

IMMORTALITY
AND
YOU

by

BASIL VINEY

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IMMORTALITY AND YOU

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I. The Problem Stated

Some day, maybe not for many decades, maybe in a few years, you will die. And after that, what? Do you think there will be a long sleep, ended by a rude awakening, and participation in a universal judgment, with heaven or hell to follow? Unless you happen to belong to one of the "fundamentalist" sects, the thought of that fate will leave you unmoved. You dismiss it as so much fairy tale.

Or do you look for something more like the continuation of this life on another plane: no sudden or irrevocable transition; but a gradual development? Since this is the middle of the twentieth century, you may very likely dismiss that idea also with a sad or superior smile. You don't expect anything at all. There is nothing after death. It is simply what it seems—the end.

But the probability is that your father or mother thought somewhat differently about it, and that to your grandparents those fairy tales seemed solid and solemn fact!

Let us review the changing estimate of the importance and feasibility of a doctrine of immortality in the past few generations.

To the end of the nineteenth century there was in orthodox circles absolute conviction about both God and immortality. The believers in hell were slowly losing the battle with the more charitable of their brethren, who would replace it by a purged doctrine of purgatory. But no one doubted survival.

Today, in this matter, orthodoxy stands very much where it did. Hell has finally disappeared, save in the now inhuman imagination of the Calvinist. You can scarcely be human still to believe in it when all your neighbours have outgrown it. Some even of the "fundamentalists",

like the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Christadelphians, have replaced it by annihilation, which they consider more consistent with the goodness of God. But heaven still stands secure.

Meanwhile, however, where stands the world? For the most part outside the churches altogether. It is not only in Russia that many people of all ages and most young people are quite sure that death is the end. This scepticism, this denial, knows no iron curtain. You meet it everywhere.

In the years immediately preceding the First World War a census of religious belief was taken in an office of some two thousand clerks. Even then, though only a few denied the existence of God, only a few thought personal survival likely. Today, similar analyses show further change.

Belief in God is going. This is easy to understand. For since the nineteen-tens we have had two world wars. Millions of young men have been killed for no obvious fault of their own.

Now if you can believe in survival it may all be made good.

On the earth the broken arcs;
In the heaven a perfect round.*

But how many can believe that today? Therefore, either God is callous, or he isn't there at all. He is a mere fairy tale, like Father Christmas. Those are the only alternatives open to many a modern mind. And, naturally enough, it is better to believe you are an orphan than that your father is a brute!

But why is it that whilst the orthodox churches have for the most part lost their hold, we Unitarians and Free Christians have stood our ground; or at least have lost less, relatively, than the others? Surely because in the orthodox churches reliance was placed far more on the Bible than

* Browning, "Abt Vogler".

on reason or intuition. They had built on the sand, we on the "impregnable rock".

Not that we have any cause for complacency or self-congratulation. We have certainly not gathered into our fold more than a tiny fraction of those who have left the orthodox churches. Yet we should have attracted them. I believe at one time we would have done so. Whence, then, this failure? May it be because we have lost something of our old confidence in survival?

The pioneers of Unitarianism, in Britain and elsewhere, took immortal life for granted. Logically, degrees of certitude were recognised; one was sure of judgment and the future life, more sure of God, most sure of self; but there was confidence in all three. This was the attitude alike of the early Scriptural Unitarians, and of the later Unitarians, who broke free from Biblical authority and based their faith on reason or intuition.

It will not do to say that the confidence of the pioneers was due to their reliance on scripture. They certainly put the Bible on a pedestal, but they never accepted total infallibility. (Even Joseph Priestley distinguishes in value and reliability between the Gospels.) One feels in reading these early divines that were the Bible taken away it would make no difference to their belief in God as Creator, or their awareness of God as indwelling Spirit.

This is true of their successors also. Martineau, for all his reverence for Jesus, consciously founded his faith in God on an intuition more fundamental than reason, though he had an armoury of reasons ready with which to confound the atheists and agnostics. And because he was so sure of God he was sure of immortality. For him it was an inference drawn from an intuition. The same holds for Theodore Parker and Frances Power Cobbe. Neither of them was in the least Christocentric. Frances Cobbe abstained from formally joining the Unitarians because

they still made too much of Christ and the Bible, yet once she had emerged from her brief agnostic phase she never doubted personal survival. The same holds also for Voysey, founder of the Theistic Church, who regarded Jesus as latterly in some degree unbalanced, and placed him lower than the Old Testament prophets.

