> "To hell allegiance.
> To this point I stand
> That *both the worlds* I give to negligence.
> Let come what comes, only I'll be revenged
> Most thoroughly for my father."

Which is the nobler attitude, the "natural" or the "celestial" one? Hamlet refuses to slay the vile murderer of his father, because forsooth he finds him at his prayers, and dreads that this may bar his punishment in the future world and send him to heaven, which would be "hire and salary, not revenge." He utterly and fatally mistakes the proportion of things in this life by persistently regarding them in the light of a future one. And we have most of us, alas! been personally acquainted with a Hamlet.

The earliest and perhaps most commonly accepted conception of eternal life is an indefinite continuation of our personal existence. It is this childish view which is still largely responsible for the way in which we, even in the nineteenth century, regard death as the "King of Terrors," the chief of evils. Theologically, it has developed into the theory that death is a punishment for and result of sin, and it is generally assumed to have come into the world at the Fall in the Garden of Eden, although, strangely enough, there is absolutely no foundation for such a conception of death in the narrative of that matchless parable itself, and very little in any other part of Scripture outside of the splendid imagery of Paul. Indeed, the poem itself implies the contrary, inasmuch as our first parents were turned out of Eden "lest they eat of the tree of life and live forever," cease to be mortal, in fact. In short, this view of death is taught neither by science nor by Scripture, reasonably interpreted. Death is essentially a vital process of transcendent importance, a blessing instead of a curse, a reward, not a punishment.

Whence, then, comes this fear of death, of which we hear so much and which is so continually appealed to as one of the most overmastering passions of humanity? Is it a natural or manufactured dread? Mainly, the latter.

There is unquestionably a genuine natural basis for it in the instinctive shrinking from the pain of wounds, the weakness and weariness of the sick-bed, the thickening speech, the darkening eye; but this shrivels in a moment in the glow of any powerful emotion, such as love, or ambition, even hunger, or revenge. As Bacon quaintly remarks: "It is worth the noting that there is no passion in the mind of man so weak, but it meets and masters the fear of death."

There is also the shudder at the pall, the hearse, Seneca's "array of the death-bed which has more horrors than death itself," the darkness and cold of the tomb, the tooth of the worm, the rain and the storm. But the main and real bitterness of death is the dread of a Future Life.

One of the principal "consolations" of religion consists in allaying the fear which it has itself conjured up. "Men fear death, as children