



ON  
IMMOR-  
TALITY

WILFRED  
T.  
GRENFELL  
M. D.

BT 923  
G7



I DO NOT EXPECT TO BE  
REABSORBED · I DO EX-  
PECT TO GROW MORE  
LIKE HIM WHEN I CAN  
BREATHE HIS ATMOS-  
PHERE—W.T.G.



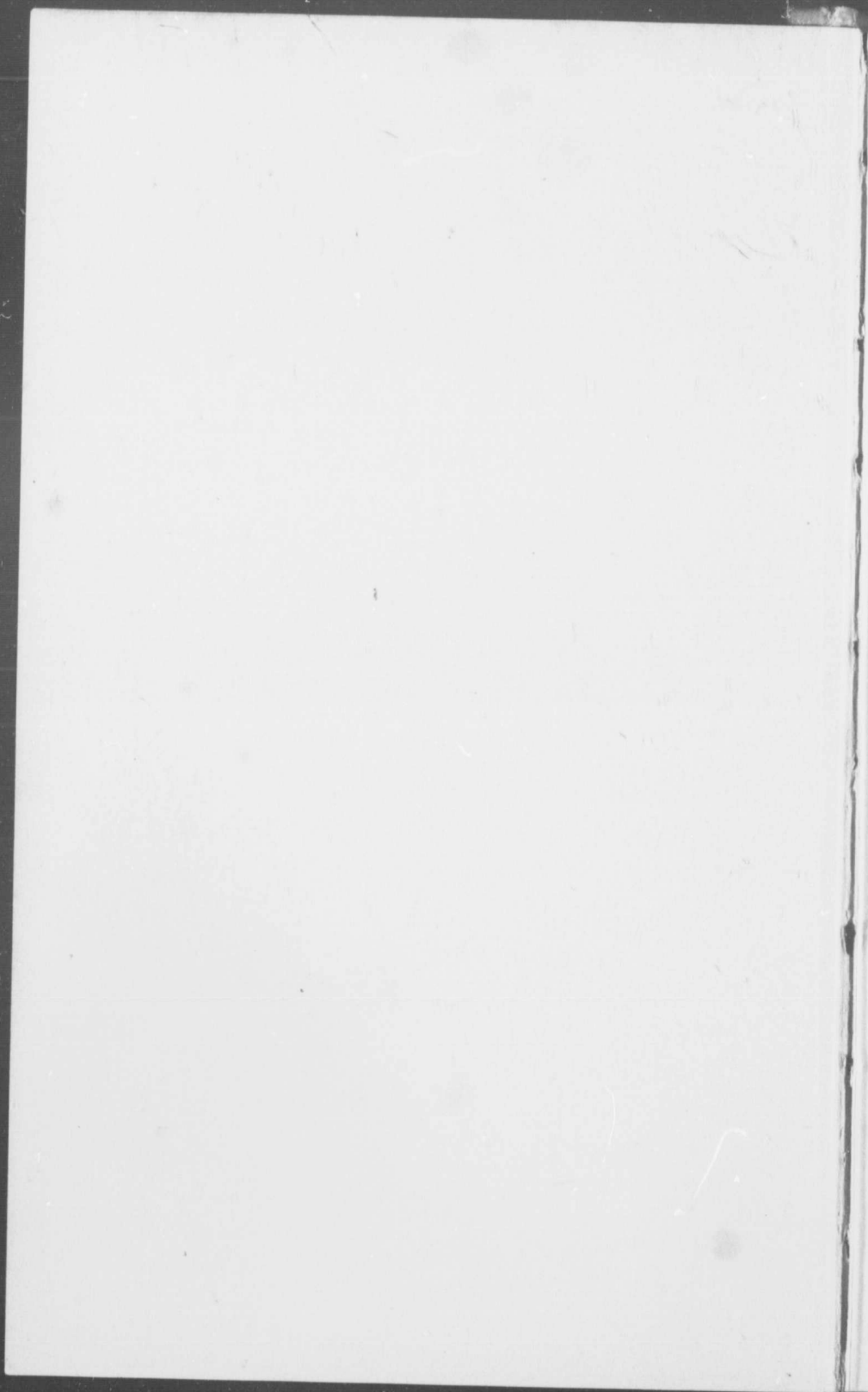


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IT FITS IN SO WELL  
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BY  
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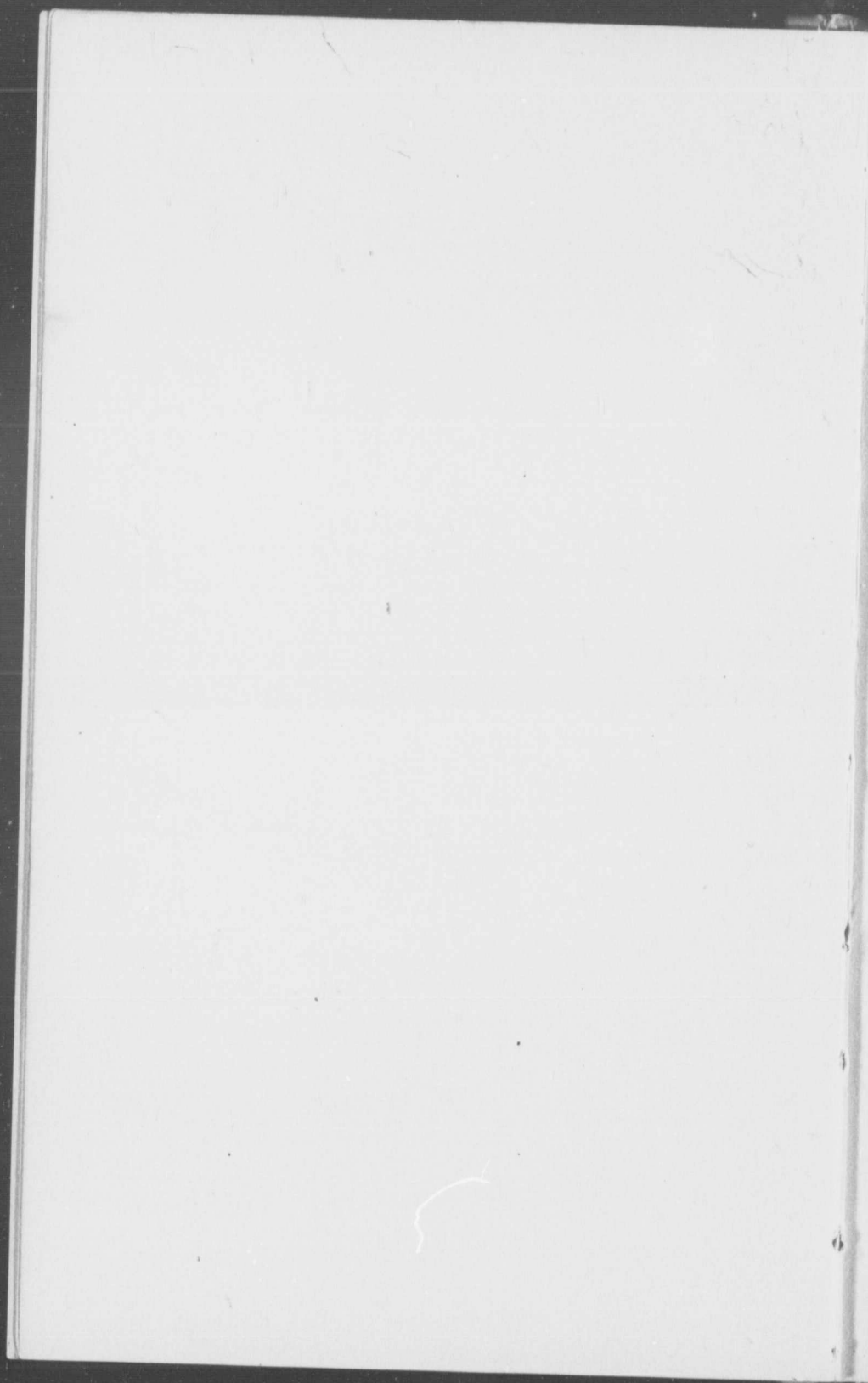
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ON  
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## ON IMMORTALITY

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**F**ROM earliest childhood I have been endowed with the keenest love for life. Looking back on my boyhood days, I can remember nothing but one long delight in the healthy body which my parents transmitted to me, in the simple and free open-air life I was encouraged to live, and in the responsibility for looking after myself without apron-string rule. I am not responsible for this love for life. I love it just because it is natural to do so. Higher powers, whether mortal or immortal, are accountable, in my case, for a deep in-rooted joy in being alive — a joy which has grown with the passing years. I am familiar with death. A man cannot be a surgeon without recognizing that there comes a time to every human body, sometimes after only a few years



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of tenancy, when it becomes impossible as a desirable habitation any longer; when, were it my own, I should ask nothing better than to be permitted to get out of it.

