

GS334

## IMMORTALITY IN HARMONY WITH MAN'S NATURE AND EXPERIENCE.—CONFESSIONS OF SCEPTICS.

By THOMAS BREVIOR.

“ Strangers born on mountains and living in lowland places, pine in an incurable homesickness. We belong to a higher place, and therefore an eternal longing consumes us.”  
JEAN PAUL RICHTER.

THE universal belief in a Future Life among all races of men through all the historic ages, and even, as is now known, in pre-historic times, is a broad fact of human experience of which materialistic and sceptical philosophies can give no adequate explanation. They have two favourite methods of dealing with it. They first seek to disallow its alleged universality on the ground of certain exceptions. We are told that there are whole tribes of men who have no such belief, and that in almost every community there are individuals and sometimes entire sects who disbelieve or doubt of any life after death; and secondly, that the belief has its origin solely in human ignorance and fear, in baseless hopes and poetic fancies.

We at once admit that there are exceptions to the belief in question, though these are of so limited a range that they no more affect the conclusion deduced from a general survey of mankind, than the elevations and depressions of the earth's surface affect its spherical form. They are far less numerous than has been supposed. Many tribes, who were once thought destitute of this belief, have been found on more careful enquiry and with a more intimate knowledge of their language and customs, to share in some form in this common belief of mankind. The few real exceptions are of a kind which fairly considered rather confirm than invalidate the rule.

If the belief was simply due to human ignorance, we should naturally expect to find it most inveterate where that ignorance was most nearly absolute, and that it would pale its ineffectual fire under the advancing sunlight of knowledge. Is this so? So far as its absence from any entire tribe of men is concerned, quite the contrary. The tribes so triumphantly appealed to by the Materialist are the very lowest in the scale of humanity. If there is any truth in the theory of the development of man from some lower form of animal life, it would be just among those tribes, if anywhere, that we should expect to find “the missing link.”

In tribes whose intelligence and moral nature is so undeveloped that they cannot count their fingers, and have no word expressive of thanks or gratitude, we can scarcely expect that a spiritual belief of any kind is possible. It would seem that the very faculties to which such belief makes appeal were not yet sufficiently developed to receive it, and we might as reasonably contend from these instances that the powers of numeration or the sense of gratitude were not common to mankind, as from these examples to impugn the belief in question as a universal faith.

The doubt and denial of a Future Life in civilized communities, and especially the prevalence of modern unbelief, is a grave and far more complex problem.

In the official *Report on Religious Worship*, 1853, we read :—

There is a sect, originated lately, called "Secularists," their chief tenet being that, as the fact of a Future Life is (in their view) susceptible of some degree of doubt, while the fact and necessities of a present life are matters of direct sensation, it is prudent to attend exclusively to the concerns of that existence which is certain and immediate, not wasting energies in preparation for remote and merely possible contingencies. This is the creed which, probably with most exactness, indicates the faith which, virtually though not professedly, is held by the masses of our working population.

And the report, speaking specially of artisans and other workmen, adds :—

It is sadly certain that this vast, intelligent, and growingly important section of our countrymen is thoroughly estranged from our religious institutions in their present aspect.

The members of the Evangelical Alliance, during their recent session, admitted and deeply deplored the increase and wide range of Materialism, and sought means to arrest it. Mr. Farrar, in his *Witness of History to Christ*, 1871, tells us that in the previous century the attacks on Christianity were rare : "It is not so now ; we are, as it were, in the very focus of the storm. It is not that every now and then there is a burst of thunder and a glare of lightning, but the whole air is electric with quivering flame."

Dean Goulbourn, of Norwich, writes :—"The frightful prevalence of sceptical views among all classes of the community, and the alarming fact that even among the clergy themselves insidious objections to the things which are most surely believed among us are gradually winning their way, seems to make it imperative upon all persons and societies entrusted with the guardianship of the faith to make some definite effort to stem the evil." The Hon. Robert Dale Owen, in a letter to the *New York Tribune*, writes :—"A bishop, who is held in deservedly high estimation by the orthodox body to which he belongs, stated to me his conviction that evidences of infidelity are daily

multiplying among intelligent men; adding that he had lately heard a Professor of Harvard College express the opinion that three-fourths of our chief scientific men were unbelievers."

No doubt similar testimonies might be quoted in regard to every nation of Christendom, where a spirit of free enquiry prevails, and free speech and writing are allowed. Many who entertain these views are men of much information and ability, some even of eminence, and generally, I doubt not, their doubts are as honest as the faith of those who subscribe to the orthodox creed.

To deal adequately with the problem thus presented would require far more space than is at my command; but there are some obvious considerations which I think may greatly help us in its solution.

Very much of our Modern Scepticism is but the natural, and on the whole wholesome, reaction against the excessive and unenlightened credulity and superstition of former ages; the protest of the human reason and conscience against certain representations of the nature and conditions of that life revolting alike to both. These crude and cruel conceptions of a barbarous and ferocious time, from which the human mind has not yet fully emancipated itself, require to be separated and distinguished from the essential belief with which they are associated, and which they so cruelly disfigure and discredit. The wonder is, not that so many reject the doctrine of a Future Life when so presented, but that any can accept it. It is a striking proof of the vitality of this belief as a permanent element in human nature that it is able to survive at all under the weight of so oppressive and terrible a burden. Let the Future Life be but presented as Spiritualism reveals it, and it will neither shock the intellect nor the heart, but will be found entirely consonant with both; and I am fully persuaded that when its teachings are better understood it will be hailed by thousands who, repelled by the crude, false and gloomy representations of theologians, now reject it as incredible.

