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A FACT?

A CRITICAL EXAMINATION

OF THE THEORY OF

A SOUL AND A FUTURE LIFE

BY

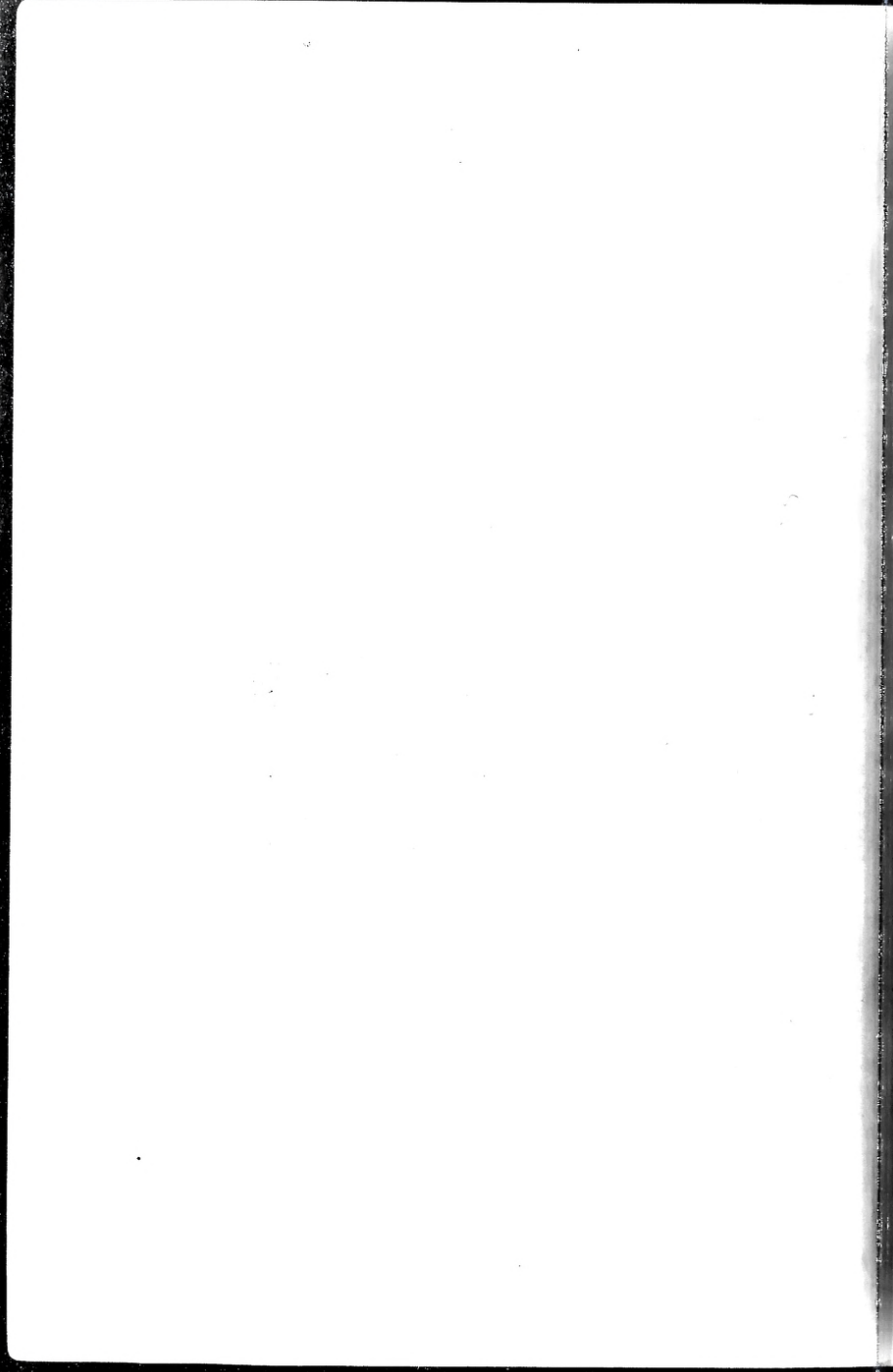
CHARLES WATTS

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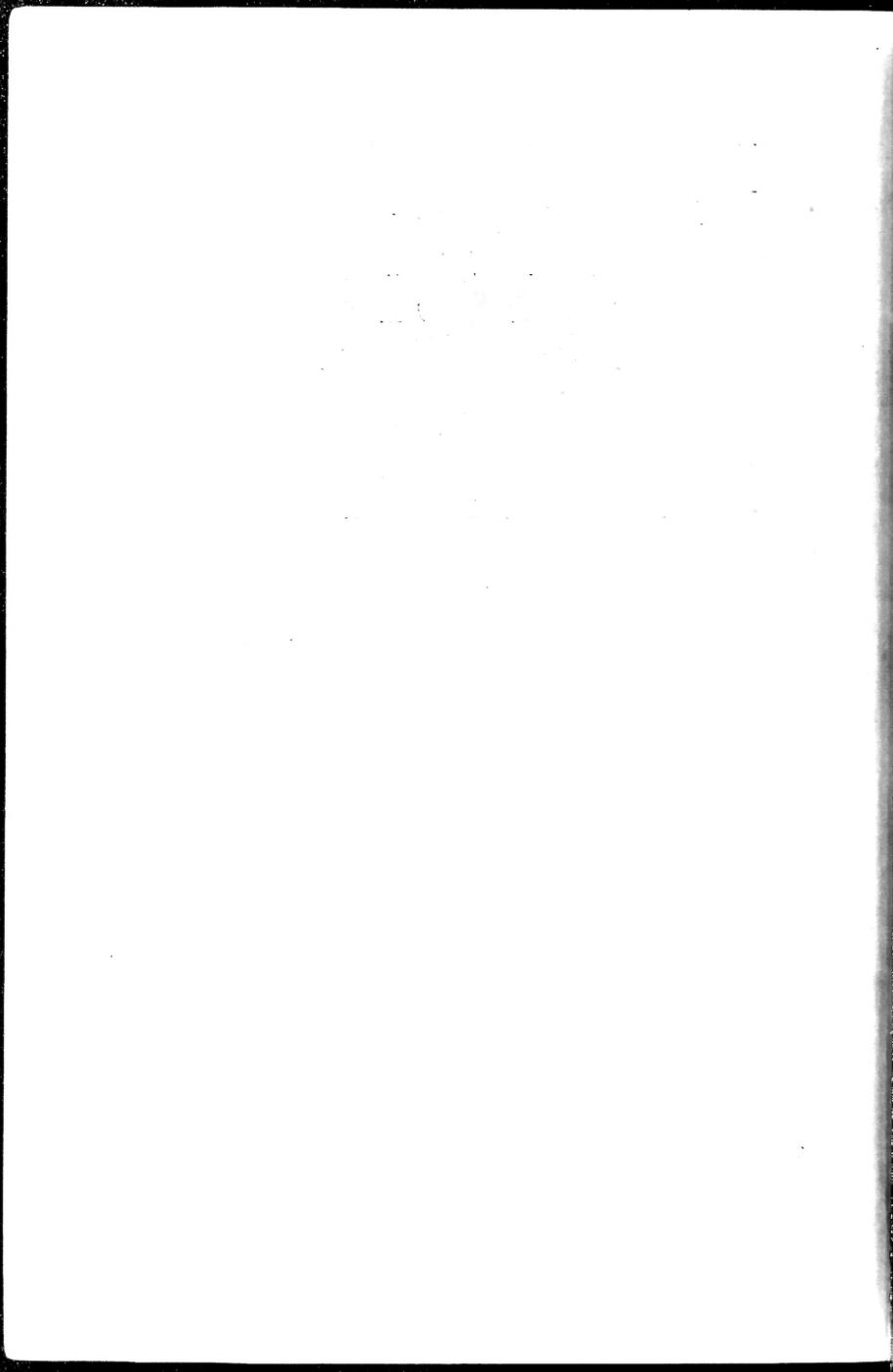
A SOUL AND A FUTURE LIFE

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IS IMMORTALITY A FACT ?

THE principal attraction of Christianity is, no doubt, its teachings in reference to a future life; yet this is a subject with which are associated errors of the most glaring kind. The belief in the Christian doctrine of immortality is based solely upon emotion, not upon reason. Now, nothing can be more fallacious than to take for granted that a belief is true because it affords emotional gratification. As Haeckel observes in his *Riddle of the Universe* :—

“Emotion has nothing whatever to do with the attainment of truth. That which we prize under the name of ‘emotional’ is an elaborate activity of the brain, which consists of feelings of like and dislike, motions of assent and dissent, impulses of desire and aversion. It may be influenced by the most diverse activities of the organism, by the cravings of the senses and the muscles, the stomach, the sexual organs, etc. The interests of truth are far from promoted by these conditions and vacillations of emotion; on the contrary, such circumstances often disturb that reason, which alone is adapted to the pursuits of truth, and frequently mar its perceptive power. No cosmic problem is solved, or even advanced, by the cerebral function we call emotion” (p. 18).

