

not in an effort to discover the truth, but in an alleged "necessity of emotion"—that is, in imagination and poetic conceit. As Kant puts it, the immortality of the soul is not an object of pure reason, but a "postulate of practical reason." But we must set "practical reason" entirely aside, together with all the "exigencies of emotion, or of moral education, etc.," when we enter upon an honest and impartial pursuit of truth; for we shall only attain it by the work of pure reason, starting from empirical data and capable of logical analysis. We have to say the same of athanatism as of theism; both are creations of poetic mysticism and transcendental "faith," not of rational science.

When we come to analyze all the different proofs that have been urged for the immortality of the soul, we find that not a single one of them is of a scientific character; not a single one is consistent with the truths we have learned in the last few decades from physiological psychology and the theory of descent. The theological proof—that a personal creator has breathed an immortal soul (generally regarded as a portion of the divine soul) into man—is a pure myth. The cosmological proof—that the "moral order of the world" demands the eternal duration of the human soul—is a baseless dogma. The teleological proof—that the "higher destiny" of man involves the perfecting of his defective, earthly soul beyond the grave—rests on a false anthropism. The moral proof—that the defects and the unsatisfied desires of earthly existence must be fulfilled by "compensative justice" on the other side of eternity—is nothing more than a pious wish. The ethnological proof—that the belief in immortality, like the belief in God, is an innate truth, common to all humanity—is an error in fact.

The ontological proof—that the soul, being a "simple, immaterial and indivisible entity," cannot be involved in the corruption of death—is based on an entirely erroneous view of the psychic phenomena; it is a spiritualistic fallacy. All these and similar "proofs of athanatism" are in a parlous condition; they are definitely annulled by the scientific criticism of the last few decades.

The extreme importance of the subject leads us to oppose to these untenable "proofs of immortality" a brief exposition of the sound scientific arguments against it. The physiological argument shows that the human soul is not an independent, immaterial substance, but, like the soul of the higher animals, merely the title of the sum-total of man's cerebral functions; and these are just as much determined by physical and chemical processes as any of the other vital functions, and just as amenable to the laws of substance. The histological argument is based on the extremely

complicated microscopic structure of the brain; it shows us the true "elementary organs of the soul" in the ganglionic cells. The experimental argument proves that the various functions of the soul are bound up with certain special parts of the brain, and cannot be exercised unless these are in a normal condition; if the areas are destroyed their function is extinguished; and this is especially applicable to the "organs of thought," the four central instruments of mental activity. The pathological argument is the complement of the physiological; when certain parts of the brain (the centres of speech, sight, hearing, etc.) are destroyed by sickness, their activity (speech, hearing, vision, etc.) disappears; in this way nature herself makes the decisive physiological experiment. The ontogenetic argument puts before us the facts of the development of the soul in the individual; we see how the child-soul gradually unfolds its various powers; the youth presents them in full bloom, the mature man shows their ripe fruit; in old age we see the gradual decay of the psychic powers, corresponding to the senile degeneration of the brain. The phylogenetic argument derives its strength from palaeontology, and the comparative anatomy and physiology of the brain; co-operating with and completing each other, these sciences prove to the hilt that the human brain (and consequently, its function—the soul) has been evolved step by step from that of the mammal, and, still further back, from that of the lower vertebrate.

These inquiries, which might be supplemented by many other results of modern science, prove the old doctrine of the immortality of the soul to be absolutely untenable; in the twentieth century it will not be regarded as a subject of serious scientific research, but will be left wholly to transcendental "faith." The "critique of pure reason" shows this treasured faith to be a mere superstition, like the belief in a personal God which generally accompanies it. Yet even today millions of "believers"—not only of the lower, uneducated masses, but even of the most cultured classes—look on this superstition as their dearest possession and their most "priceless treasure." It is therefore, necessary to enter more deeply into the subject, and—assuming it to be true—to make a critical inquiry into its practical value. It soon becomes apparent to the impartial critic that this value rests, for the most part, on fancy, on the want of clear judgment and consecutive thought. It is my firm and honest conviction that a definite abandonment of these "athanatist illusions" would involve no painful loss, but an inestimable, positive gain for humanity.

