

MISCELLANEOUS.

AN INTERVIEW WITH MR. EDISON.

Judge Charles H. Chase, of Lansing, Michigan, in his article on "The Survival of Personality," published in the current number, refers to Thomas A. Edison's comments on immortality which some time ago passed through the columns of our daily press, and since the details have probably been forgotten by this time we reproduce here a portion of the interview he had with Mr. Edward Marshall as reported in the *New York Times*.

Mr. Edison said:

"It is absurd to talk of the 'mercy, kindness, or love' of God. Perhaps matter is getting to be more progressive. That may be it. But—God—the Almighty? No! Nature is what we know. We do not know the gods of the religions. And nature is not kind or merciful, or loving. If God made me—the fabled God of three qualities of which I spoke: mercy, kindness, love—He also made the fish I catch and eat. And where do His mercy, kindness, and love for the fish come in? No; nature made us—nature did it all—not the gods of the religions. And nature did it mercilessly; she had no thought of mercy or against it. She did it impersonally, what we call cruelly."

When questioned by Mr. Marshall as to his belief in immortality, Edison replied: "Heaven? Shall I, if I am good and earn reward, go to heaven when I die? No—no. I am not I—I am not an individual—I am an aggregate of cells, as, for instance, New York City is an aggregate of individuals. Will New York City go to heaven?" He went on slowly: "I do not think we are individuals any more than a great city is an individual. If you cut your finger and it bleeds, you lose cells. They are the individuals. You don't know your cells any more than New York City knows its five millions of individuals. You don't know who they are. No; all this talk of an existence for us, as individuals, beyond the grave, is wrong. It is born of our tenacity of life—our desire to go on living—our dread of coming to an end as individuals. I do not dread it, though. Personally I cannot see any use of a future life."

"But the soul!" Mr. Marshall protested, "The soul—"

"Soul? soul? What do you mean by the soul? The brain?"

"Well, for the sake of argument," said Mr. Marshall, "call it the brain, or what is in the brain—the human mind?"

"Absolutely, no," Edison replied with emphasis. "There is no more reason to believe that my human brain will be immortal than there is to think that one of my phonographic cylinders will be immortal. My phonographic cylinders are mere records of sounds which have been impressed upon them."

Under given conditions, some of which we do not at all understand, any more than we understand some of the conditions of the brain, the phonographic cylinders give off these sounds again. For the time being we have perfect speech, or music, practically as perfect as is given off by the tongue when the necessary forces are set in motion by the brain. Yet no one thinks of claiming immortality for the cylinders or the phonograph. Then why claim it for the brain mechanism or the power that drives it? Because we don't know what this power is, shall we call it immortal? As well call electricity immortal because we do not know what it is. If a man has a strong will, he can force his brain to do this thing or that—make this effort, abstain from making one."

"Is the will a part of the brain?" Mr. Marshall inquired.

"I do not know," was the answer. "It may be or it may not be. The will may be a form of electricity, or it may be a form of some other power of which we as yet know nothing. But whatever it is, it is material; on that we may depend. After death the force, or power, we call will undoubtedly endures; but it endures in this world, and not in the next. And so with the thing we call life, or the soul—mere speculative terms for a material thing which, under given conditions, drives this way or that. It, too, endures in this world, not the other."

At the time when this report was current we discussed Mr. Edison's views in *The Open Court* as follows (Vol. XXV, p. 2):

"Mr. Edison says that he expects to live on merely in the ticks and clicks of telegraphs and in telephones and his various other inventions. But no 'merely' is needed! That immortality is big enough for any one of us. In addition he will live also in the brain of other inventors who will carry his work to further accomplishment.

"Wherever any one of Mr. Edison's inventions is used there is part of his thought, of his mind, of his soul, and that is the true Edison. Will he deny it? Scarcely. Mr. Edison's personal friends and the members of his family may love Mr. Edison himself—his person, his character, the twinkle in his eye and the smile on his lip, the human in him—better than his thoughts; or presumably they love his personality and admire his genius. But the recording angel of history, the destiny of mankind that doles out our rewards in immortality, cares naught for the former and weighs the soul only, and this soul of man, according to its merits, will take part in the life after death, in what is commonly called immortality."

AN ETERNITY LIMITED IN ONE DIRECTION.

BY EWING SUMMERS.

How can that be? for

1. Whatever has an end of existence must in the nature of things have had a beginning;

2. Whatever has a beginning must have an end.

The above postulates seem to me to be intuitive or axiomatic.

I believe it was the "school-men" who invented the technical terms *eternitas a parte ante* and *eternitas a parte post*; but I think these phrases were dropped a century ago or earlier as unscientific or otherwise too absurd for use.