In these words of Haeckel we have an explanation, not only of many of the delusions which exist as to the continuity of life “beyond the grave,” but also of the fallacies pertaining to what are termed the religious aspirations.

The reasonable course to adopt in dealing with the question of man's alleged immortality is, that those who affirm its reality should give their reasons for such an affirmation, and endeavor to answer the objections urged against their contentions. It is also the duty of those who are unable to believe in immortality to state the grounds of their disbelief, and to indicate the inconclusive nature of the arguments put forward by their opponents. It being a subject upon which absolute certainty, so far as our knowledge is concerned, is impossible, dogmatism should be avoided. Those who desire to arrive at a rational conclusion upon the question should remember that to believe a thing to be true does not make it so. If it did, not only would Christians have to admit that Secularism was true, but they would have to grant that the lowest forms of theological superstitions were facts. This would, of course, destroy the supposed veracity of Christian claims. It is also necessary to understand that there is a marked distinction to be observed between belief and knowledge. We may, and do, have faith in that of which we have no real or actual knowledge, for we are compelled to exercise such faith in every-day life upon numerous subjects. The point, however, to be remembered is that, if we are judicial or rational, we shall be careful that our belief is not opposed to knowledge; and if we are wise, we shall always be on our guard against taking for granted that which is highly improbable, to say nothing of being impossible.