Man's "emotional craving" clings to the belief in immortality for two

main reasons: firstly in the hope of better conditions of life beyond the grave; and, secondly, in the hope of seeing once more the dear and loved ones whom death has torn from us. As for the first hope, it corresponds to a natural feeling of the justice of compensation, which is quite correct subjectively, but has no objective validity whatever. We make our claim for an indemnity for the unnumbered defects and sorrows of our earthly existence, without the slightest real prospect or guarantee of receiving it. We long for an eternal life in which we shall meet no sadness and no pain, but an unbounded peace and joy. The pictures that most men form of this blissful existence are extremely curious; the immaterial soul is placed in the midst of grossly material pleasures. The imagination of each believer paints the enduring splendor according to his personal taste. The American Indian, whose athanatism Schiller so well depicted, trusts to find in his Paradise the finest hunting grounds with innumerable herds of buffaloes and bears; the Eskimo looks forward to sun-tipped icebergs with an inexhaustible supply of bears, seals, and other polar animals; the effeminate Cingalese frames his Paradise on the wonderful island-paradise of Ceylon with its noble gardens and forests—adding that there will be unlimited supplies of rice and curry, of cocoanuts and other fruit, always at hand; the Mohammedan Arab believes it will be a place of shady gardens of flowers, watered by cool springs, and filled with lovely maidens; the Catholic fisherman of Sicily looks forward to a daily superabundance of the most valuable fishes and the finest macaroni, and eternal absolution for all his sins, which he can go on committing in his eternal home; the evangelical of North Europe longs for an immense Gothic cathedral, in which he can chant the praises of the Lord of Hosts for all eternity. In a word, each believer really expects his eternal life to be a direct continuation of his individual life on earth, only in a "much improved and enlarged edition."

We must lay special stress on the thoroughly materialistic character of Christian athanatism, which is closely connected with the absurd dogma of the "resurrection of the body." As thousands of paintings of famous masters inform us, the bodies that have risen again, with the souls that have been born again, walk about in heaven just as they did in this vale of tears; they see God with their eyes, they hear his voice with their ears, they sing hymns to his praise with their larynx, and so forth. In fine, the modern inhabitants of the Christian Paradise have the same dual character of body and soul, the same organs of an earthly body, as our ancient ancestors had in Odin's

Hall in Walhalla as the "immortal" Turks and Arabs have in Mohammed's lovely gardens, as the old Greek demi-gods and heroes had in the enjoyment of nectar and ambrosia at the table of Zeus.

But, however gloriously we may depict this eternal life in Paradise, it remains endless in duration. Do we realize what eternity means?—the uninterrupted continuance of our individual life forever! The profound legend of the "wandering Jew," the fruitless search for rest of the unhappy Ahasuerus, should teach us to appreciate an "eternal life" at its true value. The best we can desire after a courageous life, spent in doing good according to our light, is the eternal peace of the grave. "Lord, give them an eternal rest."

Any impartial scholar who is acquainted with geological calculations of time, and has reflected on the long series of millions of years the organic history of the earth has occupied, must admit that the crude notion of an eternal life is not a comfort, but a fearful menace, to the best of men. Only want of clear judgment and consecutive thought can dispute it.

The best and most plausible ground for athanatism is found in the hope that immortality will reunite us to the beloved friends who have been prematurely taken from us by some grim mischance. But even this supposed good fortune proves to be an illusion on closer inquiry; and in any case it would be greatly marred by the prospect of meeting less agreeable acquaintances and the enemies who have troubled our existence here below. Even the closest family ties would involve many a difficulty. There are plenty of men who would gladly sacrifice all the glories of Paradise if it meant the eternal companionship of their "better half" and their mother-in-law. It is more than questionable whether Henry VIII. would like the prospect of living eternally with his six wives; or Augustus the Strong of Poland, who had a hundred mistresses and three hundred and fifty-two children. As he was on good terms with the Vicar of Christ, he must be assumed to be in Paradise, in spite of his sins, and in spite of the fact that his mad military ventures cost the lives of more than a hundred thousand Saxons.

Another unsolvable difficulty faces the athanatist when he asks in what stage of their individual development the disembodied souls will spend their eternal life. Will the new-born infant develop its psychic powers in heaven under the same hard conditions of the "struggle for life" which educate men here on earth? Will the talented youth who has fallen in the wholesale