

TORCH OF



REASON.

"TRUTH BEARS THE TORCH IN THE SEARCH FOR TRUTH."—*Lucretius.*

VOL. 4.

SILVERTON, OREGON, THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 22, E. M. 300 (A. D. 1900.)

NO. 7.

For the Torch of Reason.

If We Could Know.

BY J. A. EDGERTON.

If we could how know much we owe
To one another, we would sow
The soil of human hearts with seeds
Of gratitude and kindly deeds,
Whence flowers of love would sweetly
blow.

We'd seek our peace with every foe;
We'd strive to solace every woe;
We'd bind up every heart that bleeds,
If we could know.

A fuller charity we'd show,
A deeper faith; and we would grow
To higher thoughts and larger creeds—
As broad as human hopes and needs—
We'd help each other as we go,
If we could know.

The Biological Soul.

BY DR. ERNST HAECKEL.

As I long ago pointed out, these two great questions are not two separate "world riddles". The neurological problem of consciousness is only a special case of the all-comprehending cosmological problem, the question of substance. "If we understood the nature of matter and energy, we should also understand how the substance underlying them can under certain conditions feel, desire, and think." Consciousness, like feeling and willing, among the higher animals is a mechanical work of the ganglion-cells, and as such must be carried back to chemical and physical events in the plasma of these. And by the employment of the genetic and comparative method we reach the conviction that consciousness, and consequently reason also, is not a brain function exclusively peculiar to man; it occurs also in many of the higher animals, not in Vertebrates only, but even in Articulates. Only in degree, through a higher state of cultivation, does the consciousness of man differ from that of the more perfect lower animals, and the same is true of all other activities of the human soul.

By these and other results of comparative physiology our whole psychology is placed on a new and firm monistic basis. The other mystical conception of the soul, as we find it amongst primitive peoples, but also in the systems of the dualistic philosophers of today, is refuted by them. According to these systems, the soul of man (and of the higher animals?) is a separate entity, which inhabits and rules the body only during its individual life, but leaves it at death. The widespread "piano-theory" ('Claviertheorie') compares the "immortal

soul" to a pianist who executes an interesting piece—the individual life—on the instrument of the mortal body, but at death withdraws into the other world. This "immortal soul" is usually presented as an immaterial being; but in fact it is really thought of as quite material, only as a finer invisible being, aerial or gaseous, or as resembling the mobile, light, and thin substance of the ether, as conceived by modern physics. The same is true also for most of the conceptions which rude primitive peoples and the uneducated classes among the civilized races have, for thousands of years, cherished as to spectral "ghosts" and "gods". Serious reflection on the matter shows that here—as in modern spiritualism—it is not with really immaterial beings, but with gaseous, invisible bodies, that we are dealing. And further, we are utterly incapable of imagining a truly immaterial being.

On the other hand, the conception of a personal immortality can not be maintained. If this idea is still widely held, the fact is to be explained by the physical law of inertia; for the property of persistence in a state of rest exercises its influence in the region of the ganglion-cells of the brain, as well as in all other natural bodies. Traditional ideas handed down through many generations are maintained with the greatest tenacity by the human brain, especially if, in early youth, they have been instilled into the childish understanding as indisputable dogmas. Such hereditary articles of faith take root all the more firmly, the further they are removed from a rational knowledge of nature, and enveloped in the mysterious mantle of mythological poesy. In the case of the dogma of personal immortality, there comes into play also the interest which man fancies himself to have in his individual future existence after death, and the vain hope that in a blessed world to come there is treasured up for him a compensation for the disappointed hopes and the many sorrows of his earthly life.

It is often asserted by the numerous advocates of personal immortality that this dogma is an innate one, common to all rational men, and that it is taught in all the more perfect forms of religion. But this is not correct. Neither Buddhism nor the religion of Moses originally contained the dogma of personal immortality, and just as little did the majority of educat-

ed people of classical antiquity believe it, at any rate during the highest period of Greek culture. The monistic philosophy of that time, which, five hundred years before our era, had reached speculative heights so remarkable, knew nothing of any such dogma. It was through Plato and Christ that it received its further elaboration, until, in the Middle Ages, it was so universally accepted, that only now and then did some bold thinker dare openly to gainsay it. The idea that a conviction of personal immortality has a specially ennobling influence on the moral nature of man, is not confined to the gruesome history of mediæval morals, and as little by the psychology of primitive peoples.

If any antiquated school of purely speculative psychology still continues to uphold this irrational dogma, the fact can only be regarded as a deplorable anachronism. Sixty years ago such a doctrine was excusable, for then nothing was accurately known either of the fine structure of the brain, or of the physiological functions of its separate parts; its elementary organs, the microscopic ganglion-cells, were almost unknown, as was also the cell-soul of the Protista; very imperfect ideas were held as to ontogenetic development, and as to phylogenetic there were none at all.

This has all been completely changed in the course of the last half century. Modern physiology has already to a great extent demonstrated the localization of the various activities of mind, and their connection with definite parts of the brain; psychiatry has shown that those physical processes are disturbed or destroyed if these parts of the brain become diseased or degenerate. Histology has revealed to us the extremely complicated structure and arrangement of the ganglion-cells. But, for the settlement of this momentous question, the discoveries of the last ten years with regard to the more minute occurrences in the process of fertilization are of decisive importance. We now know that this process essentially consists simply in the copulation or fusion of two microscopical cells, the female egg-cell and the male sperm-cell. The fusion of the nuclei of these two sexual cells indicates with the utmost precision the exact moment at which the new human individual arises. The newly-formed parent-cell, or fertilized egg-cell, contains potentially, in their rudiments, all the bodily and

mental characteristics which the child inherits from both parents. It is clearly against reason to assume an eternal and unending life for an individual phenomenon whose beginning in time we can determine to a hair's breadth, by direct observation. Judging of human spiritual life from a rational point of view, we can as little think of our individual soul as separated from our brain, as we can conceive the voluntary motion of our arm apart from the contraction of its muscles, or the circulation of our blood apart from the action of the heart.—[Monism.]

Philosophy and Religion.

BY HORACE SEAVER.

PHILOSOPHY depends on argument; religion, on credulity: the one rests on the uniform experience of things; the other on their violation. Philosophy does not parley with the apprehensions of the timid; it does not press into its service denunciations of eternal vengeance; its professors are not supplied by revenues extorted from the prime necessities of the people; it requires no statutes villainously foisted into the legal code, to protect its tenets from disquisition, for truth and freedom, not falsehood and tyranny, are its aim.

Love of truth never raised a persecution. Persecution springs from the ambitious desire to govern the opinions of others, and thus convert them to their interested uses. And a religious ambition is by far the worst, the most rancorous, the most hateful and unreasonable specimen of its kind that ever infested the world; it is a direct violation of the rights of conscience, an atrocious and infamous invasion of the rights of man. A man wishes to compel me to think as he does, in order that I may subserve his purpose, not regarding my right to express my opinions being the same as he has to express his own; his opinions must be established, mine not dared to be uttered.—[Occasional Thoughts.]

The great slight the men of sense who have nothing but sense; the men of sense despise the great who have nothing but greatness; and the honest man pities both, if, having greatness and sense only, they have no virtue.—[Sel.]