Now, the Freethinker regards immortality of conscious beings as a subject that, by its very nature, and by the very nature of our mentality, it is impossible to

give a definite opinion upon either *pro* or *con*. Still, he considers that, from a reasonable and scientific standpoint, there is no evidence to justify the dogmatic assertion that there *is* "a life beyond the grave." Before we can accept as true the allegation that we shall continue to live after passing through the ordeal termed death, we must have some knowledge of the conditions of that supposed existence, and as to whether they are suitable to mankind. But, up to the present, we have not met anyone who possesses the required knowledge, and, therefore, no information is forthcoming as to the nature of a future life. If there is presumptive evidence in favour 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 be convinced. When similar evidence is presented in favour 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.

Many centuries ago an Oriental sage is said to have asked: "If a man die, shall he live again?" Although numerous 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 it 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." An able American preacher and writer, Mr. Hugh O. Pentecost, puts the case thus:—

"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."

This is the Secular position. With us realities are of more importance than fanciful speculations, and truth of greater value than wild conjectures. 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 an assertion. In reference to these 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.

The popular theory of man's immortality involves the belief of conscious existence after death—or, as some put it, the continuity of consciousness. Now, it has not yet been shown how consciousness can continue in the absence of those conditions that we know are necessary to its manifestations. We have evidence that life is indispensable to consciousness, and that organisation is necessary to life. It would be interesting, therefore, to learn how these two effects—life and consciousness—could be manifested when the causes of such manifestations are gone. Immortality in man implies more than continuity of life upon the globe; it means the continuation of life in the same individual, a condition of which we know nothing. Death is a state the very opposite to that of life; both, therefore, cannot be conceived as being one. A living-dead man is a contradiction, for it is a self-evident fact that, if man always lived, he would never die. Death probably 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 organised body: 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 allegation, therefore, that consciousness continues after death is purely arbitrary.

The late Professor Fiske, who was a believer in man's immortality, in his recently-published lecture on "Life Everlasting," attempts to answer the question, "What has science to say about the time-honored belief that the human soul survives the death of the human body?" In doing so he frankly admits that, from the standpoint of reason and experience, we are no more justified in supposing that consciousness will exist after death than we should be in believing that water would exist apart from oxygen and hydrogen. He says:—

"Even if we strive to imagine our own physical activity as continuing without the aid of the physical machinery of sensation, we soon get into unmanageable difficulties. The furniture of our mind consists in great part of sensuous images, chiefly visual, and we cannot in thought follow ourselves into a world that does not announce itself through sense impressions. From all this it plainly appears that our notion of the survival of conscious activity apart from material conditions is not only unsupported by any evidence that can be gathered from the world of which we have experience, but is utterly and hopelessly inconceivable."

This, no doubt, is the fact, for, as Büchner states:—

"As there is no bile without a liver... so is there no thought without a brain: mental activity is a function of the cerebral substance. This truth is simple, clear, easily supported by facts, and indisputable" (*Force and Matter*, p. 139).

Dr. A. D. Waller, F.R.S., also says:—

"That the brain is the organ of intelligent sensation and motion is proved by the facts of comparative anatomy... and by common experience" (*An Introduction to Human Physiology*, p. 530).

Notwithstanding these admitted facts, the most palpable fallacies obtain as to man's alleged immortality. Believers in a life beyond the grave are not content in simply avowing their *belief*, but they dogmatically assert that they *know* such an existence to be a fact; nay, more, they assert that they possess a knowledge of the very conditions that will control our mentality "when we have shuffled off this mortal coil." Hence the Rev. Dr. Biggs, of Oxford, tells us that in the "next world" we shall be conscious of our existence, that we shall recognise each other, and, above all, that we shall have—

"Memory not only of our past selves, but about other people; memory, too, of those living on earth....Do you think that those who have gone before us, our mothers, our fathers, those dear-loved ones who, perhaps, were sponsors for us at the font—do you think they don't remember us, that they don't say prayers for us?" (*The Christian World Pulpit*, November 13, 1891).

Now, upon what grounds the rev. gentleman makes these reckless allegations he does not state. Such dogmatism may pass unrebuked in orthodox circles, but with impartial thinkers it appears to savor too much of reckless speculation. We cannot conceive of memory and recognition apart from the person who recognises and remembers; and it is purely arbitrary to assume that, when man's personality is destroyed, its operations will continue. Besides, with many individuals the recollection of their past lives would not be conducive to their happiness. In fact, in some cases a memory of the past, and a recognition of the wrongs and miseries still being endured on earth by those we love, would not enhance, but rather mar, our peace and comfort in any celestial abode. Evidently

the Rev. Dr. Biggs does not believe his Bible where it states, "The dead know not anything. In the grave the wicked cease from troubling and the weary will be at rest. The very day man goeth to the grave his thoughts perish." If "God's word" be true, there is no continuity of consciousness, and, therefore, it appears evident that after death those who lived will have no memory or power of recognition.