There are crises in individual life, especially of the sensitive and thoughtful, when we must pass through the wilderness of doubt to the Canaan of our rest; when the heavens above us are as brass, and a thick palpable darkness broods all around, when we reel and stagger under an unwonted burden; when thought and feeling are painful from their intensity, and old forms of faith shrivel in their glowing fires, by which however the dross is finally purged from the pure gold of a diviner faith.

Again, it is to be noted that the human mind advances not equally and simultaneously on all sides, but as it were by irregular leaps and movements, now in one direction, now in another; one period is pre-eminently an age of faith, another



of philosophical speculation, in a third, art is in the ascendant. The philosophers of Greece and Rome despised the mechanical arts as base and unworthy of philosophers. When learning and culture were almost exclusively confined to ecclesiastics, theology and scholastic philosophy were deemed all-important, and any curious prying into the secrets of nature was regarded with suspicion, and denounced as magic. During the last century physical science has made greater progress than perhaps in any cycle of human history. Its progress has been so rapid and startling, and it has conferred such vast benefits on mankind, that it need excite small surprise that, dazzled and fascinated, its votaries should occupy themselves almost exclusively with its objects and methods, and that they should be sceptical as to the existence of a spiritual world not to be discovered by the telescope, or of a soul in man which eludes all chemical analysis and physiological research. We are naturally tempted to set a disproportionate value on our own favourite study, and to attach comparatively slight regard to studies of an opposite kind. In like manner in our own day, men preoccupied and engrossed with the study of the contents and phenomena of the material universe, neglect and slight the study of psychology (properly so called), and of that larger spiritual universe, which though infinitely transcending it in importance, yet does not admit of verification by their instruments and tests, and which they therefore hold to be either non-existent, or at best, incapable of proof. I fail to see how this materialistic tendency of science is to be arrested save by those sensuous and palpable demonstrations of spiritual existence which may now be found on every hand, meeting the sceptical scientist on his own ground, by presenting those experimental proofs of a life beyond death which alone he is prepared to accept as satisfactory and conclusive.

A still more potent cause of Modern Scepticism is, I think, to be found in the position which has generally for now upwards of a century been taken with increasing boldness and tenacity by Protestant churches and theologians.

To make this more clear, let us briefly enquire what has been the origin of this universal belief in a Future Life? and by what means has it been chiefly sustained? It did not, we may be sure, originate in *à priori* reasonings on the subject. It was not born into the world after long gestation in the brains of subtle metaphysicians; nor was it the idle creation of poetic fancy. The long elaborate chain of metaphysical argument now employed against unbelievers was the product of a later, a more critical and sceptical age; and whatever influence it may at any time have had over a few speculative and thoughtful



minds, it has never had any considerable weight in determining the general belief of mankind on this great question.

“Man goeth down into the grave, and where is he?” would indeed have been a doleful enquiry had the response come from no other oracle than this. When all that had been visible of friend or kinsman was buried or burned to ashes, what but the most positive evidence, the most absolute proof, could establish the belief of his continued existence? “This opinion, which perhaps prevails as far as human nature is diffused, could become universal only by its truth. Those that never heard of another world would not have agreed in a tale which nothing but experience could render credible.” The united testimony of travellers, and the history and literature (sacred and secular) of all peoples, show that this belief has its root in actual knowledge; in direct experience of spirit-appearance, manifestation, intercourse, and revelation; and that it is mainly by these direct proofs, responding to our intuitions or natural tendencies, that the faith in immortality is kept alive and nourished, conquering the incredulity which otherwise would probably have remained invincible.

Even John Stuart Mill, in his posthumous essay *On Theism*, just published, urges that—

“The argument from tradition, or the general belief of the human race, if we accept it as a guide to our own belief, must be accepted entire; if so we are bound to believe that the souls of human beings not only survive after death, but show themselves as ghosts to the living; for we find no people who have had the one belief without the other. Indeed, it is probable that the former belief originated in the latter, and that primitive men would never have supposed that the soul did not die with the body, if they had not fancied that it visited them after death.”

I do not mean by these remarks to disparage the value of those moral facts and considerations usually appealed to in this controversy. But however these may be appraised, they confessedly raise the argument no higher than probability; and even among believers there are many, like Dr. Johnson, who want more evidence, and more direct and conclusive evidence than this. In default of obtaining it, they may indeed content themselves with the assurances of Revelation; but to unbelievers in a Future Life, who do not recognise its authority, any appeal to it would be manifestly futile.

The Christian Church was not founded on a set of Articles, or a bundle of propositions voted by the majority of a council; but on the recognition that as a fact one among them had risen from the dead, and had as a spirit frequently been seen by, and held converse with, his disciples and friends. This was the

cardinal doctrine of the early Christians, the central fact the acknowledgment of which was their common bond of union. This was their common faith and hope; they had an undoubting assurance that as He lived they should live also. This inspired the joyful pæan, "O death, where is thy sting!" This inspired them with enthusiasm, and a courage to brave torture and death. It was the apparition of Christ—the risen, the glorified spirit, that converted Saul the persecutor into Paul the apostle, and transformed the heresy of an obscure provincial sect into a universal faith. And this faith was confirmed by manifold signs and wonders: by manifestations of supernatural power, and the outpouring of spiritual gifts—the discerning of spirits, speaking in unknown tongues, casting out evil spirits, healing by the laying on of hands, visions, trances, and revelations. The Greek and Latin churches maintain the continuance of these gifts and their perpetuity, and especially as the accompaniment of pre-eminent sanctity and Divine favour. The fathers of the Reformation—Luther, Melancthon, Calvin, Knox; the founders of churches—Fox, Swedenborg, Zinzendorf, Wesley, Irving; the most learned and able divines of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries—Glanville, Cudworth, More, Baxter, maintained the continued exercise of spiritual powers, both good and evil, visibly intervening in the affairs of men; and like the Spiritualists of to-day they appealed to these facts in confutation of Atheists and Sadducees. "Many," says Baxter, "are convinced by these arguments from sense, who cannot yet reach, and will not be persuaded by, other demonstration."

