

best to conform themselves to the practice which prevails around them. Otherwise it ought to be left frankly open, as it was in the primitive Church. For, when all is said and done, the New Testament teaching about it is entirely ambiguous, partly because it is so strangely meagre, partly because, so far as it speaks at all, it speaks in two opposite senses. I do not write thus to disparage the New Testament: God forbid. It is, no doubt, a part of its perfect adaptation to the highest purposes of religion that concerning so many matters, wherein we look eagerly for information and guidance, it is either quite silent, or else speaks so ambiguously that we are practically left to our own conclusions and our own devices. What we need to do first is honestly and frankly to recognize the limitations which it has pleased the Almighty to set upon His self-revelation in Scripture. When we have done this, we may go on to find out why these limitations are so wholesome and so necessary for us.

RAYNER WINTERBOTHAM.

### SCIENTIFIC LIGHTS ON RELIGIOUS PROBLEMS.

#### X.

“SHOULD SCIENCE DIM THE HOPE OF IMMORTALITY?”

THE question I have put at the head of this study is typical of *all* these studies. I am not considering the absolute determination of *any* problem. My object has been to investigate whether the influx of the modern waters has effaced former evidences. I have now come to a department of natural religion which is supposed to have been specially damaged by the inroad of these waves; I allude to that tract of land which Man sees in The Future. The Immortality of the soul has been discussed for ages, and the fiercest stage of the battle has ever been in the heart of

each individual man. I do not here come forward to add to the list of combatants. Mine is a humbler aim. I want to ask whether anything has happened to dim the hopes of yesterday. No man can deny that there *were* hopes yesterday—hopes whose light was strong enough to help men to die, and—what is more wonderful—to help men to live. I want to ask if these hopes have been put out. They were lighted before the days of Evolution; has Evolution extinguished them? Do they belong now to a castle in the air, to a palace of fancy, to a conception of Nature which no longer represents the world in which we dwell? The cry of multitudes is, "Our lamps are gone out." The plaint is not that they are inadequate, but that they are extinguished. Hundreds would be abundantly satisfied if they could only be told that the lamps of the world's virgin youth were still available to light them into the kingdom.

I intend to examine some of these old lamps, or rather, I intend to submit to the reader the result of my examination. I, too, have experienced the weight of the problem, and have subjected these lamps to a careful scrutiny. And for my part I have come to the conclusion that *none* of these lamps have gone out. I do not think there is a single star of hope that once trembled in the world's sky which has been extinguished by the supposed shadows of the atmosphere of science; and I will try to state the grounds which have led me to this conviction.

There is, however, a preliminary point which it may be well to consider in contrasting the old life with the new. Have you ever asked yourself whether there really exists in Nature any deathless object, anything which actually bears the stamp of immortality. I believe that this was one of the earliest questions ever put by Man. I think when Man began to speculate about the prospect of the soul's immortality the first thing he asked himself was, Is *anything* immortal? He felt that his cause would be weakened if its

claim were shown to be exceptional: He looked out for something to reveal a parallel. He gazed into the face of Nature with a view to discover aught that could suggest freedom from death or change. I believe that this was the real origin of fetish-worship. Did it ever strike you as strange that the primitive man did not begin with the worship of the golden stars but with the adoration of a little bit of rag or a piece of wood. I take the reason to have been that to his infant eye the rag and the wood seemed more *permanent* than the star. The star appeared to have been blotted out every morning; but morning, noon, and night he had seen the rag and the wood remain. It was a remaining thing he wanted. He sought for something to tell him that in his search for immortality he was not seeking a possession which was outside of Nature, not desiring a boon which belonged not to the universe. He wanted to be able to say, There is a thing which lives without chance of death; why should not I! It was this desire that made him choose the most changeless things as the objects of his reverence. The wood and the rag were the most changeless things. The lowest objects always are the most changeless; change belongs to vitality. Yet the very stolidness of these lowest forms suggested the immortal; and the primitive man bowed down before them.

I believe the same tendency permeates the ancient world everywhere—the search for the changeless as a suggestion of the immortal. It was this which gave the idea of the Tower of Babel. It was this which inaugurated the Pyramids. It was this which initiated the embalming of the dead. It was this, I think, which made the old world greater in sculpture than in either painting or music. Painting seemed too soft an impress to be durable; music was a series of fugitive notes; but sculpture was fashioned in harder mould—this surely would remain.

