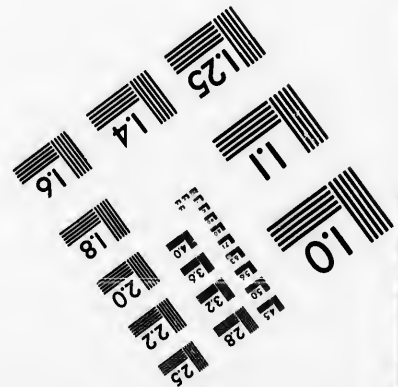
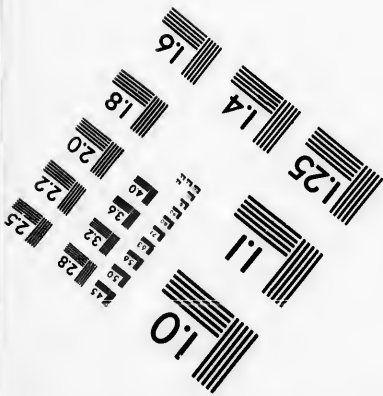
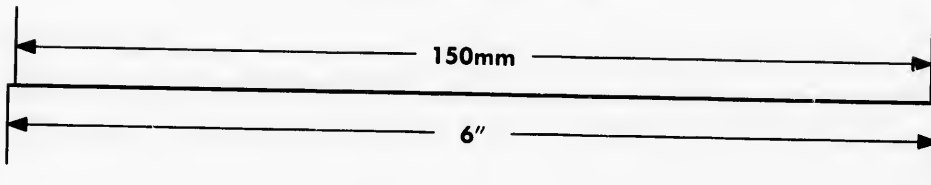
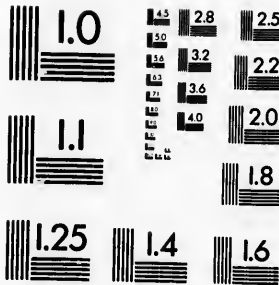
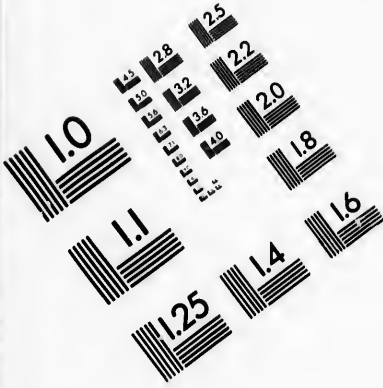


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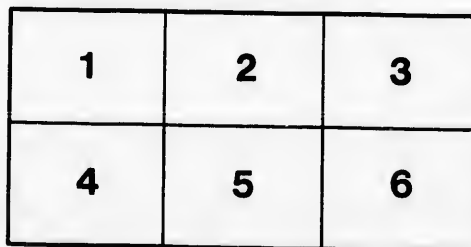
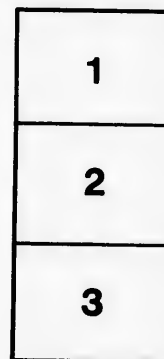
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—THE—
ORIGIN, NATURE AND
DESTINY OF MAN.

BY CHARLES WATTS.

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THE ORIGIN, NATURE AND DESTINY OF MAN.

THE origin, nature, and destiny of man have for ages been considered problems of a most interesting character. Philosophers and theologians have directed earnest attention to their solution, while poets have allowed their imagination unlimited scope in a field which seemed to be almost boundless. So fascinating have these subjects been that they have lost none of their attraction even at the present day, if one may judge from the recent unhealthy excitement caused by the Theosophical craze. Professor Huxley writes: "The question of questions for mankind, the problem which underlies all others, and is more deeply interesting than any other, is the ascertainment of the place which man occupies in nature, and of his relationship to the universe of things. Whence our race has come; what are the limits of our power over nature; to what goal are we tending; are the problems which present themselves anew, and with undiminished interest, to every man born into the world." Although modern researches have doubtless thrown much light upon these questions, it is evident that the darkness is by no means entirely dispelled. How man originated, and what will be his ultimate destiny, are themes upon which no positive information has hitherto been obtained. For this reason the modesty of Agnosticism is deemed by many persons as preferable to the dogmatism of theology or to the mystic speculations of the dreamy enthusiasts. The precise mode of our origination and our final destiny as personal beings the Agnostic recognises as mysteries beyond his power of penetration. This much we learn from experience, that the messenger of death will sooner or later visit us all. At its approach the poet yields up his poesy, the philosopher his wisdom, and the scientist the result.