But as the sceptical philosophy of Hume and Middleton, Douglas and Farmer, has penetrated the churches, and pervaded their theology, they have become powerless against the advancing hosts of unbelief. Their admissions have been fatal, and the truth has suffered in consequence more from its defenders than its assailants. The province of the supernatural in human affairs was first circumscribed within a small geographical area; then its duration was limited; the age of miracles ceased, we were told, after five centuries of Christianity, the limit was soon reduced to three centuries, and then to the Apostolic age; and now, as might have been expected, divines and learned professors are finding out that even this last small reserve must be abandoned with the rest. No wonder that unbelievers regard their victory as complete, and that writers like Frances Power Cobbe now contemptuously dismiss the New Testament narratives of Christ's resurrection and visible appearance as "Jewish Ghost-Stories"—the last lingering rag of prejudice folded around an effete superstition.

How dim, shadowy, and uncertain are the ideas of the

Future Life of its professed believers. How much unconscious and practical infidelity concerning it prevails among them! How little they realise the strength, the joy, the consolation it should impart! Enter a Christian cemetery, see the mourners draped in melancholy black; the sombre cypress and the weeping willow overshadowing the tombs; the broken pitcher, the shattered column, the inverted torch, all around you! Were it the avowed conviction that death is an eternal sleep, what more fitting symbols could be devised? Words indeed are read over the grave expressing a solemn hope of the resurrection and the life, and this is often all that reminds us we are not in a burial place of Pagans. Frances Power Cobbe in *Dawning Lights* thus depicts the general tone of thought and feeling on this subject.

“ We have contrived to banish our own immortality to a twilight limbo, which we place nowhere in the universe of space, and conceive of as nowise affected by the limitations of time. We believe, indeed, that we shall exist hereafter; and that in some unknown existence our moral sense will be satisfied by the reward of suffering virtue and the punishment of vice unchastised upon this planet. But beyond this ‘who telleth a tale of unspeaking death?’ Who ventures so much as to cast an image from the magic-lantern of fancy upon that dread ‘cloud’ which receives all the dead out of our sight, and whereon our fathers fearlessly threw the phantasmagoria of the *Divina Commedia*, and the triumphal vision with which closes the *Pilgrim’s Progress*? . . . . The worlds, enveloped in mist, are fading away into comparative insignificance. We do not think of them as we once did. We cannot measure the latitude of our voyage over life’s ocean by orbs hidden behind the clouds. Without denying, or even gravely doubting, we allow the future to pass into dim distance, and the present to fill the whole foreground of our thoughts.”

With, on the one hand, men of science affirming that there is nothing more supernatural than matter, in which we are to seek all the potencies and possibilities of life and mind; and on the other, theologians resting the belief in immortality on uncertain reasonings, and on waning authority and ancient traditions which on their own showing are out of harmony with all later and present experience, what wonder that there is an “eclipse of faith,” and that men generally, even when not avowed Materialists or Sceptics, should seek to content themselves with the certainties of the present world, and “jump the life to come?”

But this condition and temper of mind, whether due to general causes or special experience, or their conjoint operation, is in its nature exceptional and transitory.



“Thanks to the human heart, by which we live,” it is not possible as a finality in which the soul can rest; nor can it find its full satisfaction in merely secular good. Those who have tried its capacity to the utmost, who have sounded the depths and shallows of life, and its possibilities of enjoyment, have in proportion to their own largeness of nature felt its insufficiency, and confirmed the old sorrowful conclusion of the preacher, “All is vanity!” Professor Tyndall acknowledges that science does not satisfy his emotional nature; and in speaking of the charge of Materialistic Atheism brought against him, he says:—“I have noticed during years of self-observation that it is not in hours of clearness and vigour that this doctrine commends itself to my mind; that in the presence of stronger and healthier thought it ever dissolves and disappears, as offering no solution of the mystery in which we dwell, and of which we form a part.”

At the recent Church Congress at Brighton, in its discussion on Modern Scepticism, Professor Pritchard read a paper in which he says:—

“Savages have brains and capacities far beyond any use to which, in their present condition, they can apply them. And we too possess powers and capacities immeasurably beyond the necessities of any merely transitory life. There stir within us yearnings irrepressible, longings unutterable, a curiosity unsatisfied and insatiable by aught we see. These appetites, passions, and affections come to us, not as Socrates and Plato supposed, nor as our great poet sang, from the dim recollection of some former state of our being, still less from the delusive inheritance of our progenitors; they were the indications of something within us, akin to something immeasurably beyond us; tokens of something attainable, yet not hitherto attained; signs of a potential fellowship with spirits nobler and more glorious than our own; they were the title deeds of our presumptive heirship to some brighter world than any that had yet been formed.”

One of the foremost intellects of the modern world, who knew it well from large and long experience, gives us the following as his *Curriculum Vitæ*, or—

#### SONG OF LIFE.

<p>I've set my heart upon nothing you see;                        Hurrah!      And so the world goes well with me.                        Ha! ha!      And who has the mind to be fellow of                        mine,      Why, let him take hold and help me                        drain                        These mouldy lees of wine.</p>	<p>I set my heart first upon wealth,                        Hurrah!      And bartered away my peace and                        health,                        But, ah!      The slippery change went about like air,      And when I had clutched me a handful                        here                        Away it went there.</p>
---	---

I set my heart upon woman next,  
                   Hurrah!  
 For her sweet sake was oft perplexed,  
                   But, ah!  
 The False one looked for a daintier lot,  
 The Constant one wearied me out and  
 out,  
                   The Best was not easily got.