It is but fair to add that for Francis William Newman immortality was but a reasonable hope, and for John Stuart Mill, in his final tentative theistic phase, a very faint hope; no slightest "degree of certitude" there. But, apart from these two, I question whether any nineteenth-century Unitarian doubted immortality more than the solipsist really doubts the existence of an objective external universe, or the determinist, outside his study, some degree of human responsibility! Certainly their rich emotional lives were never clouded by such doubt.

But now there is a real gulf between those "degrees of certitude". We still believe in God; that is, in a First Cause; and we hope he is something like the Heavenly Father of Jesus, who cared even for the sparrow; but are we sure? As for survival—for too many of us now the mood is hope rather than trust. And the world wants more than hope. It wants more, now, even than the confident trust of a Cobbe or a Martineau. That would have sufficed once, but now nothing less than proof will arrest.

For the world has lost faith in God because it is sure that death is the end; and only demonstration that death is NOT the end will restore its faith. For this generation, Unitarianism begins at the wrong place. When it still preaches survival it does so because, in spite of appearances, it still believes in the care of God. But the world wants survival first. Given proof of that, it may again begin to worship God. But we, as Unitarians, offer no proof.

A friendly Romanist critic, G. K. Chesterton, once likened the Unitarian to a man climbing a gradual slope,

discarding, as he mounts higher, one creedal garment after another: the infallible book—the infallible church—the incarnation—the atonement—till at last he stands on the topmost peak with only God and immortality left. Some Unitarians, he said, have the wit to stop there; they still have the essentials. Others, mistaking mere movement for progress, still go on, plunging right over the precipice into sheer nescience. He might have added that as they do so they still sing lustily about "onward and upward for ever"!

There are, there always have been, and presumably always will be, two sorts of Unitarians: those for whom freedom is the means to nobler faith, and those who stress the freedom, mistaking the means for the end. But why do any of us fall into this sort of trap? Partly because of this blind reverence for mere freedom as such; partly through a dogmatic, unwarrantable, and quite deterministic assumption that you must go on mechanically; but chiefly because we are unconsciously influenced, as the unchurched masses are, by orthodox materialistic science. But we ought to know better.

Whatever the reason, the growth of humanism in our movement in America is significant. And it is a warning that even here, in a recent series of excellent articles in *The Inquirer* on Unitarian beliefs, immortality was omitted.

Let us now consider the grounds for this almost worldwide incredulity about the future life. The three outstanding reasons are: the exploration of space; a new theory of self, which denies it reality; and the filtering downward of elementary medical knowledge about the dependence of mind and memory on brain.

It is also argued that it is immoral to offer reward or threaten punishment hereafter as an incentive to right conduct here. The last contention is not new, but we hear a good deal more of it than hitherto. It has gathered weight in the atmosphere of scepticism generated by the

other contentions born of astronomical, psychological, and biological research. We must devote some attention to attacks from all quarters.

II. Ethics and Survival

We are told that it is selfish to expect personal survival; that belief therein has no true religious or spiritual value; that we should rise beyond all thought of reward, as above all fear of punishment; that what Jesus called the Life Eternal is a matter of quality, not quantity, and that we can experience it here on earth by selflessness, or in æsthetic or spiritual ecstasy, and that this should suffice.

There are two points here that demand careful consideration: the relation between faith and reward, and the relation between quantity and quality. Take the problem of reward first. It was this that worried Francis Newman. It sometimes seems that he would prefer to remain in doubt, lest the purity of motive be sullied by thoughts of loss and gain. In *The Soul** he suggests that assurance of survival may be "the last reward reserved by God for faithful souls" when the purity of motive has become incorruptible. It would not be good for the rest of us to have that assurance. This, of course, is a very different position from that of John Stuart Mill—that God will grant us immortality if he can do so, but that perhaps there is something in the nature of things making it impossible. Though modern humanists might hesitate to use Mill's words, his position, not Newman's, is theirs. There is a suspicion that, in view of certain discoveries in different scientific fields, the thing is impossible.

