

SCIENCE

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THE AMERICAN ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF SCIENCE

SCIENCE AND THE PRACTICAL PROBLEMS OF THE FUTURE¹

THE end of the world has long been a favorite subject of speculation. The ancients and our forefathers of the middle ages were pleased to imagine some sudden final disaster; as by fire. Science in our own day furnishes a basis for a more definite forecast. Sudden catastrophe is still by no means precluded, for astronomers have occasionally witnessed outbursts in other regions of the universe which may have produced profound changes throughout neighborhoods like our solar system and have brought to some tragic end life on planets like the earth.

With the development of the doctrine of energy has come the conviction of an end of the world; inevitable, as the death of the individual is inevitable. In neither case, however, is longevity to be regarded as necessarily beyond human control. Biologists are beginning to intimate, and it would seem with growing confidence, the possibility, remote but thinkable, of a considerable extension of the term of bodily life. Equally conceivable is it that the race, if it become sufficiently wise before old age overtakes it, may so modify and control the conditions of life as to greatly prolong its career.

We do not need to consider a conceivable end by cosmic catastrophe any more than

¹ Address of the retiring president of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, Baltimore, 1908.