I set my heart upon travels grand,  
                   Hurrah!  
 And spurned our plain, old Father-  
 land;  
                   But, ah!  
 Naught seemed to be just the thing it  
 should,  
 Most comfortable bed and indifferent  
 food,  
                   My tastes misunderstood.

I set my heart upon sounding fame;  
                   Hurrah!  
 And, lo! I'm eclipsed by some upstart's  
 name;  
                   But, ah!

When in public life I loomed quite high,  
 The folks that passed me would look  
                   awry;  
                   Their very worst friend was I.

And then I set my heart upon war,  
                   Hurrah!  
 We gained some battles with éclat,  
                   Hurrah!  
 We troubled the foe with sword and  
 flame,  
 (And some of our friends fared quite  
 the same,)  
                   I lost a leg for fame.

Now I've set my heart on nothing you  
 see;  
                   Hurrah!  
 And the whole wide world belongs to  
 me,  
                   Hurrah!  
 The feast begins to run low no doubt,  
 But at the old cask we'll have one  
 good bout,  
                   Come, drink the lees all out.

Such, according to the many-sided Goethe, is human life; a round of sensual pleasures and defeated aims; and the idea of a deeper purpose, or of a life to which this is but the prelude and preparation, is tossed off with a cup of wine and a hurrah! The pale face of Death, with mournful eyes, lurks at the bottom of every wine cup, and looks out from behind every garland; therefore brim the purple beaker higher, and hide the unwelcome intruder under more flowers.

Heine is perhaps the chief apostle of this gospel of the senses, "his pages reek with a fragrance of pleasure through which sighs, like a fading wail from the solitary string of a deserted harp struck by a lonesome breeze, the perpetual refrain of Death! death! death! His motto seems to be, 'Quick! let me enjoy what there is, for I must die. O, the gusty relish of life! O, the speedy mystery of death!'" But, though yielding to the enchantments of the siren, he could not but feel deeply the degradation, and in one of his better moods, contrasting his later experience with the noble faith and aspirations of his youth, he sadly confesses, "It is as if a star had fallen from heaven upon a hillock of muck, and swine were gnawing at it." Great talents and even noble virtues sometimes co-exist with Materialism, but they are not its product; all its tendencies are of the earth, earthy.

Turning from the gross idolators of sense and pleasure, shall we consult the leading oracle of Western transcendentalism? His sentences are often instinct with the life of thought; and if he cannot create a soul under the ribs of Death, he casts over its

bare bones a decent garment of fine fancies and poetic similes. Shall we enquire of him the mystery of being—the purpose of life, the riddle of man? If we may accept his own account, no one is better qualified to satisfy our doubts either as to the present or the future. Nature in familiar tones thus addresses him as her votary :—

I taught thy heart beyond the reach  
Of ritual, Bible, or of speech ;  
Wrote on thy mind's transparent table  
As far as the incommunicable.  
Taught thee each private sign to raise,  
Lit by the super-solar blaze :  
Past utterance and past belief,  
And past the blasphemy of grief,  
The mysteries of Nature's heart ;  
And though no muse can these impart,  
Throb thine with Nature's throbbing breast,  
And all is clear from east to west.

Let us then listen reverently to one whom Nature has so highly favoured, to whom all is clear from east to west. Here is his response :—

Alas ! the spirit that haunts us  
Deceives our rash desire :  
It whispers of the glorious gods,  
And leaves us in the mire.

We cannot learn the cypher  
That's writ upon the wall ;  
Stars help us by a mystery  
Which we could never spell.

If but the hero knew it,  
The world would blush in flame,  
The sage, tell he but the secret,  
Would hang his head in shame.

But our brothers have not read it,  
Not one has found the key ;  
And henceforth we are comforted—  
We are but such as they !

Cold comfort, indeed, from one who sees so clearly, and knows so much, to be told that we are all deceived by the spirit that haunts us, and that we are all alike hopelessly in the dark. Let us hope it is no "super-solar blaze" which has thus revealed to the seer only darkness visible—that after all it may be only a poor will-o'-the-wisp he has been following, and which thus leaves him in the mire.

Sir Thomas Browne remarks "It is the heaviest stone that melancholy can throw at a man, to tell him that he is at the end of his being;" and the general experience of mankind confirms the truth of his observation. There may be some men (though such instances are rare), who, like Professor Newman, profess that they have no wish for the perpetuation of life



beyond the grave. Whether such exceptional indifference springs from natural defect (as some men are indifferent to the charms of music and of poetry), or whether, as I incline to think, it is due to accidental causes and morbid conditions, physical and mental—such for instance as those which tempt men to the unnatural act of suicide, a transient mood rather than a faithful reflection of the soul—abundant evidence might be cited from the most confirmed and eminent Materialists and Sceptics to show how repugnant even to them is the idea of annihilation, how eagerly they would welcome any conclusive evidence of immortality; how gladly their spiritual nature, starved and shrunken as it is, would welcome the revelation of a future life, if it were proved to them to be in harmony with the divine laws of man's being, and stript of those barbaric conceptions which have perverted the gracious assurance of immortal life into what Professor Kingsley, with grim irony, has called "the gospel of damnation." Byron, when his scepticism was at full tide and at its best, checks his scornful mood with the thought—

Yet, if as holiest men have deem'd, there be  
A land of souls beyond that sable shore,  
To shame the doctrine of the Sadducee  
And sophists, madly vain of dubious lore;  
How sweet it were in concert to adore  
With those who made our mortal labours light!  
To hear each voice we fear'd to hear no more!  
Behold each mighty shade reveal'd to sight,  
The Bactrian, Samian sage, and all who taught the right.

And in another poem, written in a very different, though not less sceptical mood, after telling us, with Johnson—

That in the course of some six thousand years,  
All nations have believed that from the dead,  
A visitant at intervals appears.

