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THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

The Subject Philosophically Considered.

AN ESSAY,
Read before "The Abbeville Lyceum,"
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(PUBLISHED BY REQUEST.)

Upon no subject, perhaps, have philosophers speculated more largely and discordantly than upon the nature and duration of the soul.

But too commonly, however, has it happened that, presumptuously striving to know what God has wisely concealed from the finite view, they have overstepped the limits of modest investigation, and entered the mysterious and shadowy region which lies beyond. They have vainly sought to know all things; and because they could not gain a perfect knowledge of the essence and mode of existence of the soul; or rather, because the soul is not, like matter, perceptible to the external senses, they would wholly discard the notion of its immortality, and betake themselves to the cheerless and gloomy hypothesis, that the soul perishes with the body in the grave, or, in other and more expressive language, that the sleep of death is eternal.

Such, in brief, is the creed of infidelity—such the end it assigns to man.

But is death total extinction? Is all that follows death mere "blank oblivion, utter nothingness?" The mind instinctively shudders at the thought. It is too dismal to be for a moment indulged. To be laid in the narrow-house, and moulder back to dust, and be no more, never! no never! Horrible anticipation! And the rational mind would fain avoid it in the belief, that, Revelation apart, it is nevertheless in the highest degree, possible and probable that the spirit will survive the wreck of its mortal tenement. That, as an old poet has well and forcibly expressed it, "Regit idem spiritus artus orbe alio."

It will then be my present aim to show, that it is, in a mere philosophical point of view, both possible and probable that the mind or soul of man is capable of existing, and will exist after the dissolution of the body.

The existence of mind as something distinct from the functions of the body, has been questioned by the hypothesis which supposes the mind, or vital principle to be of the same substance as the body, and like the body, liable to dissolution and annihilation.

Now suppose it be, for argument's sake, admitted, that the mind and body are, as to substance, the same, will it follow that the mind is destructible? or, in other words, will be annihilated?

In nature, as in mechanics, permanency is known to be an universal law.

From all the teachings of science we learn, with respect to matter, that no particle of it has ever been destroyed by the decomposition of bodies; and since annihilation supposes entire destruction, it follows that no particle of matter has ever been annihilated. The term annihilation, therefore, is vague and unmeaning—denoting something of which the human mind can form no adequate conception. Hence, for aught that appears to the contrary, matter itself may be imperishable, immortal, and consequently though the body and mind were, as to substance, the same, it would nevertheless be true, that the mind is immortal. Annihilated then man cannot be. The grave may cover him—the worm may feed upon him—his body may be dissolved into its original atoms, but no one of these atoms will be destroyed or lost while the present constitution and order of things continues.

Matter of all kinds, we know, is liable to dissolution. Yet, all alike is continued in being—entering, perhaps, into an innumerable variety of new and fanciful combinations; so that in the natural process of things, the majestic oak may, in part be composed of the atoms of some once sensitive form laid to repose beneath its quiet shade. Nevertheless permanency is stamped upon all, all are immortal.

But, be it observed, the mind if material, must be an atom, or a combination of atoms, and, consequently perceptible to the external senses. But this not being the case, it follows that the mind is essentially different from its corporeal

tenement. And that it is immaterial, distinct from matter; and also capable of existing apart from the body would seem to result from the constant variations which the latter is known to undergo, without any perceptible or correspondent change in the former. That we are the same sentient, thinking beings now, we ever have been, or, that the mind, through all the gradations of life, from childhood to old age, remains unchanged, save by a gradual expansion and improvement of its powers, is a self-evident proposition. With respect to the body, however, the case is otherwise. Between the years of infancy and maturity, it is subject, both in texture and lineament to striking variations. The question then arises, in what manner? or by what process is this change effected? Is it by gradual accretions to the original mass, without loss, or substitution? or, by some secret, yet certain process of renewal and decay? The latter is the view which the deductions of science would lead us to adopt; since from these it appears that the human body changes, imperceptibly, indeed, yet entirely with the increase of years, so that no identical part of the infantine or youthful frame, can with certainty be said to exist in the corporeal structure of maturer years. A fact which, by the way, is well fitted to remind us that "in the midst of life we are in death."