I can honestly say that it never occurred to me until some one put it into my head that *I* could never leave *it*, because *I* was *it*. The dissecting-room was never for a moment more to me than a deserted village, where we students were pulling down the walls of abandoned houses to enable us better, later on, to keep occupied ones in repair. It was exactly the same in the wards of the hospital. I used to get very fond of my patients. But I have often been far more sorry for my friends who had to return to their hard environment crippled, handicapped, or continually bound to suffer than for those who left their damaged bodies behind them when they went out of hospital.



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More than once I would have hastened what is called "death," out of pure charity, had I dared. A splendid old oversea sailor, who appealed to my temperament especially for that reason, was under my care with cancer of the throat. Each night, as I went round the wards before retiring, I used to tiptoe past his carefully curtained bed hoping that he would not hear me. For, as surely as he caught the sound of my footstep, he would call out, "Make the dose larger tonight, Doctor. All I want is not to wake up any more." It was morphine in a lethal draught he was clamoring for. He had no craven fear of death, though he had no doctrinal education in immortality. He just believed that God was his Father, and it never entered his mind to doubt that there was something in store for him beyond. He was content to leave it at that.

To tell the rock-bottom truth, in



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spite of my particular calling, my "views" on immortality have always been closely allied to that. I have had as little time for, as I have had bias towards, theology.

As with my love for life here, so it is with my faith in immortal life here and hereafter. Now that I come to write it down, I find that the chief reason that I believe in it is just because I am sure of it. My experience of the world leads me to suppose that it is a reasonable world, a world full of causes and results. Moreover, this is strictly the view of science. I fully expect it to go on reasonably and end reasonably — not in a stultifying catastrophe. If any man says in reply, "Go to! That is intuition — and that is not knowledge," I should say that I believe that intuition brings me into most direct and most reliable relationship with what is most vital and true. Any man who, to my mind, is worth while worrying with



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believes in honor and love and truth, and that it is better to be unselfish than selfish, to be pure rather than impure, and that virtue is better than vice. It is best to believe it. I was taught it was true at my mother's knee, and there I learned of immortality. I took in one with the other, and I mean to cling to both of them.

I pray that the day may never come when I believe that this beautiful world and this gift of life are evidences that we are only the sport of a devilish God who would leave matter indestructible, but destroy the noblest attribute of mankind. There is better evidence in my mere will to believe it than there is to believe that the universe is the product of chance. I do not expect to make knowledge absolute or to convince any one else by logic. There are some people who will not believe that a leg is broken if it hangs in two pieces, and, as our eyes and ears and special





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sense are so fallible, there is some excuse for that. But the reason for believing in immortality is far deeper than these, and everything convinces me that it is infallible. The polar bear, the baby seal, and the countless birds, all beat their unerring way northward, though without chart or compass. Maybe that their sense called intuition is a better one than sight or smell or hearing. The lilies grow without the permission of current science; and so grew my faith in immortality. I take to my comfort that that is an acknowledged bond of kinship with the great poets, to whose company I have no other earthly claim. To accept their view not only, to my mind, marks greatness, but without it no man and no people can be great. Some people will always call this a special sense. Well, I spell it "common sense." Evidence does not bear out the contention that it arises from uncommon perception in



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uncommon people or in those whose experiences are uncommon. Some call the old, old sense of love of one man for one woman "a special sense." But those "some" are they who have it not, and there is a touch of unwillingness, and some think of self-love, which has robbed these critics of that which we consider "divine sense," and *therefore* "common" — and this time it is we who are sorry. We think these are all tributaries of the great natural stream of love which flows towards God.

Some men say that everything consists of, or results from, matter, whatever that is. Others have said, and some are beginning to say it louder than ever in these days of "new knowledge," that there is no such thing as matter. Many said that the old alchemists were fools. But the modern chemists tell us that the elements are interconvertible, that one does turn into the other. Copper, they say, does turn into sodium,



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and you can manufacture rubies and make the secretions of the ductless glands, which control life, out of coal tar. They say that acids crystallize with nucleated cells, and radio-activity shows that metals are alive as much as is the ameba. So some think that there is no such thing as "life" except that of the spirit, and that the human body is as much a piece of mechanism as a box; and surgery practically shows that not only does a person remain the same person if you cut his body in two, but the same obtains if you could successfully sew on the half of another body which happens not to be in use. It would seem that only those forms of knowledge are ever demonstrable of which you create the axioms yourself. Moreover, it is only by experiment that the knowledge and the axioms are verified.

