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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK IS LIFE WORTH LIVING WITHOUT IMMORTALITY? ***

Transcriber's Note:

Every effort has been made to replicate this text as faithfully as possible, including non-standard spelling and punctuation.

Some changes of spelling and punctuation have been made. They are listed at the end of the text.

Sacrificing the earth for paradise is giving up the substance for the shadow.

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—Victor Hugo.

Is Life Worth Living Without Immortality?

A Lecture Delivered Before
the Independent Religious
Society, Chicago

By

M. M. MANGASARIAN

I may be doing you an injustice, Bertie, but it seemed to me in your last that there were indications that the free expression of my religious views had been distasteful to you. That you should disagree with me I am prepared for; but that you should object to free and honest discussion of those subjects which above all others men should be honest over, would, I confess, be a disappointment. The Free-thinker is placed at this disadvantage in ordinary society, that whereas it would be considered very bad taste upon his part to obtrude his unorthodox opinion, no such consideration hampers those with whom he disagrees. There was a time when it took a brave man to be a Christian. Now it takes a brave man not to be.

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SIR A. CONAN DOYLE,
The Stark Munro Letters—Fourth Letter.

Is life worth living? If we are in good health, it certainly is. In a certain sense, even to ask such a question implies that we are not at our best. It is the sick, mentally as well as physically, who question the value of life. We cannot appreciate health too highly. Our philosophy of life is more profoundly affected by the condition of our body than we have any idea. If I were composing a new set of beatitudes, one of them would be in exaltation of health:

Blessed are they that have health, for they shall take pleasure in life.

Health also inspires *faith* in life. The first commandment of the decalogue, instead of reading, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," which is metaphysical and without definite meaning, could with much advantage be altered to read:

Thou shalt not trifle with thy health.

How fortunate it would have been for man had the "Deity" given that as his first and best thought to the world! Then, indeed, would he have been the friend of man. We cannot preserve our health without observing all the other commandments—of temperance, purity, sanity, self possession, contentment, and serenity of mind. "Behold I bring unto you health" ought to be the glad tidings of salvation. Give us that, and all the rest will be added unto us. Health is the foundation of character. If the foundation is insecure—if we have inherited disease and corruption, we can be sound, neither in our thoughts nor in our actions. The time may come when to be sickly will be considered a crime. A revolution in our feelings in this matter is already taking place. Formerly it was thought that the path to self-development is through sorrow and suffering, and that the sick were the saints. The verdict of science today, which has been confirmed by the growing experience of man, is that pleasurable activity is the most wholesome environment for man. Happiness has upon human nature the same effect that the sunshine has upon the soil. Man is a failure if he is not happy. The highest accomplishment is the ability to enjoy life. To those who say that service or usefulness is the noblest aim of life, we answer, "Why should those who serve the noblest ends of life be unhappy?"

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But let me first present to you the answer which one of America's best known psychologists, Prof. William James, of Harvard, gives to this most interesting question. Prof. James is a teacher not only of the young men in one of our leading Universities, but his ideas have become a part of the furniture of the American mind. Both his thought and the candor with which he expresses himself have secured for him a large following. Prof. James has an engaging style. Not that he is not also a profound thinker, but his sentences are as symmetrical as they are solid. He writes to be understood. That, I take it, is the secret of the masters of style. The gods always speak from behind "clouds and darkness." That explains why it is so difficult to understand what they say. But the great teachers permit no screens, draperies, curtains, or hangings of any sort to come between them and the public. There is nothing hidden about their thoughts. Neither do they speak in parables. Whoever can not make himself understood should hold his peace.

The parents of this renowned psychologist were Swedenborgians, and I believe the professor is still, nominally, at least, a member of the Swedenborgian church. Swedenborg, as you know, was a mystic; he was, indeed, a sort of a medium, who claimed to have seen and conversed with God face to face, and to have received from him a supplementary revelation, in some such sense that Mrs. Eddy or Joseph Smith received one. Of course, Swedenborg was also a philosopher, which Smith and Eddy are not. The early connections and training of Prof. James explain in part his interest in the work of the Psychical Research Society, of which he is one of the officers. So-called spiritist or occult phenomena, such as automatic slate writing, table tipping and telepathy, have always interested Prof. James, but he is by no means an easy victim, though he looks forward hopefully to the time when science will definitely locate the undiscovered country whose bourne has not yet been sighted.