The prominent fallacies which exist in reference to man's alleged continuity of consciousness after death are these: (1) The dogmatic assertion that, in addition to his body, man possesses an immortal soul, which is an entity that controls his physical organisation; (2) that in man there is a universal belief in, and a desire for, a future life, which is evidence of its reality; (3) that from matter the various phenomena of existence could not have emanated; (4) that the belief in immortality furnishes the strongest basis for morality. In the consideration of these fallacies all dogmatic utterances should be avoided. Personally, I have no objection to a life beyond the tomb, provided it is one where real happiness obtains. To associate for ever with those we love would, indeed, be pleasant, if mutual affection, comfort, and tranquillity of mind reigned supreme. But I desire no immortality unless the future abode will be illumined with love, truth, justice, and intellectual supremacy. The company to be preferred there should comprise those who on earth were known to be honest thinkers, earnest workers for the general good, and whose right to the highest state of immortality had been secured by sincere profession, noble actions, and persistent activity in the sacred cause of liberty. Such an immortality as this,

however, is not offered by Christianity. Its heaven is a kind of receptacle for all sorts of characters—men who were considered too corrupt to live on earth, but who were regarded as proper candidates for heaven. If the New Testament be true, the brave, the noble, and the patriotic are oftentimes excluded from the portals of the celestial city. The passports required for admission there are faith and submission. Many of the world's heroes who have resisted tyranny, who have struggled for liberty, who have won freedom of thought, are not deemed worthy of this heaven unless they believe in "Christ and him crucified." A permanent sojourn in a place that rejects many of the purest and best of our race cannot be desired by any but moral invalids and imbeciles.

The first fallacy to be considered is the alleged existence in man of an entity termed soul. Now, what is this "soul," where is it, and how are we to identify it? The error here is in supposing the ego in man to be an entity, while it is simply a resultant. As Professor Ribot states:—

"The ego is not an entity acting where it chooses or as it pleases; controlling the organs in its own way, and limiting its domain according to its own wish. On the contrary, it is a resultant, even to such a degree that its domain is strictly determined by the anatomical connections with the brain.... His [man's] proper ego is his whole self—his entire organism, with all his faculties" (*The Diseases of Personality*, p. 45).

If it is urged that the soul is the "thinking principle" in man, then it is not immortal, inasmuch as thought depends upon physical organisation, which we know is destroyed at death. Moreover, the lower animals manifest the same principle. Dr. W. B. Carpenter

says that, though

“in man we find the highest development of the reasoning faculties, it is quite absurd to limit them to him, as some have done, since no impartial observer can doubt that many of the lower animals can execute reasoning processes as complete in their way as those of man, though much more limited in their range” (*Gen. and Comp. Physiology*, p. 999).

Sir Benjamin Brodie observes :—

“The mental principle in animals is of *the same essence* as that of human beings. . . . I am inclined to believe that the minds of the inferior animals are *essentially of the same nature* with that of the human race” (*Psychological Inquiries*, pp. 164, 166).

Darwin, in his *Descent of Man*, deals with this subject at considerable length, and on page 147 he wrote :—

“Spiritual powers cannot be compared or classed by the naturalist; but he may endeavor to show, as I have done, that the mental faculties of man and the lower animals do not differ in kind, although immensely in degree.”

It should be remembered that the term “soul” has never really been defined; moreover, if we possess a soul, it is not known in what part of the body it can be found, or when it leaves the human frame. 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 we may refer to persons in lunatic asylums who have diseased brains, whose judgment is dethroned, and whose reason has deserted them. Has the soul 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: if it does so immediately at death, does it go 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? Further, when does this alleged soul enter the body? In infancy? Then why does the child at that stage of its life exhibit such a low degree of intelligence? If, however, the soul is not allied with the body until it arrives at maturity, both physical and intellectual development go on without its aid. The fact is, the human mind is infantile in the child, juvenile in the youth, mature in the adult, feeble in the aged, deranged by disease of its material organ the brain, and at death it disappears. The origin of the so-called soul is just that of the body, and no separation, as far as modern science shows, is possible. Mental life commences with physical life, and both are immature together. We learn to use our intellectual powers in the same way as we acquire the more perfect use of our muscular powers—by experience and practice. Each must begin and end with the somatic organs upon which they depend.

It is not at all difficult to understand how the general belief in personal immortality originated. Professor Graham, in his *Creed of Science*, remarks:—

“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” (p. 160).

Haeckel, in his *Riddle of the Universe*, observes that the perpetuation of the belief among certain persons may be accounted for “partly by their excess of imagination and defect of critical faculty, and partly by the powerful influence of dogmas which a religious

education imprinted on the brain in early youth" (p. 313). No doubt there is some philosophy in the words of Pope: "Hope springs eternal in the human breast"; and it is this hope that induces so many of those members of the human race who exist among the ills and inequalities of life to indulge the thought that there is another world where peace shall reign and the evils of our present existence shall be unknown. When, however, reason is brought to bear upon the question, it can be seen how weak is the foundation upon which the hope is resting, and that the structure which imagination has built at the bidding of hope has no substantial basis. We need not wonder at the direction that man's aspirations have taken on this subject, for they are largely the outcome of that selfishness which is so distinguishing a characteristic of perverted human nature, which cares for no benefits but personal ones. This, we believe, is destined to pass away before an enlightened altruism, which is already manifesting itself in many ways throughout human society. Possibly the time is not far distant when men will see that their conception of immortality had its origin in an erroneous interpretation of a natural sentiment—an interpretation largely the result of a desire for personal gratification.

