IMMORTALITY IN MODERN THOUGHT.

It will be admitted, we think, that the tendency of modern science is materialistic. This is especially true of biology. In fact, to many the doctrine of correlation of vital with physical forces, and the doctrine of derivative origin of species, seem little short of a demonstration of materialism. Thus materialism has become a fashion of thought; but, like all fashions, it has run into excess, which must be followed by reaction. We believe the reaction has already commenced. Science sees now, more clearly than ever before, its own limits. It acknowledges its impotence to bridge the chasm between the physical and the psychical. We pass from physical to chemical, and from chemical to vital, without break. All is motion, and nothing more; also, in the region of the vital, we pass from sense-impression through nerve-thrill to brain-changes, and still we find only motions. But when, just here, there emerge consciousness, thought, will, the relation of these to brain-changes is just as unimaginable as the appearance of the genie when Aladdin's lamp is rubbed.

It is impossible to emphasize this point too strongly. Suppose a living brain be exposed to an observer with infinitely perfect senses. Such an observer would see, could see, only molecular movements. But the subject knows nothing of all this. His experiences are of a totally different order; viz., consciousness, thought, etc. Viewed from the *outside*, there is nothing but motions; viewed from the *inside*, nothing but thought, etc., — from the one side, only material phenomena; from the other, only psychical phenomena. May we not generalize this fact? May we not extend it to nature also? From the *outside* we find nothing but motion. On the *inside* there must be consciousness, thought,[1] etc.: in a word, God. To bridge this chasm, whether in nature or in the brain, Science is impotent. As to what is on the other side of material phenomena, she is *agnostic*, but cannot be materialistic.

Admitting, then, in man a world of phenomena, which cannot be construed in terms of motion, and which for convenience we group under the name of 'spirit,' is the group permanent? Is the spirit immortal? On this subject, Science can say absolutely nothing. The field is therefore open for evidence from any quarter, and of any degree. Some of these evidences, though not given by Science, are at least suggested by lines of scientific thought. A few of these we briefly mention.

1. We have said that consciousness and thought lie behind material phenomena, in nature and in the human brain. In the one case we call it God, the divine Spirit; in the other, the spirit of man. Now, does not this identity, or similarity of relation to material phenomena, imply, or at least suggest, *similarity of nature*, and therefore immortality for the spirit of man?

2. Individual human life passes through its little cycle of changes, and quickly closes in death. If this be all, then *for the individual*, when all is done, it is precisely as if he had never been. "Yes," answers the Comtist, "for the individual, but not for humanity. Every human life leaves a residuum which enters into the life and growth of humanity. It is a glorious and unselfish religion thus to merge one's self into the only true object of worship, — humanity." But, alas! the cycle of humanity also closes; and for humanity too, when all is done, it will be precisely as if it had never been. 'But the earth — the cosmos — abides.' Yes, but only a little longer. Science declares that the cycle of the cosmos must also close. And then, when all is done, after all this process of evolution reaching upward to find its completion in man, after all the yearnings, hopes, struggles, and triumphs of man, what is the outcome? It is precisely as if the cosmos had never been. It is all literally "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Not only heart, but reason, revolts against such a final outcome. If we believe that reason underlies the phenomena of the cosmos, we cannot accept such a result. We cannot believe that the cosmos has no intelligible end. But what intelligible end is there conceivable, unless something is finally attained which is not involved in a cycle, i.e., unless man is immortal?