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Some years ago when Prof. James and I were summer neighbors in New Hampshire—near Chocorua lake—I heard the professor deliver a lecture on hypnotism in the village church of Tamworth. An incident occurred at the time which has its bearing on the experience our Society is having with the directors of the Orchestral Association. While Prof. James was explaining the phenomena of hypnotism from the pulpit, I saw, from where I was sitting, an elderly woman showing signs of restlessness in her seat. Presently she rose to her feet, walked up the aisle slowly, and taking her stand directly in front of Prof. James on the platform, she upbraided him for desecrating the House of God by delivering in it a lecture on hypnotism. In clear, though trembling tones, she ordered him out of the church. Naturally the professor was greatly embarrassed, as was also his audience. The old woman, however, was soon prevailed upon by the elders of the church to resume her seat and keep the peace. But she was trying to oust Prof. James from the church, as the trustees of this building are trying to oust our Society from this hall, on account of religious differences. The old woman of New Hampshire was not successful, and I trust that the old woman of Chicago will not fare any better. To close a hall to a movement is an easy thing, but to close the ear of the world to its message is not so easy.

I have spoken of the early education of Prof. James in order to explain the metaphysical bent of his mind. As a psychologist, he has an international reputation, but his greatest vogue is among, what are called, the liberal Christians. The orthodox have no use for him, but to those who are

endeavoring to interpret Christianity so as to make it harmonize with modern thought—who are filling the ancient skins with wine newly pressed—he is a defender and a champion of the faith. Prof. James seems to have discovered a way by which one can be a scientist and a supernaturalist at the same time. He appears to be of the opinion that a person may deny or reject many of the orthodox dogmas, and still be justified in calling himself a Christian. He is, in fact, one of the New Theologians, who are supposed to have reconstructed Christianity, and saved the supernatural. For this service, Prof. James and his *confreeres* are held in high esteem by those who would have had to give up Christianity but for their timely help.

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In his lecture on, "Is Life Worth Living," the professor admits that he is writing for the pessimists. It is they who are in the "to be or not to be" mood of mind. The optimist does not need consolation, for he is incapable of even suspecting that life is not worth living. Some temperaments are as incapable of depression or gloom, as others are of happiness. If there are parts of the world on which the sun never goes down, so there are natures which know no night. We make a mistake, however, if we think that the pessimist represents a lower type of mental evolution. On the contrary, pessimism comes with civilization, and it generally attacks men and women of a higher culture. Suicide is rare among the negroes or the less advanced races; but in the United States, representing the most perfect type of civilization, dowered magnificently, and rich in the possession of the treasures of art and nature; in America, the home of hope and opportunity—with its immense prairies, its great West, its army of earth-subduers, empire-builders, large-natured, generous, daring, enduring, restless, resistless pioneers—more than three thousand people every year kill themselves. If we were to seek for an explanation of this strange phenomenon, the nearest we can come to it would be to say that these people prefer death to life because they do not find life worth their while. There is not enough in it to satisfy them. To use an Emersonian phrase, life is to them no more than "a sucked orange." When the perfume, the aroma, the taste, the tints, and the juices have been extracted from the fruit—who cares for what is left.

Of course, these remarks have no reference to the cases of sudden suicide, committed in a moment of frenzy—when a man driven, as it were, by a storm in the brain, lets go of his hold and slips into the darkness. The professor has in mind rather those who even though they do not commit suicide, live on reluctantly, under protest, and who treat life as we would a guest who has overstaid his welcome, and to whose final departure we look forward with pleasure.