If a man "won't" — that is, does not want an axiom to be true — he practi-



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cally says, "I won't take that axiom to the test." Adopt that plan with any axiom, and see how far you will get. We just have to believe in food to eat it, and know the truth of the axiom. We just have to go to bed, and sleep on the axiom that it is safe to do it. Columbus believed that America existed. His crew believed that it didn't. It looks to us as if his acting on intuition against long odds was somehow justifiable. But, of course, there are those still who are not convinced that America does exist. I look at immortality the other way. And my faith goes farther than that. I believe that I am I. I am in the same trouble when I come to try and write down why I believe it. But I just do, and nothing can make me think otherwise. It is that wretched intuition again.

I have only got one baby, but I believe that it is personal and endowed with individuality. No one can say



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why that should be. You can write till doomsday all his peculiarities, and you will find some other baby answers to all your special tests. But I hold, all the same, with all the mothers. They *know* that their baby is individual. If they are wrong, still all I can say is that I am foolish enough to throw in my lot with them and be wrong also. But, all the same, I know that I am not wrong. After that, of course, I believe in immortality, for if I am an individual I am immortal. It is said that a man who had dined too well got into a crowded trolley and sat down by a stranger. Falling into some doubt as to whether he was going to his own home he asked the gentleman next to him, "Have you ever seen me before?" "No," was the answer. "Do you know my name?" "I do not." "Then how on earth do you know that it is me?"

Moses was not only convinced that there was a place called Canaan, but



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that he could lead the Israelites to it. They did not all get there. Those who believed that they could get in did so, and all whom they persuaded to believe the same got in also. Well, I believe that I shall attain to life immortal. I am not legislating for any one else, but if the will has anything to do with the matter I know that I am going to. Eternal life is the complement of all of my unsatisfied longings and ideals. It fits in so well.

As for others, I believe that each man must account for himself. For my part, I am immortal always.

Death is no argument against life. I hate arrogance, but all the same when Paul said, "Thou fool, except a grain of wheat die, it cannot live," I do not blame him. I think that the materialist is beginning to say that himself from what I see of science. Even the "overslept defender of the faith" is not so anxious as he was if belated scientists



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will confuse the kernel with the shell. It seems by no means impossible that science may yet show that life as an entity on earth does not exist; that organic and inorganic are alike as dead or alive only as one likes to speak of movement or growth as a sign of life; that purely scientifically there is no death of the body — which never was alive any way, as we used to understand the term,—and that spiritual life is not only in all and through all, but is all.

The futility of death, anyhow, as an argument against immortality is best shown by the fact that nobody believes it to be an argument. This is only intuition, of course; but it is also the voice of the mass of the people, and that is generally looked upon as being as near to the *vox Dei* as any current judgment of human philosophers or scientists either of the first century or of the twentieth. In a democratic country like America this ought to be



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a very helpful thought, for, in spite of all the misgovernment of the people by the people for the people, America still remains democratic, or republican, and does not yet call for a Kaiser Wilhelm of its own.

Another somewhat potent reason for my own faith in "something beyond" is the fact that I personally am compelled to believe in it. However much I might try to smother it, up it bobs again. There is something which will not take "no" from my brain. Whatever it is, there it is, insistent, irrepressible. Some call it the moral life, some the ideal life, some the spirit or soul. I call it "I." It will not be browbeaten and told that it does not exist. It is so dominant and at least so far able to demonstrate itself that I cannot deny it if I would.

Even the convicted murderer who has longed to believe in his own annihilation has had moments of qualms and doubts.





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How often have I resented the idea that, though a parrot or a tree or a crag should outlast my body, it should also outlast "me." I could not believe it. It makes me laugh to suppose it to be true. That would be the economy of a madhouse. Moreover, intellectual agnosticism has well been stigmatized as neither wholesome nor fruitful as a permanent position. And my whole estimate of the value of life and faith in its rationality is that it should be useful. Perhaps I am not heroic enough to formulate for myself an axiom which I do not wish in place of one which I do. I do not want annihilation; I want life. I love the Christ best when he says, "I am come that you have life, and have it abundantly." "He who followeth me shall have the light of life." Cold experience shows me that my axiom is a greater incentive to be useful and to make good, to be unselfish and worth while, than any



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other which I know; and history confirms it.