Now, we know that in none of these things did the

old world find a permanent object. The mummy and the pyramid are still with us ; but no man would now value them as attesting the existence of an immortal element in Nature. In nothing which meets the *eye* does man now admit such an element. When Christianity came, the face of Nature was changed for him. It ceased to suggest the immortal ; it began to suggest the perishable. He no longer thought of "the everlasting hills," nor spoke of "enduring as long as the sun." His motto rather was "change and decay in all around I see." The idea that the visible world had been fixed upon an immovable foundation fell into the background, and its place was taken by the image of a world which was vanishing away. The reaction against Paganism was the reaction against Nature. Men once had found an Immortal Spirit in wood and grove, a Divine Life in plant and tree ; but it was Pagan men who had found it there. Therefore the Christian robbed the grove of its Immortal Spirit, robbed the tree of its Divine Life. He meant to serve his Master by doing so. It did not occur to him that he was in reality mutilating that Master's teaching and dimming that Master's glory.

Yet this was really the effect of the violent reaction. It deprived Man of a secular symbol of immortality. Henceforth he must search for his future by *shutting* his eyes. No more in the *outward* world must he seek a basis for things eternal. The City of God was not here, its impress was not here. The *external* bore not the stamp of the *eternal* ; it suggested only frail mortality. And there came to Man times when he lamented this impoverishment of Nature which himself, not his Christ, had made. There came times when he longed for something of the old spirit—some return of that natural sense of immortality which saw the fadeless amid the mutable, the constant amid the changeful, the permanent amid the perishable. He began to regret that the rock had been lifted from the sea—that he was allowed

to behold in Nature no abiding thing. There was nothing immortal around him. Was he seeking something abnormal, exceptional? Had he no warrant for his hope beyond the fact of his own ambition? Was eternity an unnatural thing, a supernatural thing? Had he no companionship with the visible universe in aspiring to a possession which would not pass away?

Such is the want of the modern man. Has it been met? Yes. But by whom? By the last man from whom we should ever have expected it: by the evolutionist. In the afternoon of the day, in the midst of the world's prose, there has been realized the dream of the heart's poetry—the desire to find an immortal thing. A hand has pointed us to one imperishable object; and it is the hand of Science. Evolution—the doctrine of change—has itself revealed something which changes *not*. That rock in the sea for which we have been looking so long has at length appeared, and the glass which has discovered it is in the hand of the evolutionist. It is to Mr. Herbert Spencer that mainly belongs the proclamation of an eternal life in Nature. He tells us that there is in this universe a Force whose characteristic feature is abidingness or, as he calls it, persistence. In a universe of perpetual changes—changes which the Force itself has generated—it has from all eternity remained unmoved. It has never been increased; it has never been diminished. Its quantity has never varied; amid endless and fluctuating manifestations the amount of its energy is always the same. The waves rise and fall upon its surface, but, alike in rise and fall, its waters have the same measurement. The winds rage and rest upon its bosom, but, alike in their raging and in their rest, the weight of the atmosphere is equal. The passions of the heart sweep and sleep on *its* heart, but, alike in their sweeping and in their sleeping, the pulsations of this mighty Force are neither less nor more.

And so, after all, there *is* such a thing as immortality in the universe! That is the exclamation which bursts from us when we hear this statement of modern science. Our impression is one of joy. And truly there is ground for joy. For the first time in the record of Man we have received scientific testimony to the existence of an actual immortal life. It is no longer an impression of the savage; it is a perception by the savant. We are no longer confronted by a poetic analogy, however beautiful. We are brought face to face with an object whose distinctive attribute is that it lives for ever. We had heard before that there was a Being who possessed eternal life; but we never heard it from science. It is from science we hear it now, and the message makes us glad. It suggests to us that in our desire to be immortal we are not asking a miracle, not seeking a gift unknown to the universe. It tells us that the world in which we dwell is not, after all, such a perishable thing. It informs us that we are environed by something which is *not* subject to change and decay, which is absolutely impervious to death and incapable of seeing corruption. Such a revelation makes us revise our estimate of the universality of dissolution. We feel that, whatever *we* may be, our environment, at least, is immortal. This Primal Force, this Immortal Force, is our real environment; it not only persists, but, as Mr. Spencer tells us, it is "everywhere persistent." Is it not *something*, that at all events we are breathing an immortal atmosphere, living in an unbeginning, unending sea. No poetic symbol ever conferred the stimulus which has been created by this scientific fact.