But amid these constant variations in the corporeal system, the mind experiences no change, except, as before remarked, in the gradual development and maturity of its faculties. It follows therefore, that the mind is, in its nature or essence, essentially different from the material structure with which it is, in some mysterious manner united. And if different, and, as we have seen, not perceptible to the external senses, then it must be immaterial, and if immaterial, there is the strongest probability that it is capable of surviving and existing apart from physical organization. For if the mind be not so intimately connected with the body as to be affected by its partial change, is it not reasonable to believe it will not be affected by its final dissolution? "In truth, the body and its senses, appear to be nothing more than the instruments which the mind employs for the acquisition of knowledge, which, when so acquired, it feeds upon without the instrumentality of these external organs. As e. g. in the case of reasoning and reflection where the mind acts entirely separate from the powers of perception."

Hence arises a well grounded presumption, that when the body shall be dissolved, the mind, or immaterial principle, will live on without interruption, and in a progressively enlarging sphere of activity and enjoyment.

Furthermore, it is very generally conceded that the mind is seldom or never inactive. And when, through weariness, the body sinks to repose, how often does the mind, or immaterial principle, steal forth from its little prison-house of mortality, seemingly conscious of its present confinement, and anxious to anticipate its future unbounded freedom?

And, again, when the body, enfeebled and wasted by disease, is just on the eve of dissolution, how frequently does it happen that the mind evinces an uncommon degree of vigor and clearness in the exercise of its powers? Sufficient this, it would seem, in connexion with the foregoing, to render it in the highest degree probable that the mind will survive the decay and dissolution of the body. And if it survive it at all, the presumptive evidence is strong in favor of its immortality. For, to this end, let us briefly consider the endowments of the mind.

How deep, tender, and abiding its affections! How ardent and unbounded its desires? How wonderful and diversified in operation all its powers!

By memory, for instance, it calls up to present thought objects which lie hid in the far distant past. By imagination it visits, with inconceivable celerity, all places, in all time. The earth which we inhabit is but the point from which imagination commences its career; the centre only of a vast circuit comprised in its survey. It soars even beyond the bounds of the visible creation, consisting of innumerable worlds and

systems, and dares even to enter the "heaven of heavens," the upper sanctuary of the Most High.

In fine, contemplate the various faculties and powers of the mind individually or collectively. Observe their operations either singly or combined. And especially consider how hope buoys it up amid the trials and disappointments of the present, by the cheering and consolatory promise of better things to come. While fear, the apprehension of future ill, serves as a salutary restraint upon present action. Those social affections too, which so closely unite the hearts of kindred spirits, and, indeed, link together the whole extended circle of human relationship; though frequently wounded, or even sundered by the hand of oppression, or of death, how, nevertheless, do they firmly cling to the comforting belief of continued existence in another state, where all the evils and inequalities of the present will be fully rectified. And shall these years be ended? these social affections eternally blasted by the dissolution of the body? shall memory then cease to instruct and please by recalling the past? or imagination to enrapture by its ever varied, fanciful, and glorious representations? Sound philosophy answers no. "The diversified and wonderful endowments of the mind, are, of themselves, sufficient evidence of its immortality."

And such, be it observed, is the conclusion to which, by a somewhat similar train of reasoning, most heathen philosophers and moralists have arrived.

True, the notions which the wisest heathen sages have entertained respecting the nature and duration of the soul are confusedly mixed with fable and uncertainty. And some in ancient, as in modern times, presumed to deny the doctrine of its immortality. But the simple fact that it was believed by some, reasoned about by others, and more or less engaged the attention of all, is sufficient proof of the great importance ever attached to the doctrine, and and also illustrates and confirms the position, that the soul naturally longs for immortality. Most deeply, however, was the truth of the doctrine impressed on the minds of the more intelligent and reflecting heathen,* by the consideration of the unequal distribution of good and evil in the present state of being. They frequently beheld vice and tyranny triumphant, and conscious innocence and virtue suffering the severest indignity and wrong. And they were led to inquire, "What reward has virtue, that, for its attainment, the passions should be subdued, the appetites curbed, and present gratification be forborne?"