I am perfectly content to believe that I have been "led" (to use the phrase of those who would otherwise blame me) to devote my time to medicine and surgery and my leisure to the sea, until that also became a part of my business. The fact is, I have given my time to the study of mortality; I have accepted immortality as axiomatic. Anyhow, I take this now to my comfort that if I have been wrong in so doing and there is no immortality, at least I have not, like the ascetics, added to my loss that of the enjoyable use of what does exist. If I were annihilated tomorrow, I have enjoyed books, and games, and birds, and beasts, and the sea, and travel, and friends; and to these at last, thank God, has been added the supremest joy of a wife and child of my own — and also many opportunities of helping lame dogs over stiles. These two last are the



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supremest joys — they are more unending. In one sense the last is the supremest of all, for the reason that every man may enjoy it; it is within the reach of every single soul.

So, in any case I have little to regret. For, if I am wrong about immortality, anyhow, no one will be able to say, "I told you so." My faith in it I count as far more valuable than many dollars. What I want to leave in your minds is this: I love life, and I believe in it — only it must be life, not mere existence.

I once spent a week in Rome. There I saw large numbers of queerly and most inconveniently dressed persons who are called "religious men," who believe undoubtedly in immortality. I most sincerely hope that it means to them something more enjoyable than that to which they have devoted the time of their mortality. For I would honestly rather believe that there was not any future than to feel that it involved that



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kind of — I was going to say “life.” But theirs does not spell life at all to me. Presumably these innumerable persons are followers of Jesus Christ. But I have always understood that he came to give us life abundant. It would not be “abundant” to me to avoid the society of women, to have no money to use if I wanted it (the Samaritan needed more), while to lie down at night and feel that the money I had used and lived on during the day some one else had worked for would be to me simply intolerable.

No, churches, and candles, and vaults, and crypts, and petticoats, and relics of antiquity, all have their places. But it is life which appeals to me. I am going to have all I can get of it here on earth, and if you or any one else prove the contrary, which I am absolutely certain that you cannot do, I am going to enjoy also a belief in a better life hereafter. It should take an Irishman



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to say the rest, viz., not even if you were to convince me that there is not after we are dead. Stevenson's joyful song shall be mine to the end

“ Under the wide and starry sky  
Dig the grave and let me lie;  
Glad did I live, and gladly die,  
And I lay me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me—  
‘Here he lies where he longed to be.  
Home is the sailor, home from sea,  
And the hunter home from the hill.’ ”

It has been said that “women do not think, they feel; and then they guess.” Most women believe in our immortality. For my part, I feel much like the small boy whose kite string led round the corner. When asked by a passer-by how he knew there was a kite on the end of the line, he answered, “Why, I feel it tugging.” Even if it is feminine, I want to go out into the beyond holding up two fingers for “scissors.”

There must always be some basis on



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which to begin either arguing or acting. Personally, seeing that the time of which we can be certain is short, I am always in a hurry to begin to do things. More than once at sea, if I had waited to hem my reason into a corner before adopting a course of action, I should not be here to tell the tale.

I said a moment ago that science is beginning to point out that spirit is at least as existent as what we call matter. Fear prevents glands secreting, love sends the heart a-beating, grief causes physical pain, remorse makes the tissues waste. "There is interaction, with parallelism, but not causal interaction." My own profession has, justly I think, been taken to task for neglecting this and has erred far more seriously by not using the influence of the spirit in the healing art than by any undue niggardliness in the use of many of its far less rational drugs and possets. I think that the profession stands rebuked by



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men like Dr. Elwood Worcester. Nor is it free from blame for the extravagances of Christian Science. It is no great confession to make that the history of our relationship to sickness and death all through the ages should at least humble us to hope more for, and show more interest in, immortality than as a profession we are wont to do. Of some members it has been said that it should surely be their chief solace.

Dr. Thompson points out that the muscles of the heart, the diaphragm, and the alimentary system do more work than all the rest put together, and do it ceaselessly from the cradle to the grave without fatigue. They are involuntary muscles. On the contrary, those dominated by the will soon get tired, just because there is something ruling them.

The creative power of the soul speaks to me in all I see of man's handiwork.



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I never could believe that the achievements of such men as Isaac Newton, Clarke Maxwell, Lord Kelvin, and others were merely forms of matter. It is not easy to answer the psychologist who says, "How can a physical organ produce an idea?"

