

vast a theme. Agnosticism, if it means suspense of judgment and refusal to accept the unknown as known, is the natural frame of mind for any one who has followed the debate with an unprejudiced understanding, and who is resolved to be absolutely loyal to truth. To such a man existence must appear at this moment an unfathomable and overwhelming mystery. But let Agnosticism be true to itself, and not, while ostensibly declining to decide at all, assume and insinuate a negative decision. For a negative decision the hour has surely not yet arrived, especially as the world has hardly yet had time to draw breath after the bewildering rush of physical discovery. That the history of religion has closed, and that no more efforts will ever be made by the human mind to penetrate beyond the veil of sense and approach the Spirit of the Universe, is an opinion which rests mainly on the belief that religions are mere crude interpretations of natural phenomena; and that this is not their essence we have already ventured to submit. Suppose supernaturalism to be discarded; this does not put out of the question natural manifestations of Deity in the spiritual conceptions, efforts, and experiences of men. Christianity itself, though it may cease to be accepted as a miraculous revelation, remains the central fact of history; and as such, it, in connection with other religions, seems to call for an examination which it has not yet received. It is true that religious thought is employed on objects not like those of science, perceived by the bodily sense. But let evolution itself, which presents all things as in course of development, say whether exhaustive apprehension and final authority can be claimed for the nerves of sight, touch, hearing, taste and smell. Let evolution itself say, too, whether it is certain that organized matter is the ultimate goal of progress, and that nothing answering to the name of spirit can have been evolved. To the Eozoön the limits of the knowable were narrow. We are pleading merely for circumspection, and for a careful examination of the phenomena of religious history, which are phenomena like the rest. Religious sentiment is still strong in the minds of many scientific men, who find nothing in the pure monotheistic hypothesis that contradicts the results of science. At any rate, it is vain to bid men exclude these subjects from their minds, and

think only of making the best of this world. The question in what hands we are—in those of goodness, of something other than goodness, or of blind force—is not one concerning the nature of things, of which we might be content to remain in ignorance; it is one concerning the estate of man, and it swallows up all others in its practical importance; the truth about it, if known, would affect all our conceptions, all our estimates of the value of objects, every action of our lives. It cannot be in its own nature insoluble; and on the hypothesis that we are in the hands of goodness there seems to be reason to hope for a solution, and to believe that the delay and the necessity of effort are part of a moral plan. Mankind are not bees; they have learned to look before and after, and will never be cured of the habit. The present will not satisfy or engross them. Let the place of their brief sojourn be made as commodious as possible by science, and, what is more, enriched as much as possible by affection. "Aye, sir," said Johnson, after being shown over a luxurious mansion, "these are the things that make death bitter." Upon the materialist hypothesis of life, the pessimist has the best of the argument; and the effect of his unsparing scrutiny will soon appear.

So with regard to the immortality of the soul, if we are to retain that popular but somewhat misleading phrase. Has it been conclusively shown that moral personality, or, to put aside the special questions which even the term personality might raise, spirit, depends for its being on the continuance of the material matrix in which it has been formed? If not, the question for the present remains open, and attention must not be refused to such a phenomenon as the existence in us of a sense of moral responsibility extending beyond this life and the opinions of our fellow-men, which, we must repeat, is a very different thing from any animistic fancies about disembodied spirits and ghosts.

Again, the question which is perhaps at the bottom of all, tainted as it has been by logomachy, the question of human free agency, seems to claim the benefit of the same consideration. It may be very difficult to reconcile our sense of free agency and of the responsibility attaching to it with the apparent arguments in favour of necessarianism, automatism, or whatever the opposite theory is to be called. But the dif-