It does not follow, as is frequently supposed, that, because a person forms a certain conception, there exists a corresponding reality. 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 truth of the belief that such an animal ever existed. If an artist painted a picture of

the Devil, it is perfectly certain that the "Prince of Darkness" never sat for the portrait. The conception which was formed as to the origin of the universe and man has been shown by modern researches to be absolutely groundless in reality. Many persons are induced to believe in a future life because men eminent in science and philosophy have favored the belief. But while, of course, eminent men's opinions are entitled to respect, they are also open to doubt, inasmuch as all men are fallible. Great men have entertained the most erroneous and childish ideas. Our estimate of great men should be based upon what they do or what they prove. When they defend the abominations of slavery, or when they give their support to supposed miracles and orthodox doctrines because they are sanctioned by the Bible, we prefer to estimate the value of their opinions from the evidence they produce. 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; but, in the opinion of many, his contentions in reference to a future life cannot be proved by candid investigation and sound reasoning.

Probably the strongest argument for a future life is derived from what are called the desires of mankind. The fallacy, however, of supposing that a thing must be because we desire it should be apparent to the most superficial thinker. Men desire universal happiness, justice for all, and a fair distribution of

wealth ; but no such conditions exist. Still, it is said that this general desire for immortality should be accounted for, which we think can easily be done. No doubt there is some connection between desires and their realisation 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 realise our ideal. But the mere fact of having the desire is no evidence that its realisation will follow. It appears to me that the instinctive love of life found in man explains, to a large extent, the desire for immortality. But in most cases the desire is not for another life, but rather for the continuation of the one we have. And even in this case the desire will depend upon our present condition. If we are physically healthy, having a fair share of comforts, and surrounded by those we love, there would be few, if any, who would wish to depart "to be no more seen." If, on the other hand, our bodies are diseased, and misery and starvation exclude all sunshine from our lives, then complete extinction would be to many "a consummation devoutly to be wished." Those who argue that without an endless future this life is not worth having must regard it as being exceedingly defective. Why, then, should its continuation be desired? Moreover, is it possible to long or desire for that of which we know nothing? I think not, and to do so would be to avoid facts, and to rely upon groundless imagination.

Where is the proof that in another world there will be a change for the better? It is an instance that the wish is father to the thought. It does not appear to be taken into consideration that no guarantee can be held that the future life, if there be one, will be

an improvement upon this. It does not avail to say that injustice prevails in this world which will be remedied there. In what lies the remedy? Men who are unjust here may be unjust elsewhere, and the human selfishness of this world will but be transferred to another, if the same beings pass from one to the other. It is no assurance to say that a God of justice will see that right is done. The same God, it is assumed, will reign there as here, and most certainly he does not prevent injustice being done upon a very extensive scale in this world. Why, then, should his plan of government be altered in the next? The assumption that it will be is based upon no evidence whatever, and is even in direct opposition to the declaration so often made that God does not, and cannot, change. Besides, we know nothing whatever with respect to the conditions of a future life, and can, consequently, predicate nothing with regard to the state of society there. Great numbers of men who die pass away with the worst passions of human nature exercising supreme control over the rest of their faculties. How can these be expected to form, or even to take part in, a pure and unselfish society, where each man is supposed to love others as well as himself? Endless existence and interminable motion may be the 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 wreck of matter, and the crush of worlds.

The alleged universality of the faith in a future life is not true. Ample evidence could be produced, even from the testimony of Christian missionaries, to prove that numerous tribes have been found where not the slightest belief in a soul or in a future life existed. For instance, the Rev. Robert Moffat, who was for twenty years a missionary in South Africa, speaking of the natives, says:—

“During years of apparently fruitless labor I have often wished to find *something* by which I could lay hold of their minds—an altar to an unknown god, the faith of their ancestors, the immortality of the soul, or any religious association; but nothing of this kind ever floated in their mind” (*Missionary Labor in Southern Africa*; eighteenth edition).

Dr. T. Cromwell, in his work upon *The Soul and a Future Life*, having given a list of writers who acknowledged that in their travels they came in contact with various peoples where the belief in a soul and a future life was entirely absent, writes:—

“So the ordinary European idea of ‘an immortal soul,’ which, so many tell us, belongs to man as man, finds no place in a religion professed by a multitude of nations, whose aggregate population, at the lowest reckoning, has been estimated at three hundred and fifty millions” (p. 160).

But supposing the faith in a future life were universal, that would not prove its truth. 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, and that the earth was flat and stationary, is no evidence to us that their belief was correct. 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 story, as given in the Bible, 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 and the potency of increased general knowledge will sweep all such false notions away as surely as the morning sun disperses the vapors of the night.