of his researches. We enter the world, sojourn here for a time, and then resign to Mother Nature that force which sustained us through a fleeting existence. We die, and the elements of which our bodies were composed are transformed into other modes of existence. The transformation takes place, but to what we cannot say. To us it is shrouded in mystery. Whether or not that mystery will ever be solved is a question which the Agnostic neither affirms nor denies, preferring to deal with what is, rather than to speculate upon what might have been or what may be.

The opinions of some of the ancients upon the nature of man are very curious, and in these we recognise the mystic teachings upon which Theosophy is based. Many of those ancients supposed that there was a very close relationship between the origin of man and his final destiny.¹ They considered that whatever state or condition might await human beings after death, it was but analogous to that in which they existed before birth. According to Plato, the soul (whatever that may mean) was immortal because it had existed previous to its incarnation in a human body at birth. His idea was that if pre-existence is denied, immortality must disappear also. The ground of this notion was that, if the soul and body began life together, the inference is reasonable that they should end it at the same time. Thus the doctrine of absorption supposes that at death the spirit will return to the great fountain of spirit from which it came. A similar teaching to this is found in the Bible, where we read that at the dissolution of the body the spirit will return to God, who gave it.

The theories of pre-existence have been very numerous and have taken various forms, all of which have been more or less fanciful and destitute of reasonable evidence. For to say that the soul of man existed before birth, still leaves the question of "how" unanswered. In what form did this soul exist? One ancient theory alleges that it was a direct emanation from God, making what is termed the spiritual part of man an actual portion of Deity, the fundamental postulate being that the neces-

sary life of God, is one constant process of radiation and absorption, a letting out and a drawing in. Another theory asserted that the soul existed before birth as a conscious personal being, but on becoming incarnate in a body, all memory of its previous condition was lost. This notion, however, does not attempt to account for the origin of the soul, but only for its advent into this world, and consequently no information is given upon the important question as to how and when its career commenced, and still less as to when it will terminate. This view was taken by many Oriental thinkers, and it seems also to have found favor with certain poets in modern times. Wordsworth writes :

Our birth is but a sleep and a forgetting,
The soul that rises with us, our life star,
Hath elsewhere had its setting,
And cometh from afar.

This theory assumes that the spirit prior to birth may have been an angel or a devil, and hence the opposite kind of actions observed among men. Shakespeare exclaims : " O nature : what hadst thou to do in hell when thou didst lower the spirit of a fiend in mortal paradise of such sweet flesh."

The Theosophists claim that their idea of re-incarnation is superior to many others upon this subject, inasmuch as theirs is progressive from a lower to a higher state—not a transmission from a higher to a lower condition. But this is a mere speculation, for we search in vain for proofs of its truth.

Another theory of the origin of the soul is that it is a special creation made by a direct fiat of God at the beginning, and that it was received into the body at birth by the process of infusion. This view supposes a kind of repository in which souls are stored until required. A modification of this theory is called Traduction, and is essentially theological, invented probably to meet a dogmatic exigency. It teaches that all souls have been transmitted or brought from Adam.

The theories as to the destiny of the soul have been equally numerous, and of much the same mystic and unsatisfactory character. And this is just what might have been expected from the fact that it has been erroneously taught that the body

and soul are two distinct entities, made up of totally different substances; therefore, the origin of one can in no way explain the origination of the other. It is this unscientific theory that has given rise to so many conflicting and frequently whimsical notions, such, for instance, as what is known by the term Theosophy.