He significantly adds—

And what is strangest upon this strange head  
Is, that whatever bar the reason rears  
'Gainst such belief, there's something stronger still  
In its behalf, let those deny who will.

Shelley, in his early poem of "Queen Mab," startled the still air with his wild shriek of Atheism; yet even at this time, as is evident from his poem on Death, he felt how grim and ghastly, in his philosophy, was the pale spectre of which he wrote:—

This world is the nurse of all we know,  
This world is the mother of all we feel,  
And the coming of death is a fearful blow,  
To a brain uncompassed with nerves of steel;  
When all that we know, or feel, or see,  
Shall pass like an unreal mystery.

The secret things of the grave are there,  
 Where all but this frame must surely be,  
 Though the fine-wrought eye and the wondrous ear  
 No longer will live to hear or to see  
 All that is great and all that is strange  
 In the boundless realm of unending change.

Who telleth a tale of unspeaking death?  
 Who lifteth the veil of what is to come?  
 Who painteth the shadows that are beneath  
 The wide-winding caves of the peopled tomb?  
 Or uniteth the hopes of what shall be  
 With the fears and the love for that which we see?

As however his mind matured, we see increasing indications of a more ideal—a more spiritual philosophy—which, did the limits of this essay permit, it would be interesting to trace. In his conclusion to "The Sensitive Plant," he says:—

It is a modest creed, and yet  
 Pleasant if one considers it,  
 To own that death itself may be  
*Like all the rest, a mockery.*

He seems indeed to have had an intuitive belief in immortality; and his spirit intensely yearned for proofs of kinship with another world, and his mind was ever filled with spiritual imaginings. He even cherished the hope of holding communion with the departed. At the time he was defying the learning of Oxford to refute his "Plea for Atheism," he was the subject of the wondering belief of which he speaks in the "Hymn to Intellectual Beauty":—

While yet a boy, I sought for ghosts, and sped  
 Through many a listening chamber, cave and ruin,  
 And starlight wood, with fearful steps pursuing  
 Hopes of high talk with the departed dead.

And he thus concludes his "Adonais," an elegy on the death of his friend the poet Keats:—

I am borne darkly, fearfully afar;  
 Whilst burning through the inmost veil of Heaven,  
 The soul of Adonais, like a star,  
 Beacons from the abode where the Eternal are.

Robert Burns, writing of the Future Life to his esteemed friend Mrs. Dunlop, exclaims "Would to God I as firmly believed it as I ardently wish it!" Thomas Cooper, when his scepticism was at its climax, was so appalled at the thought of annihilation that in his great epic, *The Purgatory of Suicides*, apostrophizing the sun, he exclaims with passionate fervour:—

Farewell, grand Sun! How my weak heart revolts  
 At that appalling thought—that my last look  
 At thy great light must come! Oh, I could brook  
 The dungeon, though eterne! the priests' own hell,

Ay, or a thousand hells, in thought unshook,  
 Rather than Nothingness! And yet the knell  
 I fear is near, that sounds—to consciousness, farewell!

But, it may be said these are only the idle fancies of poets, influenced by emotion rather than by reason. Well, I believe there are times when—

The heart may give a useful lesson to the head.

When, as many have experienced—

A warmth within the breast would melt  
 The freezing reason's colder part;  
 And like a man in wrath, the heart  
 Stood up and answered,—'I have felt!'

When the natural language of emotion goes to a truth, while reason—blinded by the sophistries of a false philosophy—misses its way, and for a weary time

Finds no end in wandering mazes lost.

Like Christian in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, every man may find a key in his bosom called Promise, which will unlock the dungeon doors of Doubting Castle if he will but use it. Or, to quote a simile from Jean Paul—"The glowing of the heart relights the extinguished torch in the night of the intellect, as a beast stunned by an electric shock in the head is restored by an electric shock in the breast."

But let us turn to other witnesses. Here, for instance, is one who claims to be governed solely by the severest rules of reason and of logic,—to Comte, the founder of "The Positive Philosophy," and to whom indeed we might justly apply the remark addressed by Friend Allen to Robert Owen, "Friend Robert, thee ought to be very right, thee art so *very* positive!" Yet when the springs of his emotional nature were touched, it was to him a revelation which led him to see how defective was the system of materialistic philosophy he had so laboriously constructed; and his later views on religion were in such marked contrast with it, that some of his followers deemed it evidence of aberration of mind, and as such it was actually urged in a court of law to set aside the will that he had made. Professor Maurice, after quoting a sketch of his life, remarks:—"From this profoundly interesting narrative we learn that human love awakened Comte to a conviction of the inadequacy of his philosophical scheme. He must have a religion to graft upon it. There is no help for it; he must deny facts—facts which he has realized—if he pretends that his notion of science is sufficient to explain them. His followers perceived clearly—and complained bitterly—that by taking this course he is giving up the principles for which they had hailed him as the last



great discoverer, as the man 'who had grasped the true power for the co-ordination of the sciences.'"

Voltaire in his article, "Soul," in the *Philosophical Dictionary*, tells us that of "its origin, nature, and destiny we know and can know nothing; that it is a subject on which we must ever continue in a labyrinth of doubts and feeble conjectures;" and our questionings on the matter he says are "questions of blind men asking one another, 'What is light?'" Yet this prince of sceptics and scoffers in the article "Magic" of the same work, writes, "This soul, this shade, which existed, separated from its body, might very well show itself upon occasions, revisit the place which it had inhabited, its parents and friends, speak to them and instruct them. In all this there is no incompatibility."