3. There are three primary divisions of our psychical nature; viz., sense, intellect, and will. There are three corresponding processes in making a complete rational philosophy: viz., (1) instreaming of impressions of the external world through the senses (facts); (2) elaboration of these into a consistent whole by the intellect (knowledge); (3) outgoing of this knowledge in activity (conduct). Now, a true working theory of life must satisfy all these. But scientific men are apt to think that only (1) and (2) are necessary; that true facts elaborated into consistent theory is all we need care for. Theologians, on the contrary, seem to

[1] This thought is admirably presented by Johnstone Stoney, *Nature*, vol. xxxi. p. 422.

think only (2) and (3) necessary: they elaborate a theory of life consistent with itself, and apparently satisfactory in its application to conduct, but are less careful to test its harmony with facts derived from the senses. But all three are necessary.[1] The first furnishes material; the second constructs the building; the third tests its suitableness for human habitation. All admit that successful application to art is the best test of true theory. But conduct is the art corresponding to our theory of life, and therefore the *test of its truth*. Now, is not immortality as an element of our theory of life in the highest degree conducive of right conduct? Is it not a useful, yea a necessary, element in a working hypothesis?

4. But it may be objected, animals, too, have brains: in them, too, we find evidences of something like consciousness and thought. Are they, too, immortal? If so, where shall we stop? We pass down by sliding scale, without break, to the lowest verge of life. Shall we stop here? No: for vital is transmutable into physical forces. Thus all is immortal, or none. Thus hope of immortality vanishes, as it were, by evaporation.

This objection, though serious, is, we think, not fatal. To make our view clear, we use an illustration taken from biology. May we not imagine that in animals spirit is in embryo in the womb of Nature, unconscious of self, and incapable of independent life; and that in man it came to birth, — a separate spirit, — individual, conscious of self, and capable of independent life, on a new and higher plane? According to this view, geological time is the period of gestation, evolution is the process of development, and the appearance of man the act of birth.[2] JOSEPH LE CONTE.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY.

THE visitor to the west end of London is confronted, upon turning into Cromwell Road, by a large and majestic building, whose architectural grace and warm color make a very pleasing impression upon the eye. This recent addition to the splendors of the West End is the home of the natural-history departments of the British museum. By its completion the plans of certain prominent English naturalists are happily consummated. As early as 1854 Dr. Edward Gray, alarmed by the rapid growth of the national collection of objects from the three kingdoms of nature, memorialized the trustees of the British museum upon the necessity of better accommodations. In 1862 the matter received careful attention from Professor (now Sir) Richard Owen, who published an elaborate essay upon the proper scope of a national natural-history museum, in which he presented plans for the division of material, and the erection of a museum building. These and other plans were thoroughly discussed by the naturalists of England, and the critics became eventually divided into two opposing factions, — the one maintaining that it was best to hold the natural-history collections in Great Russell Street by an enlargement of the original edifice; and the other, that it was more desirable to erect a new building somewhere in the western part of the metropolis, where more air and a better light could be obtained. The latter view finally prevailed in the government councils; but, by reason of a combination of unfortunate circumstances, nothing was done toward the erection of a new building for nearly twenty years. The collections were not moved from Great Russell Street until the autumn of 1880.

The new building stands upon a part of the ground allotted to the great industrial exhibition of 1851. Near it are the South Kensington and Indian museums, and the structures occupied by transient displays, such as the recent fisheries and hygienic exhibitions. The main portion of the building faces Cromwell Road, and presents a frontage of about six hundred and fifty feet. The two central towers are flanked on either side by a long wing and a terminal pavilion. The wings are three stories high, with a basement. The style of architecture is Norman-Gothic, richly ornamented with animal forms and conventional figures drawn from animate objects. At the back of the principal part of the structure are a number of single-storied annexes, running out at right angles to the main wall. Light for the rooms at the front and sides is obtained through large windows reaching down to the floor, but the annexes are lighted from the top.

The entire building is constructed of a buff-colored terra-cotta, which, as already intimated, is elaborately modelled, especially about the windows and doorways. The walls of the interior are likewise ornamented with conventional figures in relief. The ceiling of the central hall, presently to be mentioned, is inlaid with wooden panels upon which are painted representations of different species of plants in life-colors. The floor is a rich marble mosaic.

[1] Reflex action and theism. WILLIAM JAMES. *Unitarian review* for November, 1881.
[2] *Princeton review* for November, 1878.