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## IMMORTALITY AND MODERN THOUGHT.

The wise student will be very cautious in his statements about the primitive man. He has never been seen or studied. What he thought, said, or did, is therefore subject-matter for guessing, but not for knowledge. Scientific faith can resurrect what may be his semblance; but the accuracy of the portrait can always be impeached.

It is said that an Englishman and a Yankee were once discussing the relative antiquity of their respective families. The Englishman declared that he could trace his to a nobleman who came over with the Conqueror, and that there was little doubt that this nobleman's ancestral line ran back to the Cæsars. But the Yankee, with a modesty that occasionally manifests itself in disputes of this kind, quietly remarked that he had at home the genealogical table of his family; and that, somewhere well down the margin, there was a note to the effect that, "At about this time the world was created." I suppose that no scholar, to-day, disputes the fact that even the humblest of us can now trace his ancestry so far back that, in comparison with its dim antiquity, the ark of Noah must be looked upon as quite a modern vessel. But, even then, the primitive man, so far from being historical, is not even a tradition or a myth; for even the traditions and myths that gather about the idea of the fancied "beginning" are moulded very largely on the patterns of the times that produced them.

I thus emphasize this point to make clear how ill-founded is any loose talk about the primitive man's thoughts on the subject of a future life. The earliest man of whose thoughts on any subject we possess any reliable information is relatively well on toward the modern age; for an authority like Prof. Marsh, of Yale, tells us that two hundred thousand years is a moderate estimate of the time that has elapsed since the first human consciousness dawned upon what until then had been only an animal world. And, in comparison with this, the Pyramids are of yesterday.

It is doubtless true that there are races of men still alive,

— open books for our study,— whose type of thought is older than the hoariest of Egyptian antiquities. But even the slowest on the road have marched on to a point very far this side of the twilight that hides the early morning of the world.

I have made all this very plain, because I regard the statement I am about to make as so very important that I do not wish it weakened by even an appearance of claiming for it more than is really its due. This statement is that a belief in continued personal existence after death seems to be not so much an invention or discovery as it does an original endowment and integral part of man. I say *seems*, because, beyond the farthest point we can reach in our backward investigations, we have only inference as our guide. But, as far back as we can go, we find the belief universal, and bearing even then no traces of being a *parvenu*. Whatever disputes there may be among scholars as to the antiquity or universality of any theistic faith, or anything that can be properly called religion, I think there is no question about this. What I regard as the proof significance of it will be treated later on. At present, I wish only to mark the fact. Man, as we know him, has never seemed able to think of death as a limit to his conscious existence. He has always treated the grave as an incident in his career, not as the end of it. Death, treated as an end, is a modern invention. Who knows but it ought to be regarded and treated as one of the diseases of progress? We have learned a thousand new facts about the universe; and we have built up new theories on the basis of our facts. And, because the facts yet known are not large enough for our human dreams, some wise men are in haste to strangle the dreams. Possibly, it would be quite as wise to wait a little, and see if there are not more facts yet, out of which we may build an addition to our universe, so making it large enough to furnish a home even for so great a thing as a soul.

That we may feel anew how large a part of human life has been that which lies beyond the death limit, I wish to recall to you briefly a few things that you all well know.

The very fact that we are accustomed to charge the entire past of human history with excessive other-worldliness only emphasizes the point we have in hand.

Any one who makes a study of the barbaric races will be struck by this, as perhaps the most significant fact about them,—that their whole life is a tyranny, dominated by the spirits of the dead. You may call it a degrading superstition, an over-belief, or what you will; but the fact remains. And it is the fact that now concerns us. In birth and in death, in all that concerns personal, family, or tribal life, it is the dead who rule. Whatever religion there is, is a religion of the dead. Whatever morality exists, the dead ones confirm it or suspend it, as they will. The history of these peoples might appropriately be written under the title of “The Reign of the Dead.”