If a disembodied spirit, or a man from Mars, quite unacquainted with life as we live it on earth, were to find a mother with an unborn babe, he would certainly argue life for it in some other sphere from the texts of its purposeful limbs and organs. On the other hand, Mrs. Gatty, in her exquisite *Parables from Nature*, represents the caddis-worm under water as finding it hard to believe that the chrysalis would ever fly free in an atmosphere then fatal to him. The single cell which forms the ovum in an egg might probably be called a presumptuous fool by its fellows if it claimed that one day it would roam the world as an enormous ostrich.





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Again, the persistence of memory through all the altered forms of the body in which I have lived suggests that when that finally disintegrates, "I" shall go on. It certainly was more than earthly wisdom which made Jesus Christ, a peasant without the advantages of the schools, say two thousand years ago, "This is life eternal, to know thee." To me this belief in my sonship to God, and consequent inheritance of immortality, has always seemed the more reasonable as being the great revelation of the greatest "spiritual expert." It has never been to me a pantheistic relationship. It is only that I have some of his nature, somewhat as a father and his child are related on earth. I do not expect to be re-absorbed. I do expect to grow more like him when I can breathe his atmosphere and "feed on him" in some closer communion than our faith here, much less our knowledge, permits so



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long as we are hampered by physical bodies.

Among my patients once was a burglar who had broken his neck by falling through a glass roof on to a stone floor after jumping across a side alley. He was practically dead from the neck down. But life lingered on, and he used to regale us with long yarns of his escapades. Of course, if he ever recovered he would be a reformed character, or, as he put it, "give up the profession." For months he appeared to live in his head alone. Gradually control over his various organs returned to him. In six months he once more inhabited his whole body. Indeed, a few months later I saw him again in the "Old Bailey," being tried for a return to professional life.

On another occasion my patient was for eight days apparently dead. She lay in a complete cataleptic state and neither spoke, moved, ate, nor appeared



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even to breathe. She was arrayed in her burial clothes — her jaw tied up with the customary death napkin. She was properly laid out as dead. Today she is alive and well and claims she was conscious that she was she all the time.

My own relationship to the Christ up to the time I was twenty years of age was only the same as that to any other historical person. For the past twenty-five years I have been endeavoring to follow him. The result is that today it would seem a base act of treachery to him were I, without more reasons than have yet been advanced, to doubt the story of his resurrection. Experience has convinced me that this faith is too valuable an asset here to be wantonly thrown aside. After all, are not the reasons for doing so too often caused by the will and not by the intellect? It makes great demands on life, this faith in immortality as Christ



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teaches it. Moreover, the willingness to accept the responsibility is so frail and unstable in all of us that through all the days we, too, have to pray, "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people."

When now again I read over the story of the resurrection as told by a doctor, a fisherman, a scribe, and a political servant in the four Gospels, I see no inherent reason for disbelieving it. The ecclesiastical party of that day would have stopped at nothing to discredit it. They were not altogether fools. Yet they themselves sealed the tomb, newly hewn in the solid rock, and positively procured a Roman guard to watch it, to whom failure in duty meant inevitable death. Thus they set at least the best certificate which mortal man could on the genuineness of the accounts. And they did this against their will. Even the trouble of the poor women who came with their offerings, that they could



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not possibly roll the heavy stone up the hill by themselves, is a subtle point for these gospel historians to have invented. They had at that time but poor payment to expect for their extraordinary zeal in lying, if the whole story were an invention. The historical continuity of the great body of believers in the resurrection is to me an additional evidence.

A while ago I spent some twenty-four hours floating on the great Atlantic Ocean on a small pan of ice, on to which I had crawled out of the freezing water. No picture was formed on my retina of a single living soul. However, I slept peacefully through a large part of the night, in the absolute conviction of an unseen Presence, and of something better before me, even if it should be behind the sun which rose in the morning gloriously from beyond the boundless horizon.

I once took Mika Sematimba, fourth



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Chief of Uganda, who was on a visit to England, to see some skating on a large lake. He said nothing at the time, but subsequently I saw a home letter of his in which he stated that he had seen water turned into stone, and had actually walked upon it. Some people believe that water is annihilated when it is evaporated. The marvelous and the unintelligible happens every day all around us.

Experience teaches that no man by searching the records of human wisdom has yet unearthed an argument for immortality from which no human being, clinging to some shreds of doubt, can apparently escape. But neither has one such been found for eating meat, or for not wearing hobbled skirts. What statistics of lives saved would convince a Christian Scientist of the value of antitoxin for his babe suffering with diphtheria, or induce an anti-vaccinationist to come and worship with me at



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the shrine of Jenner or Pasteur? To me it is a sign of feebleness when a preacher of our immortality searches through dusty tomes for the confirmation of a lifelong intuitive faith. We approve the wisdom of a Sherlock Holmes none the less because from slender indications he draws great conclusions, which give him power to perform mighty deeds.