We frequently meet with the assertion that it is unfair to condemn the theory of personal immortality through lack of knowledge as to what is termed the soul, because, it is said, it is really not known what matter is. Upon this point, however, there is this important difference: that, although we do not profess to explain what matter is in its essence, we understand what the term connotes, and we are familiar, more or less, with the properties, powers, and movements of what is known by that term. The same cannot be consistently urged of what is called the soul. It is true, nothing is known of the *essence* of matter, for we have no knowledge of essence, or real self, as apart from qualities or properties; but as a substantive existence, by means of its qualities or properties, matter is wherever being is, and we can recognise it. Matter can be seen and felt; in other words, man is conscious of its existence by reason of his perceptions of its properties, but soul as an entity none can perceive. Therein lies the difference: the one can be sensibly recognised, the other cannot. Matter has been defined as "that which exists in space."

Professor Clifton, of Oxford, says it "is that which occupies space, and is recognised by the senses." Sir William Thomson observes: "The Naturalist may be content to know matter as *that which can be perceived by the sense, or as that which can be acted upon or can exert force.*" (Quoted by Karl Pearson in his *Grammar of Science*, p. 293.)

The latest and most elaborate statement as to the nature and potency of matter is made by Büchner, in his recently-published work, *Last Words on Materialism*. Therein he states:—

"The same scientific research that has taught us the illimitable extent of matter has also given us quite a new and profounder knowledge of its properties. We now know that it has chemical, physical, and electro-magnetic qualities which were undreamed of a few decades ago. But how arduous a task it has been to deliver people from the obsession of the antiquated notion of matter, as something inert and dead, in order to perceive this. Light was held to be a stream of radiating particles; now we conceive it as an undulatory movement of that ether to which they refused the name of matter. Heat was regarded as an immaterial (imponderable) principle that could be conveyed from body to body; we now know that it is merely a vibratory motion of the matter that composes them. Electricity was supposed to be a mysterious fluid, pervading matter; we now know that it also is a movement of the finest particles of matter. In a word, the innumerable properties or modes of motion, which were formerly excluded from the idea of matter because they seemed incompatible with it, are now not merely included in that idea, but are quite inseparable from it and essential to our conception. And this applied with the same force to the organic world as to the inorganic. . . . to the highest phenomena of life, those of mind and consciousness" (p. 3).

Büchner then gives the following reasons to account for the misconceptions that have hitherto so largely obtained as to what matter really is. He says:—

"Misled by the earlier and narrow conception of matter, we

have contended long against the assumption that matter could, in certain conditions and combinations, give rise to the phenomena which we call consciousness and mind; nor is the reluctance yet extinct. Nevertheless, in proportion as our conception of matter gains in breadth and depth, that reluctance is disappearing and giving way to a sounder view."

The position here taken by the eminent German scientist is, no doubt, the correct one. Of course, as he states—

"No one will expect to find in a speck of dust the complexity and constructive force of a particle of protoplasm. In like manner, no one expects to discover mental processes in matter which has not entered into certain combinations and assumed a certain form... Who, in the days before music was invented, and having only the simple notion of wood and metal which his experience gave him, could have dreamed of the heavenly melodies that now flood our concert-halls through the combination of these elements?" (pp. 5, 6).

The scientific discoveries of this age have thrown considerable light upon the relation of mind to matter. Physiological psychology is now recognised as the highest and most certain form of mind-study. The old methods of investigating mental operations are no longer looked upon as being of much value, and every person who now desires to investigate mind proceeds along the line of what may be termed the somatic basis of thought—the brain and nervous system. In fact, as George Henry Lewes has stated, "Without a nervous system there could be nothing like what we know as feeling." Samuel Laing observes: "So far as science gives any positive knowledge as to the relations of mind to matter, it amounts to this: That all we call mind is indissolubly connected with matter through the grey cells of the brain and other nervous ganglia. This is positive"

(*A Modern Zoroastrian*, p. 140). The position, therefore, is this: No nerves, no feeling; no matter, no mind; no brain, no thought; no organisation, no life; and without organic activity consciousness is unknown.

The fallacies existing concerning personal immortality arise to a large extent through confounding nominal with real existences. For instance, theologians assume that life, mind, thought, etc., are entities. Now, these are not things *per se*, but conditions of matter which result from certain combinations of material parts. Life is not a thing any more than death, and thought is no more an entity than is digestion. The discovery of the correlation of force has completely revolutionised our knowledge as to the nature of thought and mental action. Light, heat, electricity, magnetism, etc., are now known to be forms of force, and so are life and mind. Professor Huxley has shown the fallacy of supposing life to be an entity. Oxygen and hydrogen unite in certain proportions, and form water—that is, the water is the outcome of the union of these elements. So, in certain other combinations, an organism is formed, and the result is life. The life did not pre-exist, for it had no existence at all until the organic body produced it, and then it made the appearance simply as a correlated force. The production of mind is caused in a similar way. What occurs here is a correlation of force—that is, one form of force is converted into another, heat into light, electricity into magnetism, and some one or more of them into life and mind. The origin of mind, therefore, is like the origin of heat or electricity—viz., correlation. The force itself

thus correlated was of course eternal in some one or more of its forms, but the particular form in which it is manifested is simply the result of correlation. Nothing is called into actual existence but a phenomenon, having no more permanent individual existence than the flash of lightning or the peal of thunder. We kindle a fire and heat is produced, or we light the gas and the room becomes illuminated; but where was the heat or the light before the combustion upon which it depends was brought about? Certainly not in existence in the form in which it is now seen. When the fire goes out the heat ceases, and when the gas is turned off there is no more light. No one thinks of asking what has become of either, and yet people talk of life as being an entity, and they discuss the whereabouts of mind before and after the existence of organic substance, upon which the whole thing depends.