It is time such mystic and absurd ramblings were given up, and that we ceased wasting our resources upon such groundless speculations as to what is called the soul. Let us study man as a whole, and recognise the fact that whatever powers he may possess they must have originated together in the past and will not be broken asunder in the future. The more important question, therefore, for us to consider is, not what was the origin of the soul, but of the man; not what will become of the alleged spiritual part of the individual at death, but what is the destiny of the race. The problems, consequently, come to us in a different form to that in which they were viewed by our ancestors; the method we must pursue will be a new one; and the conclusions arrived at are those which flow from the real facts of the case as verified by science. In the next article we will endeavor to ascertain what modern science has to say upon the subject.

The scientific discoveries of this age have thrown considerable light upon the relation of mind to matter. Whatever may be the exact connection between brain and thought—and we are very far from thoroughly understanding that connection at present—certain it is that so close and intimate is the relationship that exists, that the one must be studied in connection with the other. Physiological psychology is now recognised as the highest and most certain form of mind study. The old methods of investigating mental operations are no longer looked upon as being of much value, and every person now who desires to investigate mind, whether in the inchoate form in which its manifestations are seen in the lower animals, or in the highest developments that take place in human nature, proceeds along the line of what may be termed the somatic basis of thought, the brain and nervous system. Whether or not the German motto

be true that there is no thought without phosphorus, certain it is that, as far as we can judge from comparatively recent experiments, there is no thought without a brain or nervous system, and that phosphorus is a most potent agency in the thinking process. However, in the study of man it is the entire man that must be brought under notice, and not some supposed entity called a soul or spirit. The origin of man consequently means the origin, not of soul as such, but of the complete human being; and the destiny must be understood to mean the destiny of humanity.

This is not the place to discuss the question of the origin of man by evolution, a fact which is now generally accepted by all well-informed people of every shade of theological opinion. Evolution has furnished us with an explanation of so much that was before obscure, that its value cannot be overrated. Not only the physical organs of humanity, but its highest mental powers, lie latent in the brains of inferior animals. Evolution, in fact, assumes, to use the words of Hæckel, "that in nature there is a great united, continuous, and everlasting process of development; and that all natural phenomena, without exception, from the motion of the celestial bodies and the fall of the rolling stone, up to the growth of the plant and the consciousness of man, are subject to the same great law of causation; that they are to be ultimately reduced to atomic mechanics." Perhaps it is going farther than proof warrants us to assert that the entire process of evolution is reduced to mechanical law, but, substituting the term physical for mechanical, the assertion no doubt is correct. Many of the faculties of man were at one time supposed to be peculiar to him, and to be entirely absent, even in the lowest degree of development, from the inferior animals; but recent observation has shown the incorrectness of this view. Fear, love, joy, and other emotional states are seen not only in the animals highest below man, but in those much lower in the scale of animal life. The religious faculty is still maintained by theologians to be an exception; but apart from the question whether any such faculty really exists, religion, as generally understood, is a combination of fear, veneration and de-

pendence, all of which are to be met with in the lower animals Darwin has clearly shown the power of the emotions in the lower animals, and the facts which he has quoted are far too strong and too numerous to be set aside.

Man no longer stands on a lofty pedestal raised above all other creatures, and subject to laws and states to which they are strangers. He is one link in the "chain of being"—the last one doubtless up to the present—but still connected with the next as the rest with each other. An inquiry into his origin and destiny must, therefore, be pursued upon the same lines as the investigation into all other things. The origin of his physical frame is to be traced in the same way as that of all other organic bodies, and his intellectual faculties differ from theirs in degree and not in nature. We see that the human mind is infantile in the child, juvenile in the youth, mature in the adult, feeble in the aged, deranged by disease of its material organ the brain, and at death it disappears. The origin of the so-called human soul is just that of the body, and no separation, as far as modern science shows, is possible. Mental life commences with physical life, and both are immature together. We learn to use our intellectual powers in the same way as we acquire the more perfect use of our muscular—by experience and practice. It would be more unreasonable to discuss the origin of muscular power than to speculate about the origination of brain power. Both must begin and both must end with the somatic organs on which they depend. From this it will be seen how very puerile are all speculations about the pre-existence of the soul, and the question of what it was and where it was before its connection with the body, which really means before it had any existence. The modern delusion called Theosophy has therefore no foundation in science, nor in common sense. It is either the result of the working of diseased brains or the less pardonable trickery of charlatanism. The re-incarnation of spirit is almost on a par with the re-incarnation of a pre-existent digestive power in the absence of digestive organs.