Renan—the brilliant countryman of Comte and Voltaire—goes even further, he dedicates his *Life of Jesus*, "To the pure soul of my sister, Henrietta, who died September 24, 1861." In the course of this dedication he thus invokes her:—"Reveal to me, O good Genius—to me, whom thou lovedst—those truths which conquer death, deprive it of terror, and make it almost beloved." Mr. G. J. Holyoake, founder of "Secularism," which, like "Positivism," denies or ignores God and a Future Life, in a passage of great tenderness and pathos, describing the death of his child, in his *Last Trial by Jury for Atheism*, avows that even to him a pure and rational faith in immortality would be more congenial than the cold negations and dreary platitudes to which his life has mainly been devoted.

"My dada's coming to see me," Madeline exclaimed on the night of her death, with that full, pure, and thrilling tone which marked her when in health. "I am sure he is coming to night, mama," and then remembering that that could not be, she said "Write to him, mama, he will come to see me;" and these were the last words she uttered—and all that remains now is the memory of that cheerless, fireless room, and the midnight reverberation of that voice which I would give a new world to hear again. \* \* \* \* Yes, though I neither hope—for that would be presumptuous—nor expect it, seeing no foundation, I shall be pleased to find a life after this. Not a life where those are punished who were unable to believe without evidence, and unwilling to act in spite of reason—for the prospect of annihilation is pleasanter and more profitable to contemplate: not a life where an easy faith is regarded as "easy virtue" is regarded among some men—but a life where those we have loved and lost here are restored to us again—for there, in that Hall where those may meet who have been sacrificed in the cause of duty—where no gross, or blind, or selfish, or cruel nature mingles, where none sit but those whom human service and endurance have purified and entitled to that high company, Madeline will be a Hebe. Yes, a future life, bringing with it the admission to such companionship, would be a noble joy to contemplate.

Well would it have been for him, and for the influence he has exercised, had he in this matter fully realised the truth expressed by himself in his essay on *The Logic of Death*:—"Plainly, as though written with the finger of Orion in the

vault of night, does man read the future in his heart. The impulse of fiction that leaps unbidden to his breast, which, though suppressed in comparative strife, or withered by cankering cares, yet returns in the woodland walk and the midnight musing, ever whispering of something better to be realised." Yes! and the whisper is no "fiction;" the language of the heart does not deceive us.

A late eminent English philosopher, whose autobiography enables us to understand how it came to pass that, as he professed he never had any religious belief, yet when his emotional nature was stirred to its depths by the bereavement of a beloved wife, felt so little the consolations of his own philosophy, that he daily visited her tomb, sometimes, it is said, remaining there for hours together, in bitterness of spirit, at what he regarded as an irreparable loss. O, that as he sat there, disconsolate, he could have opened his sorrowing heart to the comforting assurance of the angel, "She is not here, she is risen!"

Hobbes confessed that to him death was "a leap in the dark;" and of Hume, the acutest of sceptics, and the influence of whose philosophy has perhaps been the most penetrating and persuasive, it has been truly remarked by Mr. Sears, that "Perhaps there is not a more significant passage in religious literature than the suppressed passage of Mr. Hume, where he describes the influence of his speculations. He surveys the habitation which, with infinite logical skill, he has builded about him, and he starts with horror at sight of the gloomy and vacant chambers." The following is the passage referred to:—

I am astonished and affrighted at the forlorn solitude in which I am placed by my philosophy. When I look about I see on every side dispute, contradiction, and distraction. When I turn my eyes inward, I find nothing but doubt and ignorance. Where am I, and what? From what causes do I derive existence, and to what condition do I return? I am confounded with these questions, and I begin to fancy myself in the most deplorable condition imaginable, environed in the deepest darkness.

In Carlyle's *Life of Schiller* is a passage, remarkable for its graphic force, which may be taken as an epitome of the sceptical philosophy concerning a Future Life, and as such is quoted with approval by Mr. Holyoake in his *Logic of Death*. It reads thus:—

What went before and what will follow me, I regard as two black impenetrable curtains, which hang down at the two extremities of human life, and which no living man has yet drawn aside. Many hundreds of generations have already stood before them with their torches, guessing anxiously what lies behind. On the curtain of Futurity many see their own shadows, the forms of their passions enlarged and put in motion; they shrink in terror at this image of themselves. Poets, philosophers, and founders of states, have painted this curtain with their dreams, more smiling or more dark, as the sky above them was cheerful or gloomy; and their pictures deceive the eye when viewed from a distance. Many jugglers, too, make profit of this our universal

curiosity : by their strange mummeries they have set the outstretched fancy in amazement. A deep silence reigns behind this curtain ; no one once within will answer those he has left without ; all you can hear is a hollow echo of your question, as if you shouted into a chasm.

No doubt priests and jugglers have made profit of our universal curiosity on a question in which we are so profoundly interested, but that no one once within the veil will answer those he has left without, is a statement in flat denial to known experience in all ages, and most emphatically so to that of our own age, in which we have the most ample and conclusive evidence that death is no impenetrable curtain separating us wholly from those who have gone before ; and it is moreover a view as gloomy as it is false.

Great God ! I'd rather be  
A pagan suckled in a creed outworn,  
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,  
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn !

How far more cheering and ennobling is the faith enunciated by Fichte :—

The world of nature, on which but now I gazed with wonder and admiration, sinks before me. With all its abounding life and order and bounteous increase, it is but the curtain which hides one infinitely more perfect—the germ from which that other shall develop itself. My faith pierces through this veil, and broods over and animates this germ. It sees, indeed, nothing distinctly ; but it expects more than it can conceive, more than it will ever be able to conceive, until time shall be no more.

A prominent Sceptic, conversing on Spiritualism with a mutual friend—a believer—remarked, “I would give everything, could I but hold your unfaltering convictions on this subject.”

