

# Secular Thought.

TORONTO, OCT. 17, 1896.

## Notes and Comments.

THE "religious" (!) editor of the *Toronto Mail and Empire* recently had several editorials on "The Future Life." To see such articles side by side with bitter and scurrilous personal attacks on party politicians in a daily newspaper strikes the casual reader as something grotesquely comical. Naturally, the editor says nothing more about "the future life," (observe the definite article) than the vague and meaningless phrases which are strung together by men of strong opinions—if also of complete ignorance—upon the subject. One of the editorials, however, referred to the remarks of Mr. Payn, the editor of "The Note-Book" in the *Illustrated London News*, in reply to correspondents who advised him, at his advanced age, to consider his "preparation" for a future life. Mr. Payn says he sympathizes with the sentiment of a letter of the Emperor Hadrian, which has been recently unearthed in Egypt. It is in answer to a correspondent, who reminded him that he had but a short time to live, and that he was anything but prepared to die. It is altogether likely that it was written with the kindest intention; and yet it is evident that his Imperial Majesty resented it. He remarked that persons at his age—over sixty—had generally made up their minds about the other world, or had, at all events, come to the conclusion that people had better confine their attention to their own business.

The *Mail* Editor acknowledges that such reminders are often felt as intolerable nuisances, and, indeed, no one but a conceited and ill-bred brute would think of indulging in them; for it may generally be said that life is far from being so certain for any man as to justify him in presuming that a man a few years older than himself has less time to "prepare"—whatever that operation may amount to—for death. And yet he goes on to justify such attacks on the aged in this way:

"And yet it may be the very kindest act that can be performed toward an aged person is to write to him just such a letter as that to which Hadrian, as it appears, replied so testily. If there be another life, it must bear an intimate relation to that which now is. *What we are here, we shall be hereafter.* The character formed in this life will go with us into the life which is to come; and *this*, whether for weal or for woe, will be *all that we shall take with us*—the sole capital on which we shall have to *begin life* in the state of being on which we are all about to enter. Whatever may be the peculiar theory of future rewards and punishments that may be held by any of us, on this we are all agreed, that we are all gathering up into our own being the elements of our own destiny; and the glimpses we get of what is within us in moments of peculiar illumination show us that we carry about with us even here the elements of either a very real hell-or heaven."

Of the statements comprised in this peculiar compound of doubt and dogma, we may say that they produce in us no hankering for "the future life" so much insisted upon by the Editor. If, indeed, "what we are here we shall be hereafter," then, personally, we must respectfully decline an eternity of such being; and yet, if we are to be different, why—need we ask, What good? We don't exactly know—though we may imagine—what the *Mail* Editor sees when he has those "moments of peculiar illumination" of his inner self. Unlike the

Emperor Hadrian's correspondent, we refrain from giving our opinion upon this matter upon this occasion. But we would respectfully suggest to the Editor that, if he would confine himself to a statement of facts that he can vouch for, without using that oftentimes useful but still oftener deceptive word "if," he would save himself from saying a good many things that are "not so," and his glimpses of his "innards" might assume a less peculiar and more satisfactory shape.

When the Editor tells us that "what we are here we shall be hereafter," and that "character" is "all that we shall take with us," what are we to understand? What does the "us" stand for? The Ego? What is the "character?" Is this another Ego? Will one Ego take the other *with* it? We often hear it said that character *is* the man—the Ego; but we can hardly realize how a Character, even if unblemished, could begin life, in this world or any other, without a body for it to operate. Will there be steam without engines to do the work of the next world? We know lots of "bodies"—very busy bodies, too—with very small characters, but characters without bodies! Is this what the Editor sees in his inside during his Röntgen ray experiences? What sense, too, is there in talking about *beginning life* again, if we are to be the same there as here?

We differ entirely as to its being "the kindest act that can be performed towards an aged person" to pester him about his "preparation." In former times, it was often said, in just the same way, to be the "kindest act" to a heretic to burn him alive, in order to save him from doing further mischief either to himself or others. In our view, the presumption is justifiable, that any intelligent man who has lived to a good age (whether morally or otherwise, according to his critics' view) is more likely to have correct views of life and of his preparedness for death than a younger man. Of course, young men are often of opinion that the "old fogys'" notions are out of date; but surely, if there is any department of "knowledge" where an old man's opinion is likely to be at least as good as that of a young man, it is in this matter of a problematical future life.

How, too, can the religious Editor know that, "If there be another life, it *must* bear an intimate relation to that which now is?" If he does not know whether there is a future life, certain it is that he cannot know what that life actually is. All talk, therefore, about its *relations* has just as much sense in it as the twaddle in Drummond's "Natural Law." There can be no *must be* about a thing of which we know nothing. Certainly, if *we* are to live again, we must be *ourselves*; and the talk about beginning a new life, with only our characters and without our bodies, should secure the Editor a comfortable cell in a lunatic asylum.

The annoying and mosquito-like pertinacity and damnable impertinence of these "reminders" are striking features, however, of the pretentiously pious fakirs who are so inquisitorially anxious about their victims' "preparedness" for death; and the remarks of the *Mail* Editor show how these people defend their impertinence:

"If this be so, and there is nothing purgatorial in death, but what we are in time we shall be in eternity, it would seem that we cannot be too frequently or too impressively reminded