It is said that matter cannot think; but why not? If thinking be beyond the power of matter, which is certainly something, how comes it within the powers of immateriality, which, in plain common sense, is not anything? All those who say matter cannot think assume the question to be proved. We know that men think, we know that men are material; it therefore involves no contradiction to say that matter thinks, until it has been proved that not matter but something else does. It is a recognised fact that each organ of the body has its special function. Now, ample evidence exists to prove that thought depends upon the condition of the brain, and that in proportion to its development so is the manifestation of intelligence. It is as reasonable to allege that the

brain thinks as it is to state the well-known fact that the liver secretes the bile. Dr. David Ferrier, in his *Localisation of Cerebral Disease*, says :—

“ That the brain is the order of the mind no one doubts, and that, when mental aberrations, of whatever nature, are manifested, the brain is diseased organically or functionally, we take as an axiom. That the brain is also necessary to sensory perception and voluntary motion is also universally admitted; and that the physiological and psychological are but different aspects of the same anatomical substrata is the conclusion to which all modern research tends ” (p. 5).

While it is true that partial injury to the brain may not destroy thought, it is equally true that thinking has never been known to go on where the brain has been totally injured. In support of this statement the following scientific authorities may be cited :—

“ Many instances are on record in which extensive disease has occurred in *one* hemisphere (of the cerebrum) so as almost entirely to destroy it, without any obvious injury to the mental powers, or any interruption of the influence of the mind upon the body. But there is no case on record of any severe lesion of *both* hemispheres, in which morbid phenomena were not evident during life ” (Carpenter’s *Human Physiology*, p. 777).

“ In every instance where there exists any corresponding lesion or disease on *each* side of the brain, there we are sure to find some express injury or impairment of the mental functions ” (Sir H. Holland’s *Chapters on Mental Physiology*, p. 184).

“ There are no cases on record in which the mental faculties have remained undisturbed when the disorganisation has extended to *both* sides of the brain ” (Solly on *The Human Brain*, p. 349).

Dr. Maudsley, in his *Physiology of Mind*, p. 126, observes that he has come to the assured conviction that mind does not exist in nature apart from brain.

The old fallacy that matter does not control mind is now entirely dispelled. In cases of epilepsy and paralysis mind yields to material forces. Nothing is more certain than that too much alcohol impairs and sometimes destroys all consciousness and intelligence in man. Take also the use of anæsthetics. If a patient inhale a small portion of chloroform previously to undergoing an operation, he becomes insensible to pain, and for the time being his consciousness is extinguished. As Professor Tyndall says: "Divorced from matter, where is life? Whatever our *faith* may say, our *knowledge* shows them to be indissolubly joined. Every meal we eat and every cup we drink illustrates the mysterious control of mind by matter." The fact here submitted is that mind is a part of the material organisation upon which its manifestations depend. In science it is the practice to endeavor to explain things in materialistic terms; and to adopt any other course often tends to the confusion of ideas, and leads many minds into the region of obscurity. I fail to see any 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. It is necessary to emphasize these facts, because every conception of our minds implies not only a form of thought, but an idea of the something thought of. When we formulate a thought, it may be said that we at the same time define it; that is, we lay down a boundary, for to think of a thing is to limit it.

The theological fallacy that morality is dependent upon the belief in a future life is becoming more and more apparent. Even professed Christians rely upon

material agencies for the cultivation of ethical conduct rather than upon the belief in immortality. They have more faith in well-devised and justly-administered laws as a protection against crime than in any threat of retribution in "another world." In fact, the greatest criminals have been among those who avowed their belief in a future life. The frequent revelations in our law courts of criminal conduct upon the part of the clergy of all denominations afford a crushing refutation of the boasted beneficial results of this belief. Moreover, all our prison statistics abundantly prove that, as a rule, the inhabitants of the gaols are, with very few exceptions, believers in the doctrine of future rewards and punishments. The dominant consideration which practically influences human conduct to-day is, What will be the effect of one's actions in this life? Cicero uttered a great truth when he told his son that man's morality was the necessary result of reasoning built upon human necessities. Robert Owen was equally correct in his teaching that the ability and inclination to live good and useful lives depend not upon belief, but upon the circumstances that surround the formation and development of man's character.

If belief in Christian immortality were necessary to morality, it is only reasonable to suppose that where the belief was absent immorality would abound. But the very opposite is the fact. Spencer, in his *Synthetic Philosophy*, tells us of tribes who were destitute of all religious belief, and yet they "lead a peaceful and tranquil life"; their "disputes are settled either by arbitration or by a council of five"; and they consider "falsehood as one of the worst of vices."

