can only state the difficulties of the situation

honestly and fairly as they present themselves to me, leaving it to those who are more positive to teach with more authority, or at least to blow the trumpet with less uncertain sound.

One truth shines out clearly, and it is this, that as our Creator has given us no absolutely certain evidence of a future life, however strong the probabilities may be, it is not intended that we shall base our rule of conduct here on any future prospects that faith and imagination may place before us. We have a life to live in this world, at any rate, and to live that worthily is full occupation for our energies. Those who despise it are not taught to do so by God. If there be an everlasting Heaven for us, we shall best prepare for it by leaving it entirely out of consideration, as far as our practical life is concerned. To do our duty according to the purest light that is manifested to us, that is the best preparation for life and death alike. The sublimest faith is that which sustains us in a perfect trust in the divine government in this world, and which will enable us fearlessly to resign ourselves to the care of the living God in the hour of death, believing that whatever may be in store for us will be best for us, seeing that it will be what seemeth to Him fit.

POSTSCRIPT.

Since the above paper was written, a pamphlet in reply to *Presbyter Anglicanus*, entitled "Does Morality depend on Longevity?" by Edw. Vansittart Neale, has been published by Mr Scott. It consists chiefly of a very able and interesting historical argument against the doctrine that morality depends upon a belief in immortality. Mr Neale not only shows that the most moral of the ancient nations had no belief in a future life, but that some of the most horrible wars and cruel murders can be traced to the prevalence of

that belief. His motive for entering into the controversy seems to have been the same which has prevailed with me, and affords that full justification for entering publicly into so abstruse a subject which, in my own case, I feel to be necessary. I here give, and fully endorse his words :—"It does appear to me . . . of no small importance in the education of the young, that we should rest the principles of conduct upon the knowable and present, instead of upon a future, about which we can only dogmatise, without knowing anything certain. With this view, I propose to adduce some considerations, which seem to me to show that there is no necessity for making this uncertain forecast in order to gain a solid foundation either for religion or morality" (p. 5).