What, indeed, has Materialism to offer us in exchange for the faith in immortality it calls upon us to surrender ? When the heart is lacerated by the loss of wife, or child, or friend, to be told that all must one day suffer a like experience ; that perhaps time may blunt the edge of sensibility, and awaken new interests ; that the material atoms of the beloved form are imperishable, and may re-appear in trees and grass and flowers, is but to mock our grief. I do not argue that we are to accept this, or any belief, simply because it is agreeable to us. Of course, the primary question is, not what would be pleasant, but what is true. If it can be proved that life, thought, feeling, consciousness perish with the body, let us bear our fate with what fortitude we may. My present purpose is only to show that the faith in immortality is congenial to the human heart ; that when it finds free utterance the most confirmed Sceptics, the most obdurate Materialists, confess as much, despite the confirmed and inveterate prejudice to the contrary. It is not death, but life for which we pant—that more and fuller life, eternal



in the heavens. At least one entire side of our nature, and that not the least trustworthy, responds to this belief, and is never fully reconciled to its contrary. And although in this matter instances abound in which the other side of our nature falters and is recalcitrant, yet it would surely be irrational to conclude that even here this discordance is necessary and final. Harmony is our normal condition, the true law of our being, and we need never despair of its attainment, though the evidence to co-ordinate with faith may have to be sought elsewhere than in the common theology of the pulpit or the philosophy of schools.

Some of my readers will doubtless smile when I affirm my conviction that this evidence is supplied in the facts of modern Spiritualism. Yet this is no hasty conclusion, but my deliberate and matured judgment after twenty years' investigation and experience. And now after more than a quarter of a century's contemptuous denial of these facts, and unmeasured scorn and vituperation of those who asserted them, as within the range of their own personal knowledge, the most distinguished scientists, after full investigation and every application of crucial tests, are fast admitting their validity. It is true that other scientists of the highest reputation have expressed a contrary opinion; but there is this difference, that while the latter speak without any proper knowledge of the subject, and have been at no pains to inform themselves concerning it, the former have made it a matter of deep research, and have given it years of careful experimental investigation. Wherever the investigation has been most thorough, conviction has been most complete. And it would be difficult to name any better test of truth than this. As remarked by a Roman Catholic writer in the *Dublin Review*:—

The invariable law of a plausible lie is this—let it be received at first with open arms; intelligent men, who have no interest in supporting it and no prejudice in favour of it, pause and inquire; as time flows on, it gradually, and, as it were, day by day loses its hold on the credence of men, and at length vanishes utterly and for ever. The very opposite of this has been the fortune of the phenomena we are speaking of. Among men of keen and cultivated minds they were at first received, not only with disbelief, but with laughter and derision: they were rejected as untrue, not because not proven, but because incapable of proof, because they were impossible—and, indeed, impossible they are, as we shall see, to mere human power and skill. Among the characteristics of the world in modern times a tendency to believe in the preternatural most certainly can not be reckoned. The phenomena of Magnetism and Spiritism at least appear preternatural: the predisposition was dead against accepting them: it was predicted that, before the generation that witnessed their rise had died out, they would have disappeared and been forgotten. Well, years have rolled on, and men who formerly would not without impatience read or listen to the accounts of these phenomena (the present writer was one of these), had at length been led to examine what was making such a noise in the world, and from mature, and for a time prejudiced, examination, have been led to conviction.

In this way have been brought round several of the ablest and most learned men in Europe, Catholic theologians, physicians, and philosophers and others, Catholic, Protestant, and free-thinking. Authority does not necessarily, nor even generally, prove an opinion: in a matter of mere opinion the most enquiring and cautious men may be greatly deceived, and have been so deceived. But here there is question of facts and of the testimony of the senses—of facts sensible to the sight, the hearing, the touch—of facts and testimonies repeated over and over again, beyond the possibility of calculation, in the greater part of Europe and America, and recorded year after year down to the present day. It is quite impossible that about such facts such a cloud of such witnesses should be all deceived.

The spiritual nature and future life of man are then not only within the range of the knowable, but have become actually known to thousands of independent and qualified investigators, including "several of the ablest and most learned men in Europe;" and we may add, of its most distinguished men of science.\* Materialism has demanded plain palpable facts, and by these it has been confuted. It has challenged sensuous and scientific demonstration, and its terms have been accepted, and the demonstration is complete and overwhelming. As with the hammer of Thor the strong walls and towers of Materialism have been broken by it into fragments.

We have seen by the confessions of its chief expounders what a dismal outlook it presents; but this can only be fully realised by those who have dwelt in and emerged from those

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades,  
Where peace and rest can never dwell,  
Hope never comes.

Dr. George Sexton, for twenty years one of the leading advocates of Secularism, and by far its most learned and scientific representative, after long and careful investigation into Spiritualism, fully satisfied himself of its truth, and is now one of its most earnest advocates. Speaking of the state of mind to which Scepticism leads, he says:—

No man knows better what this state of mind is than I do, having had many years' bitter experience of the doubts and uncertainties which it involves. To be, as the poet says,

"Haunted for ever by the Eternal Mind,"

and yet not to feel able to recognize the Divine in Nature and the spiritual in man, is a condition which is easier felt than described. Gleams of light occasionally shooting through the dense darkness, serving only to make the darkness afterwards more intense; a few drops of rain on the parched and dried up ground, the sight of food to the hungry, or water placed before the eyes as though to mock the vision of him who is dying of thirst, are similes which but faintly shadow forth the state of mind of the Sceptic.

---

\* As the most recent examples in England see "A Defence of Modern Spiritualism," by ALFRED RUSSELL WALLACE, in the *Fortnightly Review* for May and June, 1874; and "Notes of an Enquiry into the Phenomena called Spiritual, during the Years 1870-3," in the *Quarterly Journal of Science*, for January, 1874, by its editor, WILLIAM CROOKES, F.R.S. *The Report on Spiritualism of the Committee of the London Dialectical Society*, 1871, also gives a mass of evidence on this subject.