The modern discovery of the correlation of force has completely

revolutionised our knowledge upon a variety of subjects, and on none more so than that of the nature of thought or mental action. Light, heat, electricity, magnetism, etc., are now known to be forms of force, and what else is life and mind? Professor Huxley has shown how absurd it is to suppose life to be an entity—just as whimsical in fact as the old notion that there was an entity called aqueosity, which controlled the formation of water out of the elements of which it is composed. Oxygen and hydrogen unite in certain proportions and form water—that is, the water is the outcome of the union of these elements. No one would be so exceedingly simple as to inquire where the water was before the union of the oxygen and hydrogen took place, for it is obvious to the merest tyro that it did not exist. So in certain other combinations, an organism is formed and the result is life. The life did not pre-exist, for it had no existence at all until the organic body produced it, and then it made its appearance simply as a correlated force. The production of mind is caused in a similar way. A particular kind of organic matter, termed nerve or brain, gives out mind, just as a simpler kind involves life. What occurs here is a correlation of force—that is, one form of force is converted into another, heat into light electricity into magnetism, and some one or more of them into life or mind. The origin of mind, therefore, is like the origin of heat or electricity—viz., correlation. The force itself thus correlated was of course eternal in some one or more of its forms, but the particular form in which it is manifested is simply the result of correlation. Nothing is called into actual existence but a phenomenon, having no more permanent individual existence than the flash of lightning or the peal of thunder. We kindle a fire and heat is produced, or we light the gas and the room becomes illuminated, but where was the heat or the light before the combustion upon which they depend was brought about? Surely not in existence in the form in which they are now seen. When the fire goes out the heat ceases, and when the gas is turned off there is no more light. No one thinks of asking what has become of either. Yet people talk of life as being

an entity, and they discuss the whereabouts of mind before and after the existence of organic substance, upon which the whole thing depends. Of course no one force can cease to be; energy is as indestructible as matter. But mind, like electricity, is but a form of force, and when it is correlated it ceases in that particular form. The origin of mind is analogous to the origin of heat, and the pre-existence of the one is as absurd as that of the other. The same rule which applies to a prior existence before birth applies with equal force to a continued existence after death. If there be such a state it must be discovered by some other process than science, for the belief in it can gain no support from that source. Indeed, the whole tendency of modern science is in quite an opposite direction. As to the destiny of man, if it is to be arrived at by the scientific method applied to the facts of nature, it will be at once apparent that the individual man passes away, and the race alone will remain.

The destiny of man is here understood to involve his future in this world, and in no other; and of this we can only judge by analogy, seeing that no direct and positive information can be obtained on the subject. The past, however, if properly studied, will always tend to throw light on the future, for the same laws are ever in operation. We know pretty clearly whence man has come, and from that we may infer the goal that lies ahead to which he is tending. As an individual he was born, and as such he will die. What lies beyond the tomb no mortal man can possibly discover, for knowledge cannot penetrate the realms of darkness where death reigns supreme. We have seen that science does not only not disclose a future life, but that all the evidence that it does furnish points the other way. The matter must, therefore, remain in uncertainty. Even on the ground of probability the balance is largely against a conscious existence after the dissolution of the body. With these facts before us, Agnosticism enjoins modesty, bids us above all things to avoid dogmatism, and to rest contented with such knowledge as we possess, seeking not to learn that which we have not the requisite faculties to discover. As a poet has well said—

"No mortal man, however keen his eye,
Can into Nature's deepest secrets pry."