We may now begin to examine the old lamps in a better humour. We have received a preliminary encouragement. We have caught sight of that rock to find which our ancestors scanned the sea. It is a veritable rock of ages—not only a symbol, but an embodiment, of immortality. What if, besides being a symbol and an embodiment, it

should be a source of immortality. If it be so near to us as Mr. Spencer says, it might well infect us with its own eternity. Such a thought, I say, puts us in a good humour with modern science; it encourages us to go back and seek the things we believed to be lost. I repeat, then, the question, Are the old lamps gone out? I take them up one by one to examine them, to see if there be any light left in them. Men often speak of their duties to the present and the future; I think one of their greatest duties is to the past. We act for to-day, we plan for to-morrow; ought we not also to legislate for yesterday—to tell which of its treasures is worthy to remain! It may be that the lights in which our fathers trusted may still be visible from the summit of the hill!

The first of these lamps which is supposed to be extinguished by modern science is the value attached to the individual life. Christianity certainly emphasized the value of the individual; indeed, its immediate address is to the soul of each man. We enter its temple one by one, and, as each goes in, the door is shut. The deepest Christian experience is a solitary experience. The man is made to feel that his own personality is of deathless import. He is forbidden, at first, to look around; he is bidden to look within. He is told to measure himself by no social standard. He is commanded at the outset to think of himself as an isolated unit, alone with God. The motto impressed upon him is, "God is dealing with *you*—with you as distinctly as if in all the realms of space there beat no other heart, throbbed no other pulse, than yours." The weight of responsibility which is laid on him is, in the first instance, the weight of his own soul. That individual possession is actually thrown into the balance against the whole material universe, and, with grand dramatism, made to weigh it down, "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul!"

To the Christian, then, the greatest proof of immortality was the value of an individual life. It is this value that science is supposed to have depreciated. When Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam* he was conscious of a collision between the old world and the new. They were struggling in his own mind. The old world said, "Your friend Hallam is alive; God is too righteous to leave a soul in the dust." But the new said, "See how careful He seems of the species, how careless of the individual!" That was a typical conflict of the year 1850. It had been a typical conflict of all that century, of all the previous century. Bolingbroke had left to the age the burden of his song; and its burden had been this, "The species is everything, the individual is nothing; God's Providence can only reach the *general* good." That was the legacy which he bequeathed to a hundred and fifty years, and it was still the possession of our country when Tennyson wrote *In Memoriam*.

But since that time something has happened. A new creed has burst upon the world—a creed which has reshaped our conception of the universe. The doctrine of Evolution has been born. And the question is, do we stand any longer in this matter where Bolingbroke did, where Tennyson did? On the contrary, I say that the doctrine of Evolution has given back the old lamp which an intermediate science extinguished. It has in my opinion reinstated the unit on the throne from which the race had driven him. The aphorism which to my mind would express our modern sense of the attitude of Nature would be just the reverse of that on the lips of Tennyson. I would say that in the light of Evolution she seems "careless of the species and careful of the individual." She is careless of species, for the doctrine of Evolution has tended ever more and more to obliterate the *landmarks* of species. It has tended more and more to hide from human investi-

gation the points of difference between race and race, and to bring into prominence the points in which race and race agree. It may be objected that she is here careless of the species, not in the interest of the individual, but in the interest of the whole. But if Evolution ignores specific difference, it is precisely *for the sake of* individual difference. I have already said that the aim of Nature is to carve out the perfect form. But I would here add that with her the most perfect form is the most individual, the most concrete. Hers has been a progress from masses to units, not from units to masses. She has started with the vast, the extended, the undefined, the all-comprehending nebulous fire-mist. From that she has *descended* in search of perfection. Every stage has been a stage of increasing individualism. Each new form is a form that turns more inward on itself. The star is more individual than the nebulous mass from which it springs; it lives a separate life. The plant is more individual than the star; it is more limited in its range. The animal is more individual than the plant; it is less like mechanical things. The man is more individual than the animal; he has peculiarities which isolate him from all beside.