But there is still another class of pessimists who need to be reasoned with. These are the people who brood over the existence of evil in the world, and feel the misery of the many so keenly, that they think it involves a point of honor to consent to be happy in such a world. The contemplation of human sorrow, the surging waves of which break upon every shore; and the cry of human anguish rising like the blind cry of all the seas that roll, has a tendency to slacken the hold of the reflective mind upon life. Prof. James admits that pessimism is essentially a religious disease, in the sense that it results from the inability of man to entertain two contradictory thoughts at the same time: A father in heaven, whose tender mercies are over all his children, and children dying of hunger and neglect! Infinite wisdom enthroned in heaven, and a world running topsy-turvy. The refined mind cannot contemplate this contradiction without distress. If God is everywhere, why is there darkness anywhere? If there is within reach an ocean of truth, why is it doled out to us in dribblets which hardly wet our lips, when we are burning with thirst? Religion provokes desires which it cannot satisfy, and makes promises which it will not fulfil. It is this contradiction which bites the soul black and blue. God is infinite! and behold we are starving. God is light! and we grope in darkness. God is great! and we cannot budge without crutches. It is this thought which teases us out of our peace of mind. The idea of a God, gifted with infinite parts, measured against the helplessness of man, makes for pessimism.

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But in the opinion of Prof. James, religion alone can cure the disease which religion creates. By religion, he does not mean merely loving one's neighbor and being loyal to one's best thoughts. Religion, according to Prof. James, means the belief that beyond this present life, "there is an unseen world of which we now know nothing positive but in its relation to which the significance of our mundane life consists." If this is the first act of an unending drama, it would have great worth and significance, but if it is a detached and disconnected piece, upon which the curtain will soon fall never to rise again—if it is never going to be finished—it loses, according to Prof. James, its seriousness. In other words, it is the belief that man is an eternal being whom no catastrophe can crush or annihilate, which makes our present existence worth while, and which also reconciles us to the discipline of pain and evil. Life is worth living, in short, if man is immortal. This is the drift of Prof. James' teaching, as it is also that of all supernaturalists.

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What evidence does the professor offer to prove the existence of an unseen world and the immortality of man? He offers none. He admits that science has not as yet demonstrated the reality of an invisible world. Perhaps it never will, but what of that? "You have got a right to believe in an unseen world," declares the professor. Is it not interesting? It will be seen that if the professor has no evidence, he has many arguments. One of his arguments is that, since, we must either believe or disbelieve in a future life, neutrality in the matter being an unattainable thing, why not take our choice, and while we are at it, choose immortality. Another argument is, that as our longings and yearnings in other directions have turned out to be prophetic, we have every reason to believe that the desire for eternal life also will be fulfilled. Art, science, music, health, have come to us because of an inner impulse which prompted us to go after them. A similar impulse urges us to seek the divine, which is a sort of proof that the divine exists. Still another argument is this: All the great successes or achievements of life came as a result of the courage

that takes risks. Without audacity, man would never have crossed the ocean, or invented the aeroplane. If the belief in immortality requires the taking of risks, if it is hazardous even to hold it, we should not hesitate on that account, since some of the best things have come to us by taking risks. Start out for God and immortality; and some day you may cast anchor in the shining waters that lap the shores of a divine continent. "We are free to trust at our own risk anything that is not impossible," concludes the professor. Finally, there is the argument from analogy, which I may explain by a personal experience. In the Pasteur Institute in Paris, last summer, I saw in the vivisection room, physicians in their white aprons, operating upon live rabbits, cutting and dissecting them, while the helpless creatures were so fastened to the tables that they could not move a muscle. Now all this must seem very cruel to the rabbit. It must think the physician a butcher, devoid of all feeling, or justice, and it must perforce denounce the world in which such wanton torture is inflicted by the strong upon the weak. But if the rabbit could take a larger view, if it could be made to see that its sufferings are contributing to the progress of science and the amelioration of the conditions of life upon this planet, and thereby helping to hasten the day when disease shall be conquered, would it not be reconciled to the physician's knife and the operating table? The larger view which would embrace the world unseen will help to give to evil, suffering and misery, which now we do not understand, a *raison d'être*. The part of wisdom as well as of courage then, is to "believe what is in the line of our needs, for only by the belief is the need fulfilled. Refuse to believe, and you shall indeed be right, for you shall irretrievably perish. But believe, and again you shall be right, for you shall save yourself."