Were they told, "Though there is no future, yet you ought to live a virtuous life, since virtuous action so greatly contributes to the happiness of individuals and of nations." Such a reply would scarcely have proved satisfactory. For, however true the admission that the permanency, nay, existence of good society depends on the conduct of the good; it might again, and with reason be asked, "Why seek to build up, or support society at all? Why impose restraints on the natural freedom of man, if there be no hereafter? Why not suffer him, like a splendid brute, as then he would be, to seek to the full, the gratification of his sensual and grovelling propensities? "To eat and drink, since to-morrow he must die," and be no more?

Surely little enjoyment can result from a course of virtuous discipline; from the enlargement of feeling and desire, from the greater cultivation of the social affections, and improvement of the moral and intellectual powers, consequent on a state of society, if man be only thereby made capable of feeling more deeply, more keenly the loss of life—the "total extinction of the enlightened soul."

Some higher motive to virtuous conduct was therefore seen to be needful. A motive operating alike upon the fears and the hopes of men. And such a motive could only be derived from a belief in a future state of being, where all things will be weighed in the balance of justice, and vice be punished, and virtue rewarded.

It follows, then, that they who, for whatever cause, look forward to death as the termination of their being, anticipate a result contrary alike to the dic-

tates of right reason and true philosophy. And hence, although they should boldly affirm, in language attributed to such by one of old, that, "No man was ever known have returned from the grave; for we are born at all adventure; and we shall be hereafter as though we had never been. For the breath in our nostrils is as smoke; and a little spark in the moving of our heart, which being extinguished, our body shall be turned into ashes, and our spirit shall vanish as the soft air; and our name shall be forgotten in time; and no man shall have our works in remembrance; and our life shall pass away as the trace of a cloud, and shall be dispersed as a mist, that is driven away with the beams of the sun, and overcome with the heat thereof. For our time is a very shadow that passeth away, and after our end there is no returning; for it is last sealed that no man cometh again. Come on, therefore, let us enjoy the good things that are present. Let us fill ourselves with costly wines and ointments; and let no flower of the spring pass us by; let us crown ourselves with rose buds before they be withered; let us leave tokens of our joyfulness in every place, for this is our portion, and our lot is this." Yea, more: "Let us oppress the poor righteous man; let us not spare the widow, nor reverence the ancient gray hairs of the aged." Though some should thus reason, yet, as we have seen, such reasoning is fallacious and delusive, having no foundation, save in the guilty fears, or irrational hopes of those by whom it is employed. For, continues the wise man, "such things, they did imagine, and were deceived; for their own wickedness hath blinded them. As for the mysteries of God, they knew them not: neither hoped they for the wages of righteousness, nor discerned a reward for blameless souls. For God created man to be immortal, and made him to be an image of his own eternity."

*Book of Wisdom, 2d chap.

SATURDAY EVENING.—How seldom one thinks of himself! The gay, busy world as it revolves in its ceaseless orbit—the things of fashion and opinion as they dance before the vision—the wild whirl of to-day, which is reckless of to-morrow, all consume the sands of life, and yet we never pause to reflect upon ourselves.

It has been said, that all are foolish by nature; and yet no remark was ever more unjust. We will adduce for example your brightest specimen of genius—one who has the Promethean spark in his soul, who looks upon the landscape and loves it—who sees virtue and falls prostrate at its shrine—and yet practices vice. Vice is a relative term—the Hindoo priest, who urges the widow to mount the funeral pile of murder, is less guilty of crime on account of his ignorance, than the christian, who breaks a less moral tie. So genius, "which knows the right and yet the wrong pursues," is vicious when compared with folly.

How few of the favored sons of talent act up to their high vocation. In all arts, in all sciences, genius, like a comet, is ever eccentric, and its irregularity, comparatively speaking, is a crime—can it be reduced to consistency? Can education and mind be led to adopt the plain morality of an honest yeoman?