To that we return later on. But Newman's position,

* Chapter 5, "Hopes concerning Future Life."

more consistent with a full theistic faith, is not difficult to answer. Of all men who ever lived, the surest of survival was Emanuel Swedenborg. He was as sure of the reality of the spiritual world as the Englishman who has been to America is sure of the existence of that continent. Yet he was as insistent as Francis Newman, as the purest ethicist, that all thought of either punishment or reward must be excluded from the moral life. Goodness is not goodness at all if either dread or anticipation enters in: in so far as they do, to that degree motive is soiled, and, for that matter, reward forfeited. You are simply not good enough for heaven till your motive is pure and selfless. Translated there before, you are stifled and unhappy, craving only to be let go to some lower realm.*

We may also remind the ethicists that endless life, as distinct from mere survival of the death of the earthly body, can never be proved. It would take endless time to prove it; so it must always remain a matter of faith.

Before leaving this topic, however, it might be added that while it would be presumptuous for anybody to claim immortality as a right for himself, we may have a very good right to claim it for others. The average man would be quick to appreciate the difference, and to insist that if death is the end of the hero, saint, or genius cut off in mid-career, or, for that matter, if it is the end of any promising child, there is something amiss with the universe.

Now let us turn to the question of quantity and quality. Of course there is a difference, and of course it is theoretically possible to live for ever on very low planes of being. Swedenborg says some people prefer hell. Of course, too, it is possible to live the life eternal in an earthly body. One may be caught up in an ecstasy of goodwill, perhaps during participation in a religious service, perhaps when success is

* See Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion*, section 739, pars. 5 and 6.

achieved in some good cause. Or one may be rapt in an ecstasy of intimate affection, or of æsthetic emotion, listening to inspired music or gazing on sublime scenery. In such experiences we *are* living the life eternal, perhaps too easily. Even if we are loyal in our service of the higher we are getting so much more than we merit. We need not wait till after death to be tempted by the highest; and it is so much more subtle than the temptation of the lowest!

But for all the distinction between quality and quantity there is a relationship between them. Granted that an hour of ecstasy is worth a decade of drab life, of mere awareness, that hour is going to make the thought of annihilation, which else might be easy to endure, quite unbearable. Even Thomas Henry Huxley, whose most thrilling moments were probably those of purely intellectual emotion associated with scientific discovery and hypothesis, once wrote to a friend that he would prefer the hell of which the orthodox Christians warned him than the nothingness he anticipated. And in "Cleon" Browning has exposed "the immortality of works" for the sham that it is. The King, who dreads death, has been congratulating the creative artist, for—

What

Thou writest, paintest, stays; that does not die:
Sappho survives, because we sing her songs,
And Aeschylus, because we read his plays.

to which the poet retorts,

Say rather that my fate is deadlier still . . .
When all my works, wherein I prove my worth
Are present still, to mock me in men's mouths . . .
I, I, the feeling, thinking, acting man . . .
Sleep in my urn. It is so horrible . . .

The average man will feel that the true contrast is not between those moments of ecstasy which make the thought of death (if it *is* death) more loathsome, and an endless,

meaningless life of monotony; but between those earthly glimpses of the life eternal, and the endless life eternal of which they seem to be premonitions. And in this the average man is right. There is something amiss with the universe if death is the end of the young hero-saint like Jesus, crucified by selfish and stupid men—of the immature musical genius like Arriaga, killed by the tuberculous germ in his twentieth year—because it is so unjust. There is also something amiss with the universe if death is the end of the old saint like Buddha, of the mature genius like Verdi, because it is incredibly wasteful thus to spill so splendid an accumulation of garnered experiences, so noble a growth of wisdom, ability and character. There is even something amiss if death means the end of those who merely share the vision of the saint and the genius, sitting at their feet. And we all in some degree share the vision of God!

There is a sad limit to God's love (and that cannot be) or to his power (and that might be) if the quality does not include the quantity. In this I take my stand not with Francis Newman, but with Frances Cobbe.

III. Thwarted Hopes

But these are hopes, yearnings, mere dreams perhaps? So most of the world thinks today. It looks as though God's power is limited. More likely, thinks the young world, reborn through the pangs of two world wars and atomic discoveries into perilous humanistic hopes, there is no God at all. He never interferes this side of death when things go wrong. And he can't put the wrong things right on the other side (the hope and trust of the ages) because there isn't any other side at all. Only the broken arcs. No perfect round anywhere, only the pathetic

mirage of a tortured Jewish prophet two thousand years ago. Only the groundless trust of a Victorian poet who died before science had finally split the idealist's trinity of truth, beauty, and goodness by exposing truth for the ugly thing it is; demonstrating thereby the ultimate victory of loveless force over goodness and beauty.