If we pass on to consider the first great civilizations of the world, like that of ancient Egypt, the same striking fact confronts us. It has developed and changed its form, but it remains no less dominant than before. So true is this that the Egyptian hardly began to live before he began to get ready to die. The king fought his battles and sat on his throne by the help of the dead. The monuments that have astonished the world, and so long looked calmly in the face of all-devouring time, are the monuments of the dead. The flowers that, pressed and faded, look, after two and a half thousand years of mummy companionship, as if plucked and laid away last summer, are the tributes to the dead. The literature that remains, lighted with hope of the future, with tender trust in the gods, and tender love for the departed, is *The Book of the Dead*.

The facts concerning the other great Oriental civilizations, of India and China, are so similar to these that I need only instance them thus, and pass them by.

And when we come down to more modern times still, to Greece and Rome, how is it? They had begun, in certain limited ways, to conquer and utilize the forces of this world, so as to make it a somewhat more attractive place for ordinary people to live in. And since, in the popular belief, it

was only the gods who inhabited the bright Olympus, and common souls must descend to the somewhat shadowy and intangible regions of the underworld, the future life became relatively less attractive. Achilles, in the *Iliad*, has indeed no doubt of the future state of existence; but the prospect of giving up his powerful physical life here under the blue sky is so little alluring that he declares he would rather serve a keeper of swine here on earth than be the king of all the dead. But, on the other hand, Socrates looks forward with the most delightful anticipation to a meeting and companionship with the heroes of the olden time. Though we cannot now accept the most of his arguments in favor of it, still we must admire his serene faith in the might of his soul to meet and vanquish the universal conqueror. The Greek and the Roman had found no place for a future abode save an underground cavern or some impossible Island of the Blessed. His universe was not yet big enough for a soul that was worth keeping.

The earlier Hebrew thought, so far as the Bible reveals it to us, laid little emphasis on the land beyond the grave. It may well be that the early Hebrew reformers reacted strongly from the excessive other-worldliness of the Egyptian life out of which they had come. They may well have felt that this world and its possibilities had been too much overshadowed by the other. But, as we read even the Bible between the lines, hints of witchcraft and familiar spirits let us into the open secret of the real life of the people. And, peculiar though they were, we know they were not so much unlike their neighbors. While, in later Hebrew thought, the hidden undergrowth of belief and feeling springs up into a luxuriant development that sucks out the life of everything that attempts to rival it. This world and all its belongings become only a sort of proscenium before which, on its little stage, a preparatory piece or prologue is enacted, while the curtain is getting ready to rise on the real drama.

Christianity, at first, was an apocalypse. With its promise of "new heavens and a new earth," so soon to appear in place of the rapidly "dissolving view" of the present order,

the things of this life were made to seem as nothing in comparison with the "glory that shall follow." This expected speedy ending of all mundane affairs made not only "afflictions which are but for a moment" seem "light," but it manifestly affected the estimate of great moral and social problems, such as marriage, property, and slavery.

All the way down through the Middle Age, purgatory, hell, and heaven were quite as real places in the popular imagination as any provinces or cities laid down on the map. And, even up to the present time, Orthodoxy teaches that this life is only a probation, and that the only real object of it is to get ready to die.

So much review of the past has appeared to me to be necessary, and that for two reasons. First, I wish these facts to be in your minds, to serve as a background against which our modern attitude may stand out more clearly. And, secondly, this attitude of the past will, I think, be seen to possess an important significance in our later discussion.

Leaving the past, however, for a little while, let us now consider some phases of contemporary thought.

The central significance of the Renaissance was nothing less and nothing other than an awaking from a world-trance of other-worldliness, and a discovery of this world. The other life had been everything; and the supposed preparation for it had been by a process of magic, almost or quite wholly apart from any natural connection of cause and effect. Now the worth of this life began to be felt for its own sake. And, further, it began to be believed that the connection between this life and the next was generic, not merely magical; and that therefore the best preparation for the next world might be the making the most and best of this one.

Out of this state of mind, science was born. And the essential spirit of science is the careful investigation of facts and the demand for proof as a condition of belief. It reverses the old idea of "authority for truth," and, instead of it, takes for its motto, "Truth for authority." It thus discovered that much of the ancient and still prevalent belief as to another life was superstition. But many of us to-day need to apply the scientific method to the study of the word

"superstition," and so better learn its meaning. We need to learn that labelling a belief "superstition" does not kill it. We even need to learn that proving it to be a superstition is not necessarily proving it to be untrue. A superstition is only an over-belief,—*super-sto*, that which stands over, exceeds,—something that reaches beyond what is at present proved to be true. That which is superstition to-day may be science to-morrow.