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It will be seen by what has preceded, that Prof. James of Harvard University, throws the weight of his influence on the side of those who have always maintained that God and immortality are indispensable to the happiness of man. In his opinion, what a man would be if deprived of his reason, the universe would be if deprived of a God, and life, of a future existence. The eminent psychologist takes the further position that it is immaterial whether or not there is any evidence to prove the existence of a God or of a life after death. If the belief is essential to our happiness and usefulness, he thinks we have got the right to entertain it, irrespective of the question of evidence. "If there is a belief of any kind to which you have taken a special fancy, or one that you feel like crying for," the professor seems to say, "help yourself to it; you have only yourself to suit." Even if such a belief should involve an element of risk, we are urged to take the risk. If it requires audacity even to believe in a God and immortality, we are told to have the audacity. It is his idea that when we are dealing with the unknown, the important thing is the heart's desire, and not the question of evidence. In passing, I might suggest that Prof. James would never have thought of pushing aside with such nonchalance, the question of evidence, were it not for an irrepressible suspicion that the evidence is against him. He hopes to do without the evidence because the evidence will not help him. This reminds us of the saying of the philosopher Hobbes, that, men are generally against reason when reason is against *them*.

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As already intimated, the liberal party in the church regards Prof. James as a defender of the faith. He is classed with such men as Sir Oliver Lodge and Lord Kelvin, who though scientists still believe in the supernatural, and by their example have made such a belief respectable. It must be borne in mind, however, that these distinguished men are Christians only, if at all, in a very loose sense of the word. All the cardinal doctrines of revelation, such as the creation, the atonement, the incarnation, and a personal God—even one, to say nothing of a trinity—they reject. These gentlemen have not enough faith to be baptised to-day, had they not been baptised in their childhood,—or to be received into any Christian church without greatly stretching the rules in their behalf. It remains then quite true, and the argument has not yet been answered, that there is not a single eminent thinker in the world to-day who will subscribe to the creed of Christendom without first going through it with a blue pencil, or a pair of scissors. But Prof. James, as also Lodge and Kelvin, if they are not supernaturalists in the ordinary sense of the word, neither are they anti-supernaturalists. They are between and betwixt, if I may use that phrase—not quite ready to part with supernaturalism altogether, nor yet able to hold on to it in its entirety, and so they linger somewhere on the borders or the edge of it.

The first remark I have to make on the position of these newly recruited defenders of supernaturalism—even though the supernaturalism which they defend be of the attenuated kind—is, that their argument is not even an improvement on that of the theologian. I like the dogmatic and autocratic, "thus saith the Lord," of theology, much better than the "suit yourself" of these gentlemen. The one position is as destructive of intellectual integrity, as the other. The theologian starts with the fallacy that God can make a thing true by an act of his will—that his *say so* makes all need of evidence superfluous. Prof. James and the men of his school start with a proposition equally fatal to the truth—namely; that whatever we wish to be true concerning the unknown is true. All that is needed, for instance, to give the universe a God is to wish for one. All that is necessary to make a man immortal is to desire and believe that he is. "The Will to Believe," which is the title of one of the professor's writings, makes truth the creature of man, as theology makes it the creature of God. You see that after all, the theologian and the "scientific" supernaturalist pull together. That is to say, when science lends itself to theology, it ceases to be scientific. It is not theology that goes over to science, but science that goes over to theology. As soon as science appears at the camp of theology, it is forthwith swallowed up. When Prof. James speaks of the "will to believe," and never mind the evidence, he is borrowing from theology, the "will to create" of God.

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Even as the Deity in creating did not have to consider anything but his glory and pleasure, likewise man in believing does not have to consider anything but his needs and desires. Ask, "What is Truth?" and the theologian answers: "Whatever God wants it to be." Ask now the

scientist allies of the supernatural, "What is Truth," and they answer: "Whatever man desires or craves it to be." Of course, it may be objected that it is only concerning the unknown that man is permitted to dispense with evidence and consult his will. But there is no merit, for instance, in a man not telling any falsehoods where he is sure of being found out; his character is tested by his refusal to lie where he is sure he never will be found out. It is concerning the unknown about which we can say anything and everything we please without the fear of ever being caught, that we should restrain ourselves and show our loyalty to the everlasting law of honor, never to depart from veracity. To make any assertions about the unknown is to take an undue advantage of one's neighbors. "Truth is not mine to do with it as I please," said Giordano Bruno, "I must obey the truth, not command it." But the theologico-scientific position is the very reverse of this. If a god were to ask the question, "What is Truth?" His priests would answer, "Lord, suit thyself." If men asked, "What is Truth?" the Harvard professor and his colleagues would reply, "It depends upon your will to believe."