We can walk with steady steps where the pathway is clear and the road along which we travel is well marked out, but beyond that point we must be careful how we advance. Where certainty prevails in the field of knowledge we are entitled to speak with the authority which indicates no doubt; but when we arrive at the point where science is silent and nature dumb, we bow our heads in reverence before the inscrutable mystery of the Universe and wait for further light. Should the time ever arrive when that light will come, we will gratefully hail its approach and walk to the luminous power of its beams; but if it never appears, we shall rest content, and not be ashamed to confess our ignorance on matters where knowledge cannot be obtained.

Whatever doubt there may be respecting the future of the individual man, there should be none as to the future of the race. The march of progress is everywhere unmistakable. The entire history of mankind is one of advancement. True, the progress may be very slow, but still, like the gentle stream of the river wending its course to the sea, although the movement may not be very apparent it is certainly there, and will sweep away all obstacles that may obstruct its course. Real progress has perhaps never actually ceased since humanity has existed on earth, although many interruptions to its gradual onward march have been seen. The advancement of the race has not always been regular, but it has been persistent nevertheless. Nations have seemed to retrograde for a time, and the course of progress has been shifted from one land to another, but on the whole it has gone on, and as the centuries have passed its course has been very apparent. This will probably not be disputed by even the most conservative of theologians, who will admit and really contend for progress.

The only question of importance that arises here is, what direction is this onward march of events likely to take in the future under the law of evolution? And on this the history of

the past may throw some light. In the early ages of the existence of organic beings on the earth, the law of the survival of the fittest invariably operated in the direction of the physical. The cause for this was simple—the struggle for life was a contest in which the strongest would be almost sure to conquer and the weakest be defeated; the result was that physical power was supreme. Hence natural selection operated exclusively along these lines. But at the present time the course is changed. As far as man is concerned the contest is no longer a physical but an intellectual one. The struggle for life in the case of the human race is not now a contest in which physical prowess is always triumphant, but in which skill and ingenuity—that is, intellect—is certain in the end to come off victorious. The result of this must be obvious to anyone who reflects upon the development of mankind. The law of the survival of the fittest will hereafter operate in the direction of the intellectual and moral powers. We are not led to look for any higher beings than man to appear on the earth, but for the evolution of a superior race of men and women—superior intellectually and morally. Mankind, therefore, in the future, will be more exalted beings than are the present race. When one considers what has been accomplished in this century in penetrating into Nature's arcana, and conquering her most powerful forces, bending them to the comfort and convenience of humanity, we can easily imagine what may be done in the future. The coming man will, by his mighty intellect, reign the king of nature, making all its powers subservient to his will.

Morally the law of the survival of the fittest must, by its very nature, operate beneficially. Its tendency is to eliminate the worst elements, leaving the purest and best to survive. Vice ever produces physical deterioration, and its tendency is therefore to destroy its victims. By this means no doubt drunkenness and all its forms of dissipation will disappear, for in this particular nature herself has provided a much more potent remedy than schemes of prohibition and legislation in the direction of passing sumptuary laws. Morality is necessarily con-

ducive to health and long life, while immorality promotes disease and hastens death. The former will be preserved in the persons of those who regard its teachings and the latter will decay.

It is not difficult, therefore, to predicate what the future of mankind will be upon the earth. The toil of human labor will be more than ever lessened by the invention of machinery that shall utilise the forces of nature, so as to compel them to accomplish what is requisite in that direction. Rain and sunshine will be under the control of man, if not thoroughly, at least to a partial degree, so as to make them available for use when and where they are needed. Natural phenomena bringing disaster in their train will be checked by human skill, and the earth made an abode much nearer than what it is, to the condition of the fabled Garden of Eden, and the fulfilment of the dreams of poets of a golden age will dawn upon the world. Vice will be diminished, poverty will be reduced, and the anxiety that its fear engenders will be a thing of the past, while honesty will become the best policy in a sense never yet realised.