This, however, is not saying anything against science. The scientific demand for proof as the basis of all claims to knowledge is simply a demand for common honesty. For he who does not make a distinction between his knowledge and his beliefs or hopes may be very religious, according to popular standards; but he most certainly is not moral.

This scientific demand for verification, then, has enormously contracted the range of our celestial geography. When suddenly asked for the "titles clear to mansions in the skies," either they could not be produced or else the evidence for them was disallowed. And, since the popular belief in a future life could offer for itself no proof that did not seem to itself need proving, there has appeared that tremendous reaction of feeling that takes the name of Agnosticism. It is popular now in some quarters to smile at one who dares even discover the fact that he hopes for immortality, as though he had avowed a family claim to certain "castles in Spain."

Agnosticism commends itself to us by its honesty and its modesty. And it is certainly a blessed ignorance that takes the place of the most that Orthodoxy has been teaching us as absolute knowledge about the future world. Let me adopt Macbeth's creed, that life

. . . "Is a tale  
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,  
Signifying nothing,"—

let us with him walk

"The way to dusty death."

This were unspeakably better than the old faith. So I have no very hard words for agnosticism as compared with the

tyrant it discrowns. But I can no more submit to the new tyrant than to the old. For when it attempts to set limits to investigation, and warns us off even from a rational search for "the undiscovered country," then I rebel. Comte, its first secular high priest, attempted it even in regard to an investigation of the physical heavens; and hardly was he dead before the spectroscope turned his wisdom into folly. Who knows but some spiritual spectroscope may play the same havoc with the wise ignorance of agnosticism concerning the spiritual stars of which the world has always been thinking it caught at least occasional glimpses?

The enormous growth of modern science, and the resulting spirit of agnosticism,— these have largely determined the attitude of mind toward this subject of the great mass of the cultured and the semi-cultured people of Europe and America.

But this growth of science, grand as it is, at present is manifestly one-sided and incomplete. We have mapped the most of the earth, and gained a partial control of some of its forces: we have made extraordinary excursions into the heavens, and measured the distances of some of the stars; but man is as yet very largely an unknown country. Even many of the primary problems still wait for solution. Tyndall confesses that "the problem of the connection of body and soul is as insoluble in its modern form as it was in the pre-scientific ages" (*Fragments of Science*, p. 120). And how much we may not know as yet of the universe about us is hinted at most remarkably by no less a man than Jevons. He says (*Principles of Science*, p. 516), "We cannot deny even the strange suggestion of Young, that there may be independent worlds, some possibly existing in different parts of space, but others, perhaps, pervading each other unseen and unknown in the same space."

Many have been inclined to give up the soul because they could not find it with the dissecting knife. And others have given it up because our ordinary conceptions of space and matter have furnished for it, to the imagination, no appropriate home. But both these positions are utterly un-



scientific,—a leaping to conclusions before all the evidence is in. And this haste to settle one's opinions is always an evidence of an uneducated or only partially educated mind. Homer had no universe grand enough to furnish a worthy immortality; and so his Achilles looks upon it as a calamity. The world of modern science is not grand enough yet to make room for an immortal soul; and so the belief faints for lack of room to expand and air to breathe. Possibly, some future age may treat both ancient Greece and the present time as illustrations of the necessary failure of men who try to build before sufficient materials are gathered.

Then one of the diseases of our present civilization — a necessary result of an accumulation of facts and material development so rapid that we have not yet been able to master and use them from the stand-point of our higher manhood — is a sort of world-weariness that makes many people question as to whether they want any future life. The present life, with its worry and bustle and confusion, has been too much for them. They are weary, and only want to rest. They confuse life with its unpleasant conditions, and so are willing to be rid of both together.