The name given to this "free and easy philosophy," if I may use such an expression—is pragmatism, which is a word from the Greek root *pragmatikos*, whence our word "practice" and "practical." The idea at the basis of this philosophy is that whatever is practical and business-like—whatever is necessary to a given program, is authoritative. The philosopher, Kant, was one of the first to urge that we have a right to believe as we please concerning the things which we can neither prove nor disprove by evidence, if such beliefs are necessary to morality. His modern disciples following his leadership, take the position that it is the usefulness of a hypothesis or a belief, and not its truth, that should concern us. "Does it work," is the test, they say, of the value of a scheme or statement, and not, "Is it true?" If it works, what do we care whether or not it be true. If it does not work, it is of no help to us even if it were true. This is identically the same argument which is advanced by the Roman Catholics, to justify for instance, the belief in the existence, somewhere in the universe, of a place called purgatory. "The doctrine of purgatory works," argues the priest, and therefore, it makes no difference whether or not such a place really exists. It is a useful, consoling and profitable doctrine. Therefore it is as good as true. In the phraseology of pragmatism, millions of people want a purgatory, therefore, there is one. And once again, to the question, "What is Truth," the answer of both the theologian and the pragmatist is, "Do not bother about it." And this describes the attitude of the Protestant as well as of the Catholic toward truth. They do not bother about it. Yes, *they do not bother about it*. That is why progress limps and the darkness lingers. People have been brought up not to bother about truth, which explains why error is still king of more than half of the world. I cannot find the words—all words fail me to express my disappointment that a teacher of the youth in one of our great institutions, who are to be the America of tomorrow, should in any way contribute to the impression that truth is secondary; that our needs, our interests, our inclinations, or our whims, come first, and that if we have not the courage to look the truth in the face, we can turn around and make terms with myth and fable.

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If we were disposed to trip the professor, or by one single thrust to disqualify him for further action in the arena of thought, we could say that even from the point of view of the pragmatist, truth comes first, and that by no imaginable manoeuvring can truth be shifted to a subordinate rank. It cannot be done. Listen! You may not have to prove the existence of a God, or of a future, or of a purgatory, before believing in it. Granted: but you have to prove and you are trying to prove, that it is *true* that you do not have to prove them. Even pragmatists who say that utility is before truth, labor to prove that it is *true* that utility is before truth. In other words, they have got to prove the truth of their theory, whatever that may be, before they can make it have any value, or before it can command our respect. Things have to be true else they cannot exist. All the labor of Prof. James has for its object the demonstration of what he considers to be a truth, namely: that the truth of the belief concerning the unknown is not essential. In other words, God may be true or not, a future life may be true or not, but it has to be true that it makes no difference whether they are true or not. Wiggle as we may, we cannot escape the ring of reason that embraces life. This is what I mean when I say that the stars fight for Rationalism. Truth is so tightly screwed and made fast to the top of the flag-pole that even hands of iron and steel cannot pull it down to a lower notch.

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A second remark I would make on Prof. James' manner of reasoning is that such arguments as he uses to prop up the belief in God and immortality show, not confidence, but desperation, if it is not too strong a word to use. Urging us to take risks, to have the audacity, to ignore the question of evidence, to suit ourselves, and, not to mind the facts, is not the language of sobriety, but of recklessness. To say to a man standing on the edge of a precipice and looking down into a chasm of unknown depth and darkness, to jump over, because, perchance, he may discover his heart's desire at the bottom, is frantic advice, and a man has to be in a panicky state of mind to let go of the sun and of the green earth for a possible world at the bottom of the abyss. It was a thought of Emerson that the humblest bug crawling in the dust with its back to the sun, and shining with the colors of the rainbow, is a thing more sublime than any possible angel. If there were the slightest foundation for the belief in an unseen world, no one would think of resorting to such extreme measures as our learned professor does, to uphold it. When I see a man huffing and puffing, I do not conclude that he has a strong case, on the contrary, I am apt to suspect that it is the weakness of his cause which has disturbed his serenity. To tell us that we can will ourselves immortal, or will God into existence, and that all we need is the audacity to plunge into the unknown, whatever the risks, reminds me of La Fontaine's parable of the frog—who thought he could will himself into the size of a cow—with fatal results. The beginning of wisdom is to recognize one's limitations. To tell a man that he can *will* things into existence is to do him an injury. Pitiful is the God, and chimerical the immortality that has no better foundation than the