Meanwhile the orthodox churches still preach the Bible to a world for the most part contemptuous (despite the revival of fundamentalism); and a few Unitarians, who cannot begin to prove immortality, still preach God, and sometimes also immortality, to a world unheeding.

Meanwhile where lies truth? *Is she odious?* How much of our faith, our apparently reasonable faith, is day-dream; how much groundless trust? Is there any foundation in fact?

Count me as one still old-fashioned enough to believe that theism will be with us when humanism (like its precursor, positivism) is a forgotten fad—still able to trust both moral and æsthetic intuitions—still able, even were there no other evidence than that of God's existence, to trust in him, despite appearances, for life after death.

But that is not enough for the world, because the world can't take it. It is not helping us to get our message over. Is there anything else we can give? Is there anything anyone has to give?

Let us agree (putting aside for the moment problems suggested by human mortality—the incidence of accident—the inhumanity of man to man) that it is still reasonable to believe in God. Let us agree that apart from God there is no explanation of either order, beauty, or organic development; to say nothing of the emergence of consciousness in animal and man. Let us also admit, remembering those problems we just set aside, that if this world-order is all, there is something peculiarly unsatisfactory about it. It is like a building only half-finished, or like

the mere scaffolding, or like the wrong side of a tapestry. If only the other side were there, so much that is now confused would become clear; chaos would no longer be only half-resolved, but completely changed into cosmos. If only there were the bare possibility of survival, what a difference it would make to the outlook of the great unchurched! If only we **COULD** trust despite appearances!

But how can we, when astronomy explores infinite space and finds only the indefinite extension of this material universe; when psychology, seeking the essential self, discovers no real entity; when biology triumphantly reduces all thoughts and emotions to nerve tremors?

IV. Where is Heaven?

The sheer immensity of the universe is overpowering, and it would seem to make little difference whether our world is one of many, or a unique island of life in a boundless desert of scorching suns and frozen moons. In the former case, can we mean more to God than an ants' nest to a man? In the latter, though we might mean much to God, there is still apparently no room for heaven. Beyond that dome of blue or black there is still but space; dotted with a myriad stars, it is true, but all obviously belonging to this material order.

These thoughts are very oppressive to many, their weight often the heavier because unwitting; but surely they are due to our limited imagination? It is owing to poor imagination that we find it hard to believe that a boundless God cares intimately for all his countless children. We think of him too anthropomorphically; forgetting that after all, *because* he is infinite, the apparently impossible becomes possible: the telescopic and the microscopic

vision are one. It is owing to a similar imaginative paucity that we find it hard to conceive of another order of space, or of space of more than three dimensions, or of the possibility of another world order existing in THIS space, invisible and inaudible to us because we are not "tuned in" thereto. Thus there may be at least three ways out of the prison of this material universe, and to one or other of them death may be the key.

V. Given or Achieved ?

So much for the astronomical nightmare. Now for the psychological. It used to be taken for granted that every human was a real self, insulated completely from all others by the body, the only means of communication being by speech and gesture. On this view, common to Jewry, Christendom, and Islam, the human person is a real and abiding entity; the chief end of creation. Immortality follows as a matter of course.

But this self, we are now told, is illusory. You are not an entity that feels and thinks and acts. You are a mere sequence of feelings, thoughts, and deeds. You do not *have* experiences. You *are* a mere string of experiences. You have no more real existence than the river, whose waters change momentarily. On this view survival seems, at least to the western mind, less likely than hitherto.

Now it must be admitted that certain discoveries new to the west seem to favour this "flux" theory of personality. Thus there is no doubt that we are not the completely isolated entities we once thought we were. Thoughts, moods, even the details of experience are sometimes transmitted from one person to another apart from the material and bodily agencies of communication. We are not like planets

in space, but rather like islands in the ocean, linked in the subconscious by submarine land.

Then certain disconcerting facts have come to light, as abnormal and morbid types have been studied with more care and sympathy. Thus in some rare instances memory disappears, and a new memory, even a different temperament, builds up in the old body. Or occasionally two personalities, each with its own memory chain, alternate in the one body.* All this would appear at first sight to suggest that personality is even more ephemeral than the physical body! But we must guard against hasty conclusions. Sometimes these alternating strands unite into the single continuous memory of an enlarged personality: the dissociation only temporary; the reunified person able to recall all his previous life back to early childhood.