Again, he says the Carnatic aborigines very markedly show "fidelity, truth, and honesty"; and that among the Chakmas "crime is rare" and "theft is almost unknown." From these references (and many more of a similar kind could be adduced) it will be seen how erroneous is the statement that religion is necessary to morality. Besides, it should not be overlooked that with the orthodox Christian the popular notion is that the alleged moral efficacy of the belief in immortality consists chiefly in its deterring influence upon wrongdoing. In the past the preaching of this erroneous doctrine was the strongest feature in Christian propaganda. Among the superstitious, to excite fear was found far easier than to evoke love. Popular preachers were not slow to discover this fact; hence they preferred to discourse from their pulpits upon such subjects as "hell fire," "the wrath of God," "eternal damnation," "everlasting torments," and "the devil and his angels." These topics proved more attractive than the "love of God" or the "bliss of heaven."

The error and inutility of such teachings have now, fortunately, been discovered, and, as the result, Christianity is rapidly declining as an active factor in daily life. Of course, it is not here meant that the *profession* of the Christian faith will entirely disappear. It is too profitable as a business speculation; but its errors, its creeds, and its dogmas will disappear before man's cultured intellect; while its truths, like other verities, will become allied with principles which accord with the requirements of a progressive civilisation. It is recognised by the leading minds of to-day that the incentive to virtue and the deterrent of vice have but little, if anything, to do with speculations as

to what *may be* after death. The lesson from experience is that the desire and determination to live useful and upright lives spring from right training and proper conditions. As Edwin Arnold says in *The Light of Asia* :—

Pray not, the darkness will not brighten ! Ask
Nought from the Silence, for it cannot speak !
Vex not your mournful minds with pious pains ;—
Ah, brothers, sisters ! seek
Nought from the helpless gods by gift and hymn,
Nor bribe with blood, nor feed with fruit and cakes ;
Within yourselves deliverance must be sought ;
Each man his prison makes.

Goldwin Smith, in his *Guesses at the Riddle of Existence*, deals with the question of Immortality thus :—

“ Darwin’s discovery has effaced the impassable line which we took to have been drawn by a separate creation between man and the beasts which perish. Science, moreover, Darwinian and general, has put an end to the traditional belief in the soul as a being separate from the body, breathed into the body by a distinct act of the Creator, pent up in it as in a prison-house, beating spiritually against the bars of the flesh, and looking to be set free by death. Soul and body, we now *know*, form an indivisible whole, the nature of man being one, enfolded at first in the same embryo, advancing in all its parts and aspects through the same stages to maturity, and succumbing at last to the same decay. Not that this makes our nature more material in the gross sense of that term. Spirituality is an attribute of moral elevation and aspiration, not of the composition of the organism. Tyndall called himself a ‘ Materialist,’ yet no man was ever less so in the gross sense. If we wish to see clearly in these matters, it might be almost better to suspend for a time our use of the word ‘ soul,’ with its traditional connotation of antagonism to the body, and to speak only of the higher life or of spiritual aim and effort. . . . To fathom the mystery of the universe—that is, the mystery of existence—we cannot hope. Of eternity and infinity we can form no notion ; we can think of them only as time and space extended without limit, a conception which involves a metaphysical absurdity, since of space and time we must always think

as divisible into parts, while of infinity or eternity there can be no division. The thought of eternal existence, even of a life of eternal happiness, if we dwell upon it, turns the brain giddy; it is a sort of mental torture to attempt to realise the idea. . . . White robes, harps, palm branches, a city of gold and jewels, are not spiritual; they must be taken as material imagery; taken literally, they provoke the derision of the sceptic. . . . Is the doctrine of resurrection to be extended to every being that has borne human form—the Caliban just emerging from the ape, the cave-dweller, the Carib, the idiot, as well as the infant in whom reason and morality had barely dawned? Where can the line be drawn? . . . That a survey of nature drives us to one of two conclusions—either to the conclusion that Benevolence is not omnipotent, or to the conclusion that Omnipotence is not, in our acceptation of the term, purely benevolent—has been proved with a superfluity of logic. What may be behind the veil we cannot tell. But in that which is manifested to us there seems to be nothing that can warrant us in looking for immortality as the certain gift of unlimited benevolence invested with unlimited power. What lies beyond that which is manifested to us is the region, not of demonstration, but of hope.”

Now, what objection can there be to the Agnostic position in reference to the supposed soul and the alleged future life? That position is based upon the fact that we know nothing beyond our present existence. The Agnostic does not deny a future life, but, in the words of Colonel Ingersoll, says:—

The tongueless secret locked in fate
We do not know; we hope and wait.

Whatever our opinions are will in no way affect the reality of the truth or otherwise of a future life. If we are to sleep for ever, 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 possess 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. The Agnostic is, therefore, safe so far, inasmuch as he recognises it to be his first duty to cultivate a healthy body, and to endeavor to make the best, in its highest sense, of the present existence. In reference to the supposition that we may be punished in case we are wrong: if there be a just God, before whom we are to appear to be judged, surely 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 we may 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 and just to our fellows. As to the feeling of consolation which is said to be derived from the belief in a future life, the Agnostic is safe upon this point also. For, if there be a life beyond the grave, we have the conviction that good conduct on earth will entitle us to the realisation 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." Therefore, despite the hopes, the expectations, and the speculations concerning immortality, it appears to me that when "life's fitful fever" is over we may conclude that "The rest is silence."

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