Method is every thing—a virtuous system will prove an overmatch for evil habits; and a Saturday Evening should recall one from the troubles and outward assaults of the world to inward communication with himself, his conduct, his location as to here and hereafter. It should be like the cottage of the lover and the laborer—he should sit down beside the fire-side of his own hearth, call around him his children, which are his thoughts, and with them enter into judgement as to the past, and from this calculate upon better things to be performed in the future. Men read history to be informed of the past—they gravely calculate from prediction what may ensue from the aspect of the present political world—and yet forget to look at the past of their own lives, and to draw a horseshoe of their future existence even upon earth. The world is selfish, it is said—and yet how little of man's life is devoted to himself. True it is that ambition claims a part—the love of distinction, of pleasure, of ease,

are creditors which claim more—but real selfishness, which is a side from these outward objects, and which relates to the settlement of our accounts with ourselves, takes no part in the drama of existence, and is untried before the forum of conscience.

How seldom do we strive to be acquainted with ourselves! with the springs of action which governs us—the course of life which we pursue—the very detail of criminal carelessness which marks our conduct—all is unnoticed as we sweep onwards to death.

Is there no remedy—let each Saturday night sit in judgement upon the other six days of the week, and let the Sabbath be devoted to virtuous resolutions, penitence and prayer.

THE CONFESSION.—A cloud was seen to pass suddenly over the features of Maria. The lustre forsook her dark eyes. Her spirit seemed troubled.

"Triumph the lilly on that young cheek Where bloomed the rose."

Ten times that evening did Harvy importune her to acquaint him with the cause of her sadness—but not a word escaped from her lips. Sadly and silently she sat:

And now and then a sigh she stole, And tears began to flow.

Breathes there a wretch so base as to injure you—my dearest—by word or action? Tell me—and by thine heart, as pure as Heaven, I will never rest till I've redressed thy wrongs! Is an awful mystery locked up in thy bosom, that I must know? Tell me the secret—and by the ringlets of thy hair I'll never reveal it, though the blackest torments rack me! tell thine own Harvy "what lies heavy in thy breast!"

She blushed, she placed her fair hands across her bosom, looked languidly into her lover's face, and softly like the last breathings of an expiring saint—she thus confessed: "Tis them darn green apples Harvy."

THE COUNTRY GIRL'S MEMORANDUM.

—As we were going along the street yesterday afternoon, says the Cincinnati Commercial, we picked up a rather nice looking scrap of paper, which was covered all over with a delicate looking hand writing. It was without doubt dropped by some young lady—perhaps young and beautiful, who lives in the country, and is her memorandum of things to be done, while in town. It reads as follows: "Call at Dr. Hawes" and have him look at my decayed teeth; get two papers of pins, and four of assorted needles; buy some grass cloth for a new petticoat; get the May Queen at Thurber's; tell John—that father wants him to send out his sausage filler the next time the team comes out; go to Whitaker's and get Dumas last novel, call at Mrs. D.'s and ask about that worsted work pattern; get a bottle of Camm's Spanish Lustral to stop my hair from coming out; ask Sarah to lend me Mrs. Osgood's poems; get some orris root to make my breath sweeter, provided I do not conclude to have my tooth out; try to meet Alonzo, and have a little talk with him about that moonlight walk; get some cotton for my chemises and Robert's drawers; return James' last novel to Matilda; tell Mr. Smith that the old blind cow has had a fine calf, and that father says he may have it to raise."

Demosthenes and Daniel Webster agree in attributing eloquence to action. Both proved that theory true by their action. "A clergyman, we have heard of, did the same thing more demonstrably. His wife had just been buried, and he was closing the service at her grave. Stretching forth his hand and pointing to the grave," he said, "cease from troubling, and placing his hand upon the coffin, he continued; and resting."

* Lucan.

* Abereombic, on the intellectual powers.

* Such as Cicero, Pluto and Aristotle.