The wisdom of the Bible, as I hear men argue, seems to afford ever more and more claims to my confidence in its reliability. "Our bodies shall return to the dust of which they were made, but our souls shall return to God who gave them." To the question, "With what bodies shall they be clothed?" it answers, "A spiritual body, a body like to that of Christ's glorification," to which natural material bounds shall be no hindrance. And it adds just what my reason could wish, "Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither



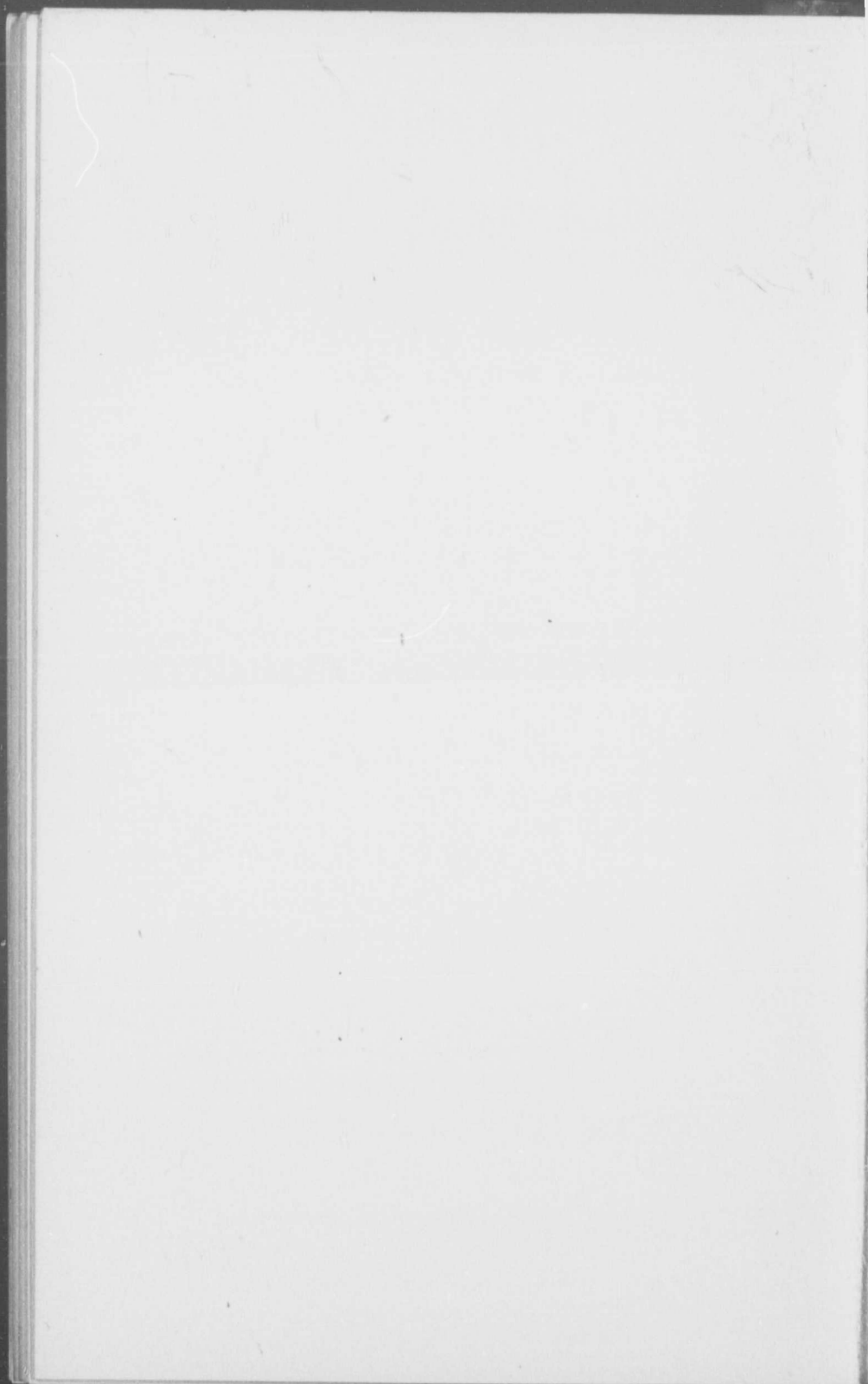
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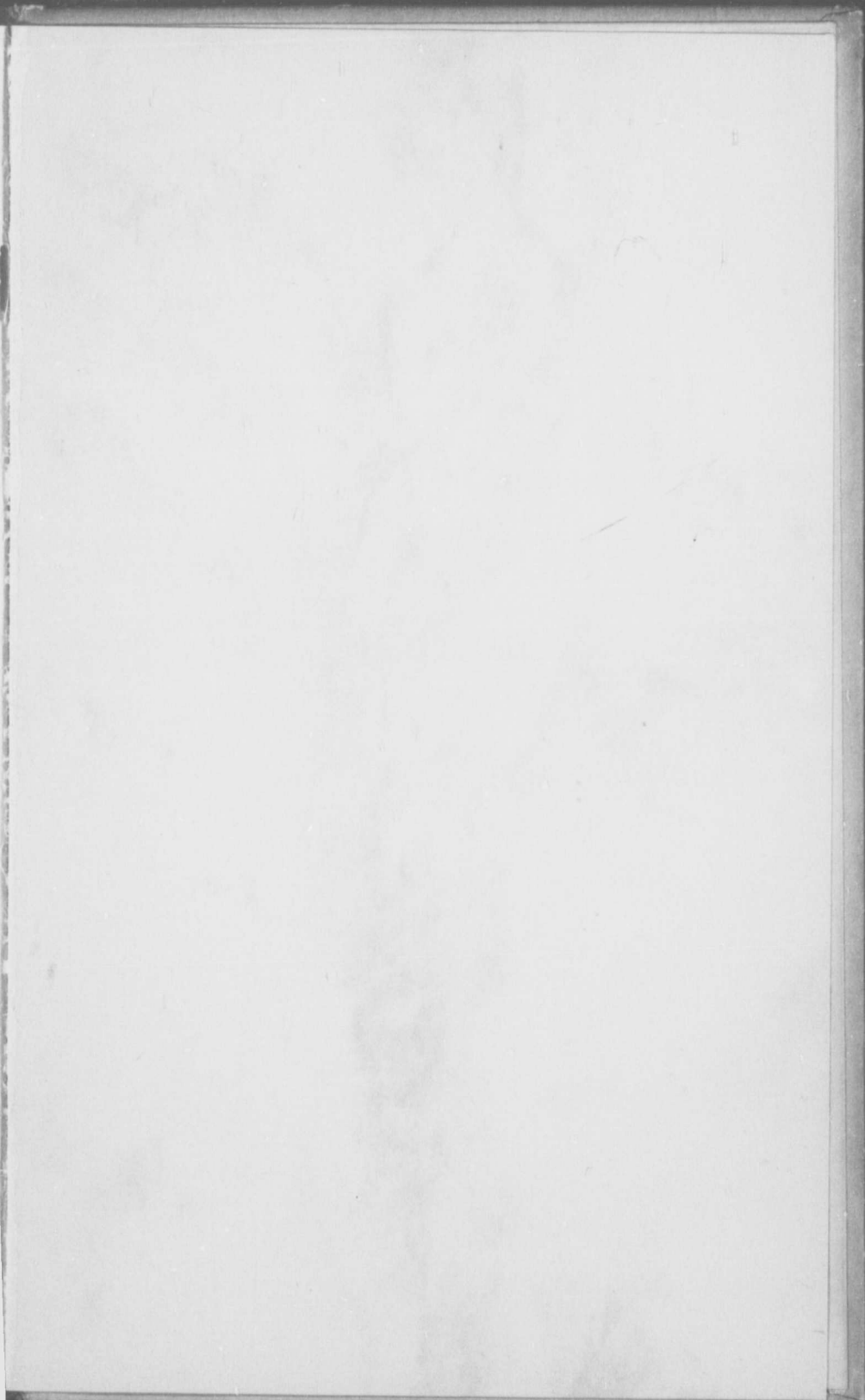
hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, what God hath prepared for them that love him." Such stories as that of the Transfiguration, and the questionings of the disciples as to which of them should be first, suggest conscious recognition of individuals.

I have just poked a black, dead-appearing fire. A fresh draught of air has poured through it, and it has sprung up to new life and usefulness. I cannot believe that there are any dead. Of death I should say :

"Only good-night, beloved, not farewell.  
A little while and we shall dwell  
In hallowed union indivisible.  
Good-night, good-night!"









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