I only mark this now in glancing at some of the more important phases of the attitude toward this subject of the modern world. And now let us turn sharply round and look in the other direction. Contemporary with this growth of science and agnosticism are the enormous native development of Spiritualism and the sweeping invasion from our old Aryan home of that strange-looking exotic, Theosophy. Science comes out of its inner temple, and by the mouth of its more forward spokesman announces to the waiting world its verdict, "*Agnosco.*" And, representative of many other philosophic authorities, one of our own sages utters the oracular stone for bread, "No wise man will trouble himself about the matter." But, reasonable or unreasonable, the toiling, struggling, dying, but still hopeful masses refuse to look on nonentity as a desirable acquisition. So their answer to science and philosophy is Spiritualism and Theosophy. In vain do the wise men shout, "Atavism," and talk

about a reversion of the civilized world to the animistic superstitions of our barbaric ancestors. The loving, hungry human heart still wails its protest in such lines as those of Holmes:—

“Is this the whole sad story of creation,  
Told by its breathing myriads o’er and o’er,—  
One glimpse of day, then black annihilation,  
A sunlit passage to a sunless shore?

“Give back our faith, ye mystery-solving lynxes;  
Robe us once more in heaven-aspiring creeds!  
Better was dreaming Egypt with her sphinxes,  
The stony convent with its cross and beads!”

These last two lines I, for one, cannot accept. Better “black annihilation” than endless heaven at the price of endless hell. Neither am I willing to have my faith given back to me as a charity loaf, conceded to me on account of a supposed unreasonable heart-hunger that defies the logic of the head. If the temple that is offered me be not large enough for both my faith and my brains, I will still stay in the wilderness and worship in tents, looking for a glimpse of some “better country.”

We are now ready to raise the question as to the present standing of this problem.

I cannot say, “Amen,” to those who declare that the logical outcome of unbelief is suicide,—that, if there be no future, then this life is not worth having. I cannot undertake to answer for others; but, as for myself, the vision of the blue dome above us, of the wide night sky of stars, of green fields with trees, of cloud-kissing mountains, of wind-swept seas; the love of wife and child and friend; the spectacle of the world’s activities, with the glimpses that may be gained of the upward march of humanity along the pathway of the past; the comedy, tragedy, heroism,—all this is so wonderful, so fascinating to me, that I am glad every day that I may have even a brief look at so marvellous a scene. However it ends or when, I am grateful that I was invited to be even a humble spectator.

I say this, not because I imagine that my personal feeling

can be important to you, but because I wish my argument to be freed in your minds from any suspicion of being unduly biassed by a personal longing for immortality. I do wish it. But I wish still more not to be deceived. Whatever the fact, I desire to know it, that I may adjust myself to the reality of my position. A prejudice either for or against a fact is something I cannot understand. Let us try, then, with eyes open all round, to see how the matter stands.

In the first place, then, traditional Orthodoxy has nothing to say to any one who needs to have anything said. What it offers in the way of proof is sadly in need of being proved itself. Church tradition is authority only to those who have not investigated it. Biblical infallibility is a thing of the past. The reappearance of Jesus after death may still be accepted by either one of two classes: first, by those who accept it on authority as a dogma; and, secondly, by those who hold that similar reappearances take place to-day. In the first case, it is not evidence; and, in the second, it is believed on account of a supposed present fact instead of its serving as proof of this fact. The Church, then, is, for the present, out of court as a witness.

The transcendental "I know," "I feel," that seems to be satisfactory to so many easy-going liberals,—this also is utterly lacking in probative force to any mind that stands in need of proof. How can a present consciousness testify to the continuance of personal identity into an indefinite future? It seems to me that this talk of knowledge on such a basis is simply a misuse of words. And the somewhat high and mighty air of some who speak slightly of the asserted low and materialistic tone of those who seek for evidence, and who talk of their personal consciousness of immortality as though it were a sort of saint's aureole that spontaneously encircled the heads of the spiritually-minded, appear to me to gain little in the way of certainty to offset their loss in the way of humility.

Turning now from these negatives, let us see what we can find that leans at least toward the positive.

With only such exceptions as prove the rule, the state-

ment may be broadly made that the desire for continued existence is a universal one. When people tell me that they do not desire a future life, I feel practically certain that the conditions of their life here are such that they shrink from their indefinite continuance. And, not being able to conceive themselves as freed from these hampering conditions, they are conscious of only a longing for rest. And yet it seems clear to me that it is not life they would be delivered from, but only a certain kind of life. The often-quoted words of Tennyson, I believe, sink their plummet down to the bottom of deepest truth:—

“Whatever crazy sorrow saith,  
No life that breathes with human breath  
Has ever truly longed for death.”