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whim of man.

According to the doctrine of "The will to believe" there would be no God if there were no men to "will" his existence, and no immortality if men did not desire it. This is theology dressed up as philosophy or science. How was the world made? And the theologians answer, God said, "Let there be light, and there was light." How was God made? And the pragmatists answer, "Man said, let there be a God, and there was one." This is trifling. If the word is not too harsh, I shall call it sophistry, or mental gymnastics, to which men never resort except when straight reasoning will not help them.

Sophistry is a plea of guilty. I was debating the other evening in a Milwaukee theater on the question of the responsibility for the burning of Joan of Arc. While listening to the defense of the gentleman who was trying to prove that the Catholic Church was not responsible for her martyrdom, I said to myself that such a defense would never have been thought of were it not for the fact that the old claim that the church of God cannot err had not broken down. In the same way the defense that the bible should be taken allegorically, proves that the old position that the bible is from cover to cover the word of God with every letter and punctuation, as well as word and meaning inspired, is no longer tenable. To say that the bible must not be taken literally is but another way of saying that the bible is not true, or that you can make it mean what you please. Men never put up such a defense for anything unless they are driven to it by sheer desperation.

My third remark on the pragmatic philosophy of Professor James is that, besides doing violence to our reason, his doctrine that an unseen world is indispensable to make life worth living, or to help make the world moral, places man not only in an unenviable light, but it also does him a great injustice. If it is true that a man will make a beast of himself if he finds out that he is not a God, I take the position that he is beyond hope. Nothing can save him. But it is not true. It is a priestly tale that a man will not behave himself unless we can promise him the moon, or the sun, or eternity. A man would only be a contemptible animal if he must be given toys and trinkets and sawdust dolls to divert his attention from mischief. The claim of the preachers that unless men are assured of black-eyed houris and golden harps, or at least,—some sort of a ghostly existence,—somewhere and at sometime in the future, they will convert life into a debauch, is simply a falsehood. Man is not so depraved as that. Indeed, the doctrine of total depravity was invented by the priests to create a demand for the offices of the church. The priest cannot afford to believe in human nature. If a man can save himself, or if he can do good by his own effort, what need would there be of the mysteries and the sacraments,—the rites and the dogmas?

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I had occasion to tell you a few Sundays ago that if a lily can be white, or a rose so wondrous fair, or a dog so loyal and heroic, without dickering with the universe for a future reward, man can do, at least, as much. Would this be expecting too much of him?

In France, there is, in one of the close-by suburbs of Paris, a cemetery for dogs. Of course, no priest or pastor would think of officiating at the interment of a dog, however useful or faithful the animal may have been. They are brought here by their owners and quietly buried. The visitor finds here, however, many tokens of appreciation and gratitude for the services and value of the dog to man. Little monuments are raised over the remains of some of the occupants of the modest graves. One of these bears the inscription: "He saved forty lives, and lost his own in the attempt to save the forty-first." He did his best without the hope of a future reward. Is man lower than the animal? Does he require the help of the Holy Ghost, the holy angels, the holy Trinity, the holy infallible church, and all the terrors of hell fire to make him prefer sense to nonsense, cleanliness to dirt, honor to disgrace, the respect of his fellows to their contempt, and a peaceful mind to one full of scorpions? Do we have to swing into existence fabled and mythical beings and worlds before we can induce a human being to be as natural as a plant and as faithful as a dog? The doctrine of total depravity is a disgrace to those who have invented it, and a blight to those who believe in it. It is not true that we have to be put through acrobatic exercises,—make our reason turn somersaults, resort to sophistry,—become frantic with fear about our future,—postulate the existence of ghosts, Gods, and celestial abodes before we can prefer the good to the bad and the light to darkness. Supernaturalism is both negative and destructive. It denies goodness, and it destroys in man the power of self-help. Von Humboldt's indignation seems pardonable, when he used the word "infamous," to characterize the theologian's attempt to make the well-being of the human race depend upon such supernatural gossip as he had to market.