Can we say, then, that Nature is careless of the individual! Would it not be more correct to say that the individual is the main object of her care! Is not her distinctive work an evolution of individualism! Are not the steps, by Mr. Spencer's own definition, steps in diversity, peculiarity—what he calls "heterogeneity!" And what is that but individuality! What do we mean when we say of a man, he has great individuality? Simply that he is marked out from the mass by points of difference, distinguished from the species by something all his own. It is this distinctiveness for which, by the testimony of Evolution, Nature is working, toiling, planning; this is the aim of her life, this is the object of her striving. In the light

of that aim and its results, how can it be said that she ignores the part in the interest of the whole.

Those who think that Nature is opposed to the permanent existence of an individual should study carefully the views of one of the greatest of living scientists, Weismann, as he has expressed them in *The Contemporary Review* for October 1893.<sup>1</sup> He has advanced a very remarkable, a very startling theory. It is nothing less than this, that since the beginning of organic life up to this hour there has actually continued in existence a single individual form! Amid the successive changes of species, amid the incessant variations of types, one tiny concrete object has persisted—deathless, abiding! The thought almost takes away the breath with its novelty, and one requires some time to get accustomed to it. It is so different from our familiar platitudes about the fleeting nature of life that we seem to be transported into the atmosphere of fairyland. And yet the fact on which Weismann bases his theory appears to lead to no other conclusion. How shall I express that fact! The very statement of it is as subtle as any passage of Browning. Instead of stating it, let me try to describe it. Let me attempt to illustrate it by something which is not quite itself, and which is yet so like it as to be more than an analogy; so, I think, shall we best understand the force of Weismann's argument.

Imagine a bit of stick floating in a pool of water. Imagine that this piece of stick were gifted with the power of growth, in other words, that it embodied an inward life. Imagine that one day, after it had reached a certain size, it all at once broke exactly in the middle and became two pieces. Imagine that each of these halves continued that growth which had existed in the whole, until each of them reached the same size which had been attained before

<sup>1</sup> A similar view is taken by Professor Ray Lankester in the article "Protozoa," *Encycl. Brit.*, 9th Edition, vol. xix. p. 837.

separation. Conceive then that with each of them the original process of separation was repeated, and that the two pieces were divided in the middle just as the original whole had been. Conceive that after this second division each of the new pieces again continued the growth, and each again attained the size of the original stick—only to be subjected in turn to an identical process of separation. Imagine that this alternating process of new growth and new division went on through all the ages without break and without deviation, and that at the present moment we saw the stick repeating the circle described a hundred thousand years ago—what would our conclusion be? Would it not be this, Here is an organism which has never seen death, which has no death in the cup of its nature, which exhibits amid the changeful the power of immortality!

Now, in all that is essential, this is no mere analogy; it is a fact. There has really been, there really is, such an organism. There *is* a creature which, as Weismann says, has never seen death! Before the mountains were brought forth or ever the dry land appeared, while yet the earth was only a wide waste of waters, there was formed within these waters a tiny life encased in a tiny form. That life, that form, has never died. Accident has doubtless eliminated many of its offshoots, but the essence of the life remains. It has passed through the experiences of the stick. It has grown to a certain point and has then split into two pieces. Each of these has attained the original size and each has again divided. The process has been repeated from age to age—through centuries, through millenniums. Each division is followed by a growth; each growth is followed by a new division. And all the time, what is it that grows, what is it that divides? It is the original, tiny organism, the one concrete form. It is this which has lived on, it is this which has preserved its con-

tinuity, it is this which has evaded death. Weismann says that, when the creature breaks in two, each part, if gifted with intelligence, would claim to be the original whole, each would point to the other and say, "I am the mother, that is the daughter." What is this but to say that the thing preserved is the individual life!

This lamp, then—the lamp of individuality—has not been put out by science. Science has rather burnished the lamp anew. It has shown that the aspiration of religious faith is no unscientific dream. It has revealed the spectacle of a creature which has escaped death, which has perpetually renewed its days. Is there not in such a spectacle a scientific hope for Man—the scientific suggestion that he, too, may possess an individual principle which the cleavage called death may leave unaffected. This is not an analogy like the simile of the butterfly, not a poetic symbol like the resurrection wrought by spring. It is a sober truth, a prosaic fact; and as such it grounds religious faith upon the ledge of experience. In the following study I shall continue the examination of these old lamps to see whether their light has ceased to burn; in the meantime it is something to know that the light of this first, this Lamp of Individuality, remains undimmed.

G. MATHESON.