And, when Mr. Frederic Harrison tells me that I am selfish to wish for immortality, that the desire is an immoral one, it is sufficient to reply that he is selfish and immoral to desire to be alive to-morrow or this afternoon. At any rate, it is only the difference of my wanting a somewhat larger slice off the same loaf. Or when Dr. Maudsley writes,—I quote from a private letter to me; but, as they are his well-known opinions, I am letting out no secret,—“To me, it always seems something of a marvel that any one, looking back on what men have actually been from the beginning, and around upon what they are now, not abstractly, but actually, in their daily doings and being, should think the universe would gain anything by securing their immortality, or need feel itself under any sort of obligation to perpetuate them forever. An eternal Bushman, for example, or an eternal New York Fifth Avenue millionaire! An eternal chimpanzee were a less ill use to make eternally of the matter of either of them, surely!”—when, I say, Dr. Maudsley writes me like this, I cannot help thinking the Doctor forgets that, if the Bushman and the millionaire are souls, there may be reason to look upon them as seeds of something better to which they may grow before eternity is quite exhausted. And, when any one informs me that I am

only "a worm of the dust," with no right to aspire to such a destiny, I reply that this is just the point in dispute, and that I will accept any lineage, whatever it be, when it is established.

The practical universality of human belief in immortality in all the past has already been made plain. It is still taken for granted by the world's millions. The poets who coin the common heart's sorrows and hopes into song still chant it. The wide-spread reactions toward the older faiths have here their main motive. And the springing up of Spiritualism and Theosophy on grounds burnt over by the fires of the orthodox hell, and right in the teeth of the east winds that blow from the cheerless seas of doubt, testify to the hunger of men for some assurance that the loved and departed are not also the lost.

I wish now to hint at what seems to me the proof significance of this simple fact.

Death certainly seems to be the end, the utter dissolution and destruction of the individual. And, by as much as this appearance seems conclusive, by so much does the wonder grow that anybody should ever have thought otherwise. To talk of shadow and trance and dream is entirely beside the point. It is the paradoxical fact itself, and not the inadequate attempts to explain it, that is the object of our wonder. Familiarity with it has blunted the edge of the marvel. Suppose a dog should be found pondering Hamlet's soliloquy, or bent in earnest thought above the motionless body of one of his companions and raising the question, If a dog die, shall he live again? And yet, if the problem has no more relevancy to the case of man than to that of any other animal, why should it ever have become a problem in the one case more than in the other?

On any theory conceivable, this story of immortal hope is a tale that the universe has whispered to the trusting heart of man. He stands related to the universe as the coin is related to the die. Whatever is in him was first in it. Even the most transient and passing characteristics stand vitally related to external facts that produced them. Nothing

comes from nothing. And any characteristic of man that has existed always and everywhere must, it seems to me, be regarded as matching a permanent reality in the universe itself. The basis of all science, the uniformity of natural law, has for itself no surer foundation than this. Indeed, this is its foundation. I cannot see, therefore, why we are not justified, on the clearest scientific grounds, in claiming that this story, which the universe has always been telling to man (no matter through what symbols or by what methods), is an echo of some reality that is a part of the universe itself.

And then, again, it may be said that, so long as the most materialistic science utterly fails to prove the negative, no one can declare the grandest trust to be unreasonable. This faith, so natural to the human heart, is in possession of the ground. It will vacate when the proper warrant is produced. But, until it is, no one need apologize for his faith. So far as any science knows to the contrary, there may be, within each of us, a psychical body that death only releases into an immediate and larger activity; and the inter-stellar spaces may be the scene of intelligent activity so real and intense that life here would appear by comparison only as its shadow. And these bodies and these worlds need not be thought of as unimaginable and intangible spirit, either. They may be as material as the ether, and yet invisible and intangible to our present senses. And, if there be an immortal life at all, I believe we shall be no "unembodied thoughts," but as material as we are now, only in some higher and finer way.

