

THE SURVIVAL OF PERSONALITY.

BY CHARLES H. CHASE.

THE age-old question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" is always of intense interest to mankind and has been so in all ages. How great that interest is we can appreciate only when some prominent man denies the possibility of survival of the self and consciousness after physical death, as Thomas A. Edison did a few years ago.¹ The pulpit and press comment thus provoked is a sure index to that interest. It is doubtless true that 99% or more of the world's population believe in immortality—not the immortality of influence merely, but the continuous existence after death of the conscious, thinking, willing self, the ego of man's individuality. Yet with the great majority this belief depends not on any conscious reasoning process, but upon what may be termed intuition. Indeed, the great masses of the people cannot defend their belief in that regard.

And because the ordinary man (the "common herd," as some contemptuously designate the masses) cannot defend his belief, he is thought not to count for or against the question, by those who assume for themselves a monopoly of philosophic thinking. The common ideas of God are crude and anthropomorphic; the common ideas of the soul, heaven, and the future existence are fashioned after things which man knows here on this mundane sphere, being therefore materialistic, and for these reasons his views are not to be relied on. In such ways are we wont to place ourselves into an aristocracy of correct thinking.

But this common intuition is, without doubt, more to be relied on than is the opinion of any specialist who has devoted his life to the pursuit of any one, or any small number of, lines of scientific or philosophic investigation. The training of a physician, so-called biologist, bacteriologist, chemist, toxicologist, physicist (and in

¹ See report of his views on page 380.

many and any other specialist lines) quite incapacitates them to reason upon religio-philosophic questions.

The foregoing statement may be regarded by some as a bald and unwarrantable assumption; but its truth and the reason therefor may be indicated as follows: The ignorant man is not usually onesided in his development; his field of vision may be small, but it is comprehensive and manysided in that field. He may be superstitious, inconsistent, fallacious in his reasoning, but in his intuitive grasp of great fundamentals he surpasses his more educated and specialized brother. The specialist is trained to ignore what he cannot discover by his senses—to treat it as though it were not. The physician says: "There is no soul; I have dissected the body and found none." The chemist and physiologist say as to the processes of digestion and metabolism: "It is a mere matter of chemistry, the action of the blind forces of nature which we see everywhere about us; such processes afford no evidences of the soul or God." The physicist says as to all phenomena, including life: "All phenomena can be reduced to matter and motion." The mechanical and electrical engineers say: "Man is a machine, a very well built machine, but imperfect. If an expert optician were to turn out so imperfect an optical instrument as the eye, he would disgrace his profession." The self-styled biologist says: "The whole of life processes is but the chance selection by which the strongest, and the fittest, escapes dissolution. All is the result of the fortuitous clashes of brute atoms."

This manner of reasoning may be affirmed of all those who have not risen above the old maxim that "seeing is believing." There are, indeed, many notable exceptions to the charge of narrow reasoning, as quoted above, men who have gone outside the narrow confines of their specialties, who have escaped the mental paralysis ordinarily produced by too close confinement to what are known as scientific methods. Auguste Comte and our own Thomas A. Edison are notable examples of such paralysis of the reasoning faculty, though in Comte it may have been an inherited mental defect.

It was faith in the unseen, in that which cannot be discovered by the senses, which has given us the interstellar ether, the inter-atomic, intra-atomic, and all-pervading ether. It was faith in the unseen and the undiscoverable by the senses, that has given us the long ether-waves, the Hertzian waves; and how well does the wireless telegrapher make use of them! These truths were established by induction, the scientific imagination, by the process which we

call generalization. They were assumed, treated as true, and we can find no other way of interpreting results obtained by experimentation on such assumption.

It is by such processes that we arrive at the God-idea, that of the self-existing ego, or soul; there is no other way of reducing the cosmos to a rational consistent whole. The whole mental attitude and effort of the specialist is to reduce all phenomena to the elements of such simple phenomena as he knows by daily contact with them. The chemist and physicist are satisfied to reduce their phenomena to motions, attractions, and repulsions. To them sound, light, heat, electricity are mere vibrations. The subjective side of these phenomena (we should say the phenomena themselves, since vibrations are in no respect light, heat, etc.) is entirely ignored, or treated as accompanying, merely, as an epiphenomenon, the objective phenomenon. Psychic phenomena must, with them, be reduced to materialistic terms. The mind is a mere mirroring of the objective world; the brain, a plastic material upon which the phenomena of the external world are recorded—a phonographic record, in Mr. Edison's view of it.