In like manner Gerald Massey, in his admirable essay concerning Spiritualism, testifies:—

Spiritualism will make religion infinitely more real, and translate it from the domain of belief to that of life. It has been to me, in common with many others, such a lifting of the mental horizon and a letting in of the heavens—such a transformation of faiths into facts—that I can only compare life without it to sailing on board ship with hatches battened down, and being kept a prisoner, cribbed, cabined, and confined, living by the light of a candle—dark to the glory overhead, and blind to a thousand possibilities of being, and then suddenly on some splendid starry night allowed to go on deck for the first time, to see the stupendous mechanism of the starry heavens all aglow with the glory of God, to feel that vast vision glittering in the eyes, bewilderingly beautiful, and drink in new life with every breath of this wondrous liberty, which makes you dilate almost large enough in soul to fill the immensity that you see around.

One who has followed the Apostolic injunction—"Add to your faith, knowledge;" and whose public ministrations as a teacher of religion have, in consequence, been marked by an intelligence, as well as a strength and fervour, which carry to other hearts the conviction of his own, remarks:—

This doctrine of a God who is indeed our Father; this glorious assurance of everlasting life in Him; this long line of witnesses who have caught some ray of His divine beauty and shed it upon us—these things, which religion grafts upon philosophy, make life rich indeed. We can fly for shelter from Infinite Law, and take refuge and find peace in Infinite Love. . . . And when the fear of death comes on us, we can look through the darkness to the light beyond, and lie down in hope, knowing in Whom we have believed, and confident that He will keep that which, in life's last act of renunciation, we commit to Him. It is this tone of triumphant confidence, this enthusiasm of faith in the truth of the Universe, this fanaticism of trust in the veracity of God, which gives zest to life. It is this hope which brightens the eye and nerves the hand, makes us strong and happy in the conflict of duty, and enables us to overcome the world. It is this certainty of faith which turns belief into knowledge, and is the everlasting Rock on which we stand secure amid the changes and calamities of time.\*

When Dr. Tyndall in his celebrated Belfast address went out of his way to speak of Spiritualism as "degrading," he spoke not with the intelligent impartiality due to the high position he occupied, but with the vehement prejudice of a disciple of the Lucretian philosophy of which he appears enamoured; but to which it seems to me the term he used might fitly be applied. Mr. Alfred Russell Wallace, who has made Spiritualism a special and careful study, and whose judgment concerning it is therefore of far greater weight, remarks that its phenomena combined with its higher teachings, "constitute a great moral agency which may yet regenerate the world."

For the Spiritualist who, by daily experience, gets absolute knowledge of these facts regarding the future state—who knows that, just in proportion as he indulges in passion, or selfishness, or the exclusive pursuit of wealth, and neglects to cultivate the affections and the varied powers of his mind, so does he inevitably prepare for himself misery in a world in which there are no physical wants to be provided for, no sensual enjoyments except those directly associated with the affections and sympathies, no occupations but those having

\* *Scientific Men and Religious Teachers*, by P. W. CLAYDEN.



for their object social and intellectual progress—is impelled towards a pure, a sympathetic, and an intellectual life by motives far stronger than any which either religion or philosophy can supply. He dreads to give way to passion or to falsehood, to selfishness or to a life of luxurious physical enjoyment, because he knows that the natural and inevitable consequences of such habits are future misery, necessitating a long and arduous struggle in order to develop anew the faculties whose exercise long disuse has rendered painful to him. He will be deterred from crime by the knowledge that its unforeseen consequences may cause him ages of remorse; while the bad passions which it encourages will be a perpetual torment to himself in a state of being in which mental emotions cannot be laid aside or forgotten amid the fierce struggles and sensual pleasures of a physical existence. It must be remembered that these beliefs (unlike those of theology) will have a living efficacy, because they depend on *facts* occurring again and again in the family circle, constantly reiterating the same truths as the result of personal knowledge, and thus bringing home to the mind even of the most obtuse, the absolute reality of that future existence in which our degree of happiness or misery will be directly dependent on the “mental fabric” we construct by our daily thoughts, and words, and actions here.

The assertion, so often made, that Spiritualism is the survival or revival of old superstitions, is so utterly unfounded as to be hardly worth notice. A science of human nature which is founded on observed facts, which appeals only to facts and experiment, which takes no beliefs on trust, which inculcates investigation and self-reliance as the first duties of intelligent beings, which teaches that happiness in a future life can be secured by cultivating and developing to the utmost the higher faculties of our intellectual and moral nature *and by no other method*, is and must be the natural enemy of all superstition. Spiritualism is an experimental science, and affords the only sure foundation for a true philosophy and a pure religion. It abolishes the terms “supernatural” and “miracle” by an extension of the sphere of law and the realm of nature; and in doing so it takes up and explains whatever is true in the superstitions and so-called miracles of all ages.

Contrast the moral influence of this knowledge—not only as Mr. Wallace has here done with that of the popular religion and theology—but with that of the latest gospel of our high priests of science that matter is the final cause of all things; and that man is but an automatic machine, the product of its atoms evolved through the lower forms of organic life; and soon, “like streaks of morning cloud, melting into the infinite azure of the past;” while religion, “though valuable in itself, is only man’s speculative creation,” concerning which “ultimate fixity of conception is here unattainable.” Look on that philosophy, and on this; and then let intelligent reasonable men determine which is elevating and which degrading.

Mr. John Stuart Mill, while considering the evidence for our hope of personal immortality to be but slender and dubious, insists that it is a part of wisdom to let the imagination dwell by preference on a possibility “at once the most comforting and the most improving.” Spiritualism enables us to read “certainty” for “possibility;” and when even the faint hope of a nobler destiny is most comforting and most improving, what must be the effect when we no longer walk with faltering uncertain feet, but feel the ground firm under us; and can look upward to the heavens in the serene confidence of knowledge?