If any one should say that, after having declared my conviction that materialism is dead, I now turn round and accept a theory of the immortal life that is essentially materialistic, I should reply, First, I do not yet *accept* any theory; and, secondly, this conception of future possibilities at which I hint has nothing whatever in common with what is both popularly and philosophically meant by materialism. Such an objection would only be a catching at the word and missing the substance.

Materialism has broken down. It is already an antiquated phase of science. Even Clifford, with his "mind-stuff," and Haeckel, with his "molecular souls," are confessions that they need something besides "dead matter"—which, by the way, does not exist—to explain even the lower forms of life. And, in presence of the higher problems, of thought and consciousness, materialism is as dumb as the Egyptian sphinx.

But, supposing immortal life to be a fact, is there any prospect of its ever being discovered and verified as a reality? No less an authority than Mr. John Fiske says (*Destiny of Man*, p. 111), "Scientifically speaking, there is not a particle of evidence for either view,"—that is, either for or against immortality. And he goes on to speak of desisting "from the futile attempt to introduce scientific demonstration into a region which confessedly transcends human experience." At the same time, he thinks (and he evidently includes himself in the statement) that men will go on believing it as they have in the past.

I confess it seems to me no little surprising to hear a man like Mr. Fiske talking in this way. I find myself almost universally in accord with him; but, in this case, he seems to me to have forgotten his stand-point as a scientific man. Does the problem of immortality "transcend human experience"? Is not this most unscientific assumption of the negative of the very point in dispute? If, in reality, any man has ever entered into an immortal life, then, since this man was and is human, the fact of living beyond death is, in his case, a fact of human experience, and so in no wise transcends it. And, if he could come and enter into relations with us once more, then this converse with an immortal would be as much a part of human experience as any commonplace dialogue with one's next-door neighbor.

Now, I suppose that neither Mr. Fiske nor any one else would feel himself warranted in saying that, if there be immortals, this supposition of possible relations with them would be antecedently or inherently impossible. Neither would it require any one to believe in the supernatural; for

such converse, if real, would be as natural a fact as any other. Whether, then, this problem be one that "transcends human experience" is a question that no man has any right, scientific or otherwise, to settle except on the basis of the facts and the evidence.

If immortality be a fact at all, and if it be a fact that touches and concerns us in any way, then most certainly it may come within the range of human experience. It is outside that range no more than this continent was before Columbus sailed. And we know now that even this had been discovered, in ways that never became fruitful to civilization, by sporadic and scattered adventurers, over and over again. So, it is claimed, have the mysterious seas of death been crossed over and over again. We now dismiss these stories as idle tales, just as, for many years, the voyages of Marco Polo were looked upon as romantic inventions. If, however, this pathway through the mystery should ever be brought under control, charted, and made into a navigable way, then we should read the old-time stories in a different spirit. The uncertainty, the intermittency, the apparent lawlessness, of these manifestations in the past, is no more against the possibility of reducing them to law and order and knowledge, and so bringing them under voluntary control, than were the first manifestations of steam, electricity, and magnetism arguments in discredit of the locomotive, the telegraph, and the mariner's compass. Whatever be the facts, the mind of man, by the guidance of the scientific method, is as competent to deal with the one case as it has proved itself to be with the others. While the subject itself is as much more dignified and important than these as life is more important than the passing incidents of a day. I therefore protest, with all the earnestness of which I am capable, against both the shallow and flippant scientific disdain of this question, and the airy, aristocratic dilettante indifference with which theologians treat it, while all the time they glare with holy horror at any man who presumes to doubt what they are so ready to admit is outside the limits of proof.



It is sometimes said that, if there be anything in the popular claims of communication with those we call the dead, or if immortality is capable of being proved as a fact of science, it ought to have been known long ago; and that the fact of the lateness of the claim in human experience is much against it. But I fail to see the force of this objection, either from the stand-point of human history or of divine providence.

In the first place, it is claimed — among all peoples — that these whispers from the other side have been heard in all ages from the very first. But, even though all these claims be disallowed,— as they ought to be until established,— it can still be said that there has been no more absolute need of certainty on this point than on many others. And a parallel question might be asked concerning many other discoveries, the knowledge of which has contributed so greatly to the growth of civilization. If God be, and if he love us, why did he not tell us a thousand things that we, as matter of fact, have been left to find out?