What we must concede to the flux theory is that personality is not to be taken for granted! But it surely is at once challenging and exhilarating that it is an achievement rather than an endowment? God gives the strands, and the power to weave, but leaves the integration to you, so that your self is the more truly yours, because largely of your own making.

Now if we find reason to believe in immortality on other grounds, this flux theory in itself gives no occasion for doubt, except that perhaps the attainment of immortality, like that of an integrated self on earth, depends on you. Perhaps it rests with you whether death is the end of you or not!

This is not my view of the matter. I hold with Frances Cobbe that we are all "doomed to be saved". Yet the doubt is a stimulating one.

* See case in Dr. Binet's *Altérations de la Personnalité*, pp. 6-20; also quoted in Myers, *Human Personality*, Ch. 2.

VI. Body or Mind ?

But there is nothing stimulating in the thought that, whatever our conduct of life, death is the end of us. And it is the depressing denial, not the stimulating doubt, that troubles so many today.

Popular books on psychology still teach that memories and association-tracks between them are inscribed on the brain, something like tunes on a gramophone record; and the whole thing sounds so plausible that it is simply taken for granted. It fits in with appearances too! Memory often fades as the years accumulate; and what more natural, since the brain is wearing out? Every night consciousness goes blank (or seems to) because the brain is tired. How, then, can we possibly believe that it will survive the dissolution of the brain in death?

One need not be a materialist to accept this theory of "psycho-physical parallelism". One may reject as incredible the statement that brain movements generate consciousness, yet it is still hard to see, if memory depends on brain-records, how any real personality can survive death. It is rightly felt that personal survival implies continuity of memory. Mind may not be generated by matter, but body and brain would still seem to be essential to both the birth and the continued existence of created or derivative mind.

All this thinking may be both superficial and fallacious (like the current attempts to explain evolution solely in terms of struggle and random variation), but it is superficially convincing, it has the support of many scientists, and it has the average man helpless and hopeless in its grip.

Nor can we find any answer to it in the writings of Unitarians like Cobbe and Martineau; simply because, strangely enough, they do not seem to have been aware of its implications.

If only a hole could be knocked into this theory of "psycho-physical parallelism"! Well of course it has been, long ago, by Bergson. In *Matter and Memory* (1908) he outlined a new theory of the relation between mind and body, giving plentiful evidence to show that the brain is the organ of recollection rather than of actual memory, which he regarded as immaterial. If the French philosopher is right it is no mere jest to say that the brain is the organ we forget with, for its function is in a very real sense to forget rather than to remember. It screens off all the past that happens to be irrelevant to the present situation; so that death, being the removal of the screen, may well imply a vivid recapture of all the personal past: innumerable forgotten details returning as they sometimes do in the detension of dream.

Thus Bergson gives scientific warrant for some of Tennyson's most telling lines in "In Memoriam":

We ranging down this lower track,
The path we came by, thorn and flower,
Is shadowed by the growing hour,
Lest life should fail in looking back.

So be it: there no shade can last
In that deep dawn behind the tomb:
But clear from marge to marge shall bloom
The eternal landscape of the past.

This is perhaps the most striking example extant of the poet's intuition anticipating the scientist's discovery.

No subsequent discoveries about brain locations, or the relation between grey matter and electric currents, have invalidated Bergson's arguments, or restored psycho-physical parallelism to its former apparently impregnable position. But it is the stale science that captures the multitude, and anyhow Bergson would never become a best seller!

Nor is the prospect of eternally reviewing one's past life particularly alluring, and that seems to be the only one facing the disembodied soul! We would continue to live, not merely to retrospect. But we would meet again those we once knew on earth. We would meet those of earlier generations hitherto known to us only by the books or music they left behind them; a joy Channing anticipated with full confidence. We would grow endlessly in intellectual grasp and emotional depth; a prospect which seemed inevitable to Browning, since God's universe is infinite. But all this implies no vague disembodied existence, but the assumption of another body; immaterial, if you use the term matter in the narrow scientific sense, but substantial, in that it is the form through which the individual consciousness manifests itself to other consciousnesses; and living in a substantial, visible, audible world: the spiritual body of Paul—the spiritual world of Swedenborg: the body more responsive to the indwelling mind (so that self-deception and deceit alike become impossible); the world corresponding more closely to the spiritual status of its inhabitants.