Such analogies are far fetched and mere child's play; for no material, no objective, phenomena can represent by any fair analogy the phenomena of mind. Many, too, trained in the materialistic way of reasoning, trick themselves into believing they reason when they define a phenomenon by its synonym, as by saying that consciousness is mere awareness. This is generally done with all the naïveté of one who thinks he has explained all there is to be explained about consciousness.

It is true that the complete proof of the immortality of the conscious ego cannot in the present state of our knowledge be made; but the probable evidence in its favor is overwhelming.

There is only one of the many cosmic theories which is incompatible with the continued existence of the conscious ego after the dissolution of the physical organism, and this theory is quite untenable. I refer to the extreme materialistic theory which attempts to reduce all phenomena to a push or a pull of inert atoms—fortuitous clashes of unintelligent, dead matter. No philosopher worthy of the name now holds to this extreme theory; even Ernst Haeckel, the present champion of materialism, is a hylozoist, believing that all matter is alive. In no other way can he avoid the absurdities of the the materialistic theory. We may, therefore, dismiss the extreme materialistic theory as unworthy of any consideration whatever. To suppose that the universe has come from

the fortuitous clash of blind, brute atoms is as absurd as to suppose it possible that the application of blind forces to piles of lumber, mountains of ore, and other miscellaneous materials would result in the formation of commodious homes, useful and complicated machines and appliances, and intelligent automatons. In fact the two hypotheses are the same, and need only to be stated to be rejected as absurd.

With hylozoism, idealistic monism, idealistic pluralism, the common dualism of popular belief, and even with a certain form of materialistic monism the theory of immortality is entirely compatible. The assumption of immortality explains in the cosmos what can be explained in no other way.

Descartes's *Cogito ergo sum* (I think, therefore I am) is the most fundamental of all philosophic propositions, and the most obvious and indubitable to the mind. It is the only sure foundation of epistemology. The individual can know no matter; it can know (experience) only sensations, thoughts, emotions, and volitions. What we know of the outside world is only an imperfect and often fallacious report which the mind interprets as material or mental phenomena. That in matter which we have been accustomed to believe the most fixed and immutable property is now about to disappear. Inertia, mass, that without which matter could not be known to us, could in no way affect our senses, has become a mere will-o-the-wisp, dependent on the speed of the electrons which compose the atoms; and when the electrons lose their motion, inertia (mass) is no more. And were the electrons to retain their motion after the material universe has been disintegrated into electrons and the final equilibrium of motion established (a continuous and uniform flow in all directions), matter, in every respect as we know it, will have become *non est* (annihilated). To say that matter is substance, fluid, solid, etc., tells us nothing of its ultimate and fundamental nature. The ego can know nothing but its own sensational, emotional, and intellectual states. Mind we know is, and cannot know to the contrary that all we know as matter is but the manifestation of mind. We may never be assured whether there be a dualism of mind and matter, a monism of thinking, willing, and moving matter, or a monism of mind only. We do know that there can be no monism of brute material; for brute matter can in no way develop into mind, or account for the existence of mind as we know it. The conclusion may be stated: *Sentio, cogito, emotus sum; ergo sum ego, et mens sum ego*. Intelligence only can account for the inerrant power of selection by the various

vegetable organisms growing in the same soil, of just the elements needed by each for its own use, the carrying of the elements to the point where they are needed, and their assimilation at that point. Thus, too, in the processes of the animal, intelligence only can select from the blood stream what the organism needs and eliminate what it does not need. Why does the bone matter in the blood go to make bone, the nerve matter to build up nerve cells, except by intelligent selection by our vital powers, though unconscious? Intelligence and will are everywhere, and without intelligence and will there is nothing that we can do or know. Intelligence and will are the two things in the universe, as far as we know, that are conserved, and cannot be destroyed. They are timeless in the ever present, have had no beginning and can have no end. How we are individualized and separated, if so, from the Universal Intelligence we do not know, may never know; but that we are an individualized and coherent part of the Universal Intelligence, there can be no doubt.

It may be thought that the above stated conclusions are without warrant, since few reasons are given; but, in truth, to give all the reasons would require the marshaling of all science and philosophy before the court of reason to bear testimony. Yet I believe, were we able to see the question of immortality from all sides in the light of all that science and philosophy can give, we must be convinced of the continued existence of the conscious ego throughout a timeless eternity.