Thus, in human growth, things have their natural advent,— they come “in the fulness of time.” First, man is animal; then comes the further evolution of mind; then the moral becomes dominant. May it not well be that the spiritual should appear as the blossom and crown of all? This, at any rate, is Paul’s order of progress.

I shall now venture to set my feet, for at least a little way, within the borders of a country that has been at least very rarely traversed on an occasion like this,— the regions of Psychic Research.

Some of you must be more or less familiar with the work of the English Society. I have been a member of the American Society from the first, and much of the time chairman of one of its committees. Besides this, I have done what I could as an original investigator for eight or ten years. I think I may therefore claim, without any breach of modesty, to know something more of the subject than those who have given no careful attention to it whatever. Many dismiss it on *a priori* grounds; many others have made up their minds

on the basis of one or two public and palpably fraudulent séances; while others know only what, from time to time, they see in the newspapers. It is evident that these people have no right to hold an opinion, much less to express it. And yet, if your experience is like mine, you will find that they are more certain about it than anybody else, and quite ready with their shallow judgment as to the folly of anybody who has really taken the trouble to study the matter.

I have long felt it to be a part of my duty to investigate the subject, and to have at least a few facts, for or against, on which to base an opinion. Some millions of people in Europe and America are Spiritualists, on the basis of what they claim to be personal experience. The belief seems to me to be either the most lamentable delusion or the grandest truth in the world. Which? It really would seem to be worth while to find out, if for no other reason than to deliver the thousands that may be led astray by a fancy. When my parishioners come to me in sorrow and beg for guidance, I feel that I ought to have something for them better than a prejudice.

If a future life can be demonstrated, if communication between that world and this be a possibility, I should most certainly be glad. I do not see how it would change the lines of my regular work. It would only put beneath my feet a certainty where now is but a hope.

I have no time to go deeply into this phase of the subject, even if it were advisable to-day. To treat it at all adequately would require at least an essay by itself. In what I do say, beyond what is accepted by competent scientific investigators, I shall confine myself to the results of my own personal experience, and to briefest hints even here.

Three things I now regard as settled. They do not at all prove the claim of Spiritualism; but they do go a wonderful way in at least illustrating the power of the soul to transcend ordinary physical limits, and act through other than the recognized channels of communication. It is said that one day Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson were

taking a walk together in Concord, when a wild-eyed Second Adventist rushed up to them with the news—"important, if true"—that the world was about coming to an end. After Mr. Parker had replied that the message did not concern him, as he lived in Boston, Mr. Emerson quietly remarked, "Well, suppose it is: I think I can get along without it." In the light of already established facts, it begins to look as though the soul might, with some degree of confidence, quote the reply of Mr. Emerson. What are these facts?

First, hypnotism or mesmerism. This, which a French scientific commission once scouted, after what it called an investigation, is now recognized by the medical fraternity—in the words of one of them—as having "a distinct therapeutic value." I have known a case of a young lady's being put into the mesmeric sleep and having a serious surgical operation performed with as complete unconsciousness as though under the influence of ether. All the ordinary phenomena I have witnessed in private over and over again.

Secondly, the fact of clairvoyance is established beyond question. Under certain, as yet little understood, conditions, both seeing and hearing are possible apart from the ordinary use of eye or ear or ethereal vibrations. What is it then that sees and hears?

Thirdly, it is a fact that mind may impress mind, and, in some exceptional cases, far away, even half way round the world.

Now, no one of these facts, nor all of them combined, goes far enough to prove the central claim of modern Spiritualism. But this apparent semi-independence of the body does at least make the question a rational one as to whether the soul is not an entity capable of getting along without the present physical body. And, while we are on the borderland of stupendous facts like these, I confess I find it hard to be patient with the conceited and flippant ignorance that waives them aside with a supercilious air, while it gravely potters over a fish's fin or a dug-up vertebra of the tail of some extinct mastodon, calling one science and the other only superstition.