Is there such a body? Can there be such a world? If, even after Bergson, anatomical and physiological discoveries again make it seem unlikely, the answer is ready to hand. Psychological research has not *proved* immortality, if by that you imply endless life. As already stated, that, in the nature of things, cannot be proved. But in my judgment it has as certainly proved survival of earthly death as it has proved telepathy and clairvoyance.

But what a curious illustration of the almost ineradicable materialistic bias from which we suffer, that telepathy has to be proved over and over again! And how unfortunate that attention is latterly concentrated on the deliberate telepathy of detail rather than on the spontaneous telepathy of crisis, which is so much more significant and illuminating.

The telepathy of crisis, often between the dying and the living, sometimes between the dead and the living, was proved to the hilt in the latter part of the nineteenth century. There are numerous instances in Myers' *Human Personality and its Survival of Bodily Death*. Yet now we have numberless petty experiments to show that if X draws a few geometrical figures, Z in the next room, or in the other hemisphere, reproduces a larger percentage of them correctly than mere coincidence can explain. This sort of thing is on the level of a parlour game. I do not say it signifies nothing, but it is now quite needless, and it degrades psychical research.

It is true that many cases of apparent telepathy from the dead might be explicable in terms of extremely circuitous telepathy among the living; but not all. There are instances dating as far back as Swedenborg where the discarnate entity has revealed facts, afterwards verified, unknown to any person living at the time.

Even so, the incorrigible sceptic will find a way out. Thus it is urged that the information must have been transmitted from subconscious to subconscious in the earth-life of the entity—and this though telepathy itself, by ignoring the law of inverse squares that all material and etheric waves obey, suggests the immateriality of mind.

And so we find Frederick Myers, who had endeavoured in his lifetime to work out new devices to trip the telepathic extremists, apparently hitting on the other side, in conjunction with Sidgwick, Gurney, and others, upon the ingenious means of cross-correspondence. Somewhat complex messages are divided between several independent automatic scripts, in such a way that only by bringing together and interweaving them is the full sense apparent.*

* See Tyrrell, *The Personality of Man* (Pelican Books), Chs. 17 and 18; Saltmarsh, *Evidences of Personal Survival from Cross-correspondences*.

Mark that I have said nothing of methods involving the entrancement of the medium at a seance; methods to which I was myself strongly averse at one time, and concerning which I am still uncertain to what degree they should be deliberately encouraged. Neither telepathy from beyond nor automatic script (the entity using only the hand of the medium) necessarily involves entrancement. Nevertheless, these other methods, too, are worth consideration. The entranced medium may often be "possessed" only by his own secondary personality, but when so possessed it would seem that he or she is more liable to telepathic impact alike from the living and the dead. And few who have made an impartial study of the matter would deny that on occasion it would seem that discarnate entities use the brain or the voice of the medium directly, she herself being either unconscious or out of the body.

As a Unitarian, conversant with the "higher criticism", I am depressed by the ignorance in spiritualistic circles—by the readiness with which the most incredible miracles in the Bible or anywhere else are accepted and explained along spiritualistic lines. But though I incline to accept the report of Jesus appearing, in what was evidently an unearthly body, to Mary Magdalene, and to the disciples on the Emmaus road, and to reject the story of his showing Thomas the wound-marks in a very earthly body, and of his eating fish by the lakeside, I dare not deny dogmatically that he may have materialised.

VII. Unitarianism and the New Light

One question remains. Who are to be the vehicle of this new revelation; a comparatively large body of often uncritical and superstitious spiritualists, a tiny body of

educated but not specifically religious psychical researchers, or a small body of critical and religious Unitarians? What answer shall we try to give to that question ourselves? On it our own future may depend to no small degree.

New lights (new at least in our western European culture) have arrived in our day—the light of mental healing and the light of communication with the dead pre-eminent among them. Each has been the occasion of the founding of new religious sects: Christian Science and the other healing cults in the one field; divers organisations of spiritualist churches in the other. There is not the slightest doubt that these movements (either group already collectively much larger than ours) are attracting converts from orthodoxy, and not infrequently from agnosticism also, who two generations ago would automatically have joined the nearest Unitarian church! Here is the real reason of our lack of progress. Some of us satisfied in our theism, some of us restive to move on farther (even if it means plunging over that Chestertonian precipice)—for these new cults we often have little sympathy. And so the new light has in each case largely become the property of extremists who, seeing it alone, lose all sense of balance and proportion, and do a poor service to the light itself, warning thoughtful people away.