From a theological standpoint the destiny of man cannot be adequately considered without a recognition of the doctrine of immortality. Now, it is not at all difficult to understand how the general belief in immortality has arisen and the reason for its prevalence. There is sound philosophy in that couplet of Pope's :

"Hope springs eternal in the human breast ;
Man never is, but always to be blest."

But is it not too much to say that the time in which man shall be blessed will never come ?—in this world, of course, being understood, because the following lines are :

"The soul, unsettled and confined from home,
Rests and expatiates in a life to come."

How a world which man has never seen, and of which confessedly he knows nothing, can be his home, the home in which he is resting, is somewhat difficult to comprehend. Still the sentiment expressed is not altogether unreal. The experience of

hope, existing and acting amid the ills of life, sees a future world in which peace shall reign and all these evils will disappear. Hence the belief in a future state. When, however, reason is brought to bear upon the question, it is seen how flimsy is that on which the hope is resting, and that the structure which imagination has built at the bidding of hope has no substantial foundation. There is no doubt a glorious future for man, but it is for the race, not for the individual; and it is in this world, and in no other. It is in this fact that lies the basis of the sentiment, and herein it finds its complete realisation. We need not wonder at the direction that man's aspirations have taken on this question, for they are largely the outcome of that selfishness which is so distinguishing a characteristic of perverted human nature, which will have no benefits but personal ones. This, we believe, is destined to pass away before an enlightened altruism which is already manifesting itself in many ways throughout human society. Selfishness had its origin in the days of brute-force, when each individual cared for nothing higher than his own self-interest or personal pleasure, and when consequently, all his powers were bent in the direction of securing to himself as much happiness as possible, regardless of the rights of others and even of the feelings of others. It is too true that this vestige of a brutal past is not yet obliterated; still, there are numerous schemes for benefiting, not merely oneself, but one's fellows existing in every civilised land, and altruistic philosophy is becoming every day more widely known and accepted. Under the benign influence of Hedonism or Utilitarianism, the world is gradually growing better and selfishness is happily on the decline. We hope the time is not far distant when men will see that their conception of immortality had its origin in an erroneous interpretation of a natural sentiment, an interpretation largely the result of a desire for personal gratification. How truly did Pope speak when he said that "Hell was built on spite, and heaven on pride."

The basis of this belief in immortality is the yearning to enjoy somewhere immunity from the terrible drawbacks of

human life; and as there appears to the orthodox mind no possibility of bring about such a condition of things in this world, the happy state is relegated to some other existence. It does not appear to be taken into consideration that no one guarantee can be held that the future life, if there be one, would be any better than this. It does not avail to say that injustice prevails in this world which will be remedied there. In what lies the remedy? Men who are unjust here may be unjust elsewhere, and human selfishness of this world will but be transferred to another, if the same beings pass from one to the other. It is no assurance to say that a God of justice will see that right is done. The same God, it is assumed, will reign there as here, and most certainly he does not prevent injustice being done upon a very extensive scale in this world. Why, then, should his plan of government be altered in the next? The assumption that it will be is based upon no evidence whatever, and is even in direct opposition to the declaration so often made by the same persons, that God does not and cannot change. Besides, we know nothing whatever with respect to the conditions of a future life, and can consequently predicate nothing with regard to the state of society there. Great numbers of men who die pass away with the worst passions of human nature exercising supreme control over the rest of their faculties. How can these be expected to form, or even to take part in, a pure and unselfish society where each man is supposed to love the others as well as himself? Death can effect no active change in such persons, and it is clear, therefore, that the probabilities are that the next world—if there be one—will be no better than this. The consequence is that the hope which underlies the belief in immortality does not find its realisation in the ordinary conception of a future state. It does, however, become realised in an improved future for the race, a future which is arrived at by an induction of facts and a close observation of the trend of the times.

No. 962.