Connected with modern Spiritualism there is, beyond question, an immense amount of deliberate fraud. Many people have found that they can get a living in this way easier than by working for it. Then there is much of honest self-delusion, much honest misinterpretation of facts. Certain mysterious things do occur; and they are straightway supposed to mean what they may not mean at all. But all the bad logic of the world is not to be found here. It sometimes gets out of the séance room, and climbs even into the chair of the philosophic or scientific professor. So let us not be too severe on the bad logic of those who have had no special training.

But when all the fraud, all the delusion, all the misinterpretation, have been brushed one side, there remains a respectable—nay, even a striking and startling—body of fact that as yet has no place in our recognized theories of the world and of man. Whatever their explanation, they are at least worth explaining. And, whether they prove or disprove Spiritualism, they cannot fail to throw important light on many problems touching the nature of man. The so-called explanations that I have seen, such as those of Drs. Beard and Carpenter and those of many others, are so inadequate to account for facts of my own experience that, by natural reaction, they almost incline one to grasp the opinions they combat, for the sake of having something a little more solid to hold by.

That physical objects are sometimes moved in a way that no muscular pressure, conscious or unconscious, can account for, I know. That information is sometimes imparted that was never in the possession of either of the sitters I also know. It is true that these cases, in my own experience, are not yet common enough to preclude the possibility of their being accidentally correct; though the circumstances have been such as to make me regard this as a strained and improbable explanation. To have information given me that it was impossible the medium could know, this has been a very common experience. To call it mind-reading is easy; but what is mind-reading? One insoluble mystery is

hardly a satisfactory explanation for another. Automatic writing, when the medium was unconscious of what she was writing, and this of a most remarkable character, is another common experience. These are little facts, you may say. But so was the fact that a piece of amber, under certain circumstances, would attract a straw. Science knows no little facts; and any fact, until it is explained, must be either a constant challenge or a standing reproach to any science worthy of the name.

I have never paid the slightest attention to anything that occurred in the dark, or under conditions where deception as to fact was even possible. I have seen a plenty of these, but have always ruled them out of court. And, besides, most of the things that have impressed me have occurred when the medium was a personal friend, and not a "professional" at all.

I must let these bare statements stand as hints only of a story it would take me hours to tell. As the result of all this, am I a Spiritualist? No. Would I like to be one? I would like to be able to demonstrate the fact of continued existence, and the possibility of opening communication between the two worlds. But I am a good deal more anxious for the truth than I am to believe either one way or the other.

If not in the present age, then in some more fortunate one, I believe the question both can and will be settled. And I cannot understand how any one should treat the matter as of slight importance. Thoreau's remark, "One world at a time," has often been quoted as being the end of all wisdom on the subject. But I cannot so regard it. I do not think, as some do, that morality is dependent on it. But I do think that one's belief here may so change his life emphasis as to put a new meaning into his whole career. If I know I am to die in two years, I shall certainly lay my life out on a different scale from that which would be appropriate if I could confidently look forward to forty years more of life; and, in spite of George Eliot's "Choir Invisible," it seems to me that the enthusiasm

which works only for a certain indefinite future here on earth, while all the time it is believed that the whole thing is finally to end in smoke, is, to say the least, a little forced and unnatural. And among common people, not sublimely unselfish, it will not be strange if they care more for present satisfaction than they do for some unimaginable benefit to some unknown people that, perhaps, is to be attained in a thousand years.

But, if all men could know that death is only an incident, and that life is to continue, for good or ill, right on ; and if they could know that, under the working of the law of cause and effect, they are making that future life day by day ; that its condition is to be determined thus, not by creed or belief, or ritual or worship, as such, but by character,—is it not plain that this would become the mightiest of all possible motives? If it can be attained, here is a power able to lift and transform the world.

It is not a question, then, that is all in the air, and is of no practical importance. I know of none that I believe to be more practical.

But, if this certainty is never to be attained, I believe with Mr. Fiske in this,—that the great majority of men and women will still cherish the hope, at any rate in hours of sorrow and loss. In the glare of day, when they are prosperous, while the sun shines, they may forget it or doubt it ; but, when the night comes, they will look up at the stars, and dream at least of other and happier worlds. And this, at any rate, can be said for the dream : that no advance of knowledge as yet has proved its right to impeach it, or take away its comfort from the hearts that ache for the sight of faces that have vanished.

M. J. SAVAGE.