Thus the Christian Scientist, through his emphatic denial of the very existence of disease, is for ever concentrating on it. And thus many spiritualists, like many psychoanalysts, see a hidden significance in the most meaningless dream (born maybe of unwise eating and drinking), and consider the most trivial seance a more spiritual experience than sunset or symphony.

The consequence of this is that on these matters most people are hopelessly biased. The vast majority, be they sceptical or antagonistic, see in spiritualism only the credulity, the self-deception, the humbug; whilst too

many spiritualists themselves often miss the glory of this world in attempting to live already in the next: the seance the highlight of life; mere endlessness mistaken for a superior quality of living.

Martineau perhaps exaggerates a little when he assures us that we have no right to suppose any other world diviner than this; but his balance is assuredly saner than the spiritualist's, to whom an apport is more wonderful than Strauss's "Death and Transfiguration", and a mediocre trance speech more welcome than a parable of Jesus. Nevertheless, the world wants the assurance of survival that nowadays only the spiritualist can give. The world needs it sorely, even if we, to whom faith and trust come easily, can well do without it. But is the average spiritualist the best person to give it?

Surely we should be the first in the field wherever the merest suspicion of new light glints through! We, more than any other movement, should possess just that balance between friendly interest and critical ability which is here essential.

I am not suggesting that every Unitarian church should have its psychic circle, and I would much prefer to sit under the simplest lay preacher than to listen to the average "trance address", which I am persuaded far more often comes from the medium herself (possibly from her secondary personality) than from the other side; but I *am* suggesting that we should not be afraid were we to discover a few mediums in our midst, and that it would do us no harm to make occasional contact with those in the spiritualistic movement whose viewpoint approximates closely to our own.

It is surely both significant and welcome that the principles of the National Spiritualist Association read like a paraphrase of James Freeman Clark's five points, with "the communion of saints" added. Significant, too, that so

many scripts, purporting to come from beyond, bear witness to the shedding alike of traditional or materialist prejudices, and the approach to a faith like ours!

If we welcomed more of the new light, if we let it illumine our own message, it would surely be of great benefit. We should rescue our movement from the peril of mere vagueness and aridity; and we might rescue spiritualism from the astrologers and numerologists and all the other fortune-tellers who have made it a laughing-stock to most thoughtful folk. We might even prevent mental healing from becoming the exclusive property of the Peculiar People and the Christian Scientists.

VIII. Harmony or Unison?

There still remains the question: Granted survival, can we glimpse farther than the threshold?

There are three possibilities: reincarnation, temporary continuity culminating in re-absorption, and unending personal persistence. The two first are characteristic of the Far Eastern religions, Buddhism especially; the last of Jewry, Christendom, and Islam.

There would appear to be actual evidence that reincarnation sometimes occurs. Lafcadio Hearn tells of a Japanese boy who distinctly remembered an immediately precedent incarnation; giving details, afterwards verified, of his former parents, home, neighbourhood, and premature death. The incredulity of the small boy's parents and of the local "headmen" or magistrates (for all their Buddhism) was turned into complete conviction when they travelled to a distant part of the country and found every detail of his story verified.*

* See Hearn, *Gleanings in Buddha-fields*, Ch. 10 (based on an early nineteenth-century Japanese manuscript).

It is possible, of course, to think out an alternative explanation. The second boy might somehow have telepathically tapped the memory of the first boy and mistaken it for his own. But that doesn't sound very convincing. In this, and a few other instances, reincarnation seems the less unlikely explanation.

But a theory of general reincarnation may well open up more questions than it solves. Continuity of memory is an essential ingredient in continuity of identity, and to suggest that past memory-chains are merely obscured till final enlightenment restores them sounds rather like begging the question.

Buddhists, Brahminists, and Theosophists argue that all injustice can be explained (or explained away) by reincarnation. We are but reaping the reward or the retribution of deeds done before our present birth. But surely this very belief tends to harden the heart in all but the most saintly—as witness the caste system of India.

Yet it would seem rash to deny the possibility of occasional reincarnation under unusual circumstances, such as premature death. But reincarnation on earth is not what is usually meant by immortality.

The flux theory, however, suggests that though we may indeed survive death, it may not be for ever. Buddha, who anticipated it by nearly three millennia, believed in survival, in reincarnation, in intermediate lives on higher planes of being, and ultimately in Nirvana, which is usually interpreted as re-absorption into the Supreme: perhaps not loss of consciousness, but loss of all personal distinction. This outlook repels western man (and not only western man) as wrong somewhere; but the discovery of telepathy, which begins to break down the barriers between "thou" and "I", suggests that it may be true.

Theosophists, some spiritualists, and even Swedenborgians, assume that in another life telepathy will be the

dominant or even the only means of interchange. Now it would seem that the ultimate outcome of this must be the submergence of all separate existence—soul transmitting thought, mood, and expression to soul with such fullness that whatever one thinks and feels the other will think and feel, so that coalescence, complete identity, is inevitable. Mark, too, that the end of separate selves implies, among other things, the end of human love. For love is impossible without separation and distinction. Love is not unison, but harmony. Similarly, re-absorption means the end of love between man and God.

Surely all this points to the great lack in Buddhism: the lack of any awareness of the person and consequently of the love of God. Here, surely, we should prefer Jesus as our norm? However inadequate may be the symbols of fatherhood or motherhood, that is because they are less than the truth about God in his relation to us. Still further astray is Buddha's grand but unsatisfying concept of a great impersonal moral law.

"But you have told us that telepathy is a fact," you say? Yes, but my guess (and it is also Hudson's) is that it is likelier the relic of a dying talent than the premonition of a new and higher one; that it is among the animals rather than the angels that it reaches its completest development; among the birds that wheel in flocks and migrate in myriads. The whole course of organic evolution is towards increasing separation; from the colonial animals, several of which share a stomach or even a nerve-chord together, to the arthropods and vertebrates, each with its own separate body; and through the latter to man. Now man, if he is wise, is at once the most specialised and least stereotyped of animals: most specialised, so that good houses may be built by a few craftsmen that many may reside therein; so that good music may be composed and played and sung by the few that many may be inspired thereby; least

stereotyped, so that each may appreciate the talents and share the gifts of all his fellows.

Now if a life after death is possible, is it reasonable to suppose that this tendency will be reversed? Assuredly not! Whatever may be the function of telepathy in that life we may rest assured, with Swedenborg, that the key-word may be sometimes harmony, more often perhaps polyphony, never unison!

Tennyson expresses it perfectly:

That each, who seems a separate whole,
Should move his rounds, and fusing all
The skirts of self again, should fall
Remerging in the general Soul,

Is faith as vague as all unsweet:
Eternal form shall still divide
The eternal soul from all beside;
And I shall know him when we meet.

IX. In View of Death

And now, when all is said, how should we behave when death approaches us? I wish that more of us could feel about it like that broad Anglican clergyman of the eighteenth century, the unjustly forgotten poet, Edward Young. He wrote of earth:

This is the vestibule . . . life's theatre shut.
Strong death alone can heave the massive bar
And make us embryos of existence free. . . .
From real life but little more remote
The future embryo, slumbering in his sire.
Embryos we must be, till we burst the shell
(Yon ambient, azure shell) and spring to life.

If the young man is told that a year or two hence he will go to America he probably thrills to it: a whole new world!

But if the old man is told that in a year or two he will die he probably shrinks from it. Why is that? Because he fears hell? No one believes in hell now—or at least no one believes it to be his own destination! Probably because he thinks death is the end, and for all his grumbling he doesn't want to end. But if he has faith he still shrinks? Because somehow doubts still creep in? Yet he really is going to a new world. His should be the greater thrill!

Though there is the other danger, not limited to spiritualists, of anticipating overmuch. Charles Kingsley once wrote to a friend, "Why do folks cling to this half-existence and call it life?" and again, "let anything be asked for me except a long life". Except where health is badly failing, that is morbid.

Nor is it merely a matter of belief about what happens after. It is not only your Huxley, dreading annihilation, not only your Cowper, fearing damnation, who shun death. No one was more sure of better life beyond than Browning, yet he so loved this world that sometimes he reproached himself for preferring the prospect of endless life here to transition there. True, he condemns this mood. It betrays lack of imagination, if not of faith in God's love and power.

Yet, after all, it is best and wisest to live one life at a time; even one day at a time. It is more grateful to God to trust in him for the future, and serve and enjoy him now.

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