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And what is the verdict of history on this question? Does the belief in God and immortality make for morality? How then shall we explain the dark ages which were ages of faith, and why are not the Moslems, whose faith in Allah and in a future life is very much stronger than ours, a more moral people than the Europeans or Americans? Why was King Leopold, the Christian, a moral leper to the hour of his death, while Socrates, the pagan, who was uncertain about the future, has perfumed the centuries with his virtues? Has the belief in the supernatural prevented the criminal waste of human life, protected the child from the sweat-shop and the factory, or even robbed religion of its sting—the sting whose bite is mortal to tolerance, brotherhood and intellectual honesty? There are excellent people who believe in the supernatural and equally excellent people who ignore the supernatural, from which it would follow that excellence of character is independent of one's speculations about either the eternal past, or the eternal future. It is not true then that we have to prove to man that he has always existed, or that he shall always exist before we can make him see that the sunset is beautiful, or that the sea is vast, or that love is the greatest thing in the world.

A man will be careful of his health whether he expects to live again or not. He will avoid

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headaches, fevers, colds, anaemia, nervous prostrations and diseases of every kind which rack the body and make life a misery, irrespective of his attitude to the question of survival after death. The question of health, then, which is a very important one, is independent of any supernatural belief. It would not affect our health a particle were the heavens empty or full of gods. In the same way, men will continue the culture of the mind irrespective of theological beliefs. Will a man neglect the pleasures of the mind, despise knowledge and remain content in his ignorance, if he cannot be sure that he is going to live forever? But if neither the culture of the body nor that of the mind is in danger of being neglected, is there any reason to fear that the culture of the affections and the conscience will suffer without a belief in an unseen world? We have only to look into the motives which govern human actions to recover our confidence in the essential soundness of human nature, and in the ability of morality to take care of itself without the help of ghosts and gods. You love your country and you are willing to defend its institutions, if need be, with your life, but is it because your country is immortal? Is America going to live forever? Is it going to have a future existence? And yet Washington and his soldiers loved it dearly and risked their lives for it. Were the ancient Greeks and Romans, to whom patriotism was a religion, and who loved and fought for their country—fools, because they did not first make sure that their country was going to live forever? You are devoted to art, you have built palaces for the treasures of the brush and the chisel. You have paid fabulous prices for the works of a Rembrandt and a Titian. Is it because these paintings are never going to perish? Is the canvas which you adore immortal? You prize the works of genius—of a Shakespeare, a Goethe, a Voltaire, a Darwin. You have edifices of marble and steel in which to house the great books of the world. And yet a fire tomorrow may wipe them out of existence—they may become lost, as many great works have been lost in the past. Nevertheless, are they not precious while we have them? If a humane society will interest itself in the welfare of the horse and the cat and the dog, which live but a few years; if the flower which blooms in the morning and fades in the evening can command our attention and devotion—must a man be a god before we can take any interest in him? Must somebody be always whispering in our ears, "Ye are gods; ye are gods," to prevent us from doing violence to ourselves or to our fellows? And men seek health for the present, not for the future. And they cultivate the mind to make life richer now and here. And love is desired because it makes each passing moment a thrill and an ecstasy. What then is the value of any speculation about the unseen world, since man can care for his body, mind and heart, without venturing out on an ocean for which he has neither the sails nor the compass?

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But the unseen world is necessary, the professor seems to think, in order to explain the suffering and the injustice in this. In my opinion, such a belief has done more to postpone the reform of present abuses than anything else. The time to suppress injustice and to relieve human suffering is now, not in some distant future,—here and not in an undiscovered country. The belief in God has tempted man to shirk his responsibilities. He has left many things to be done by God which he should have done himself. It is a nobler religion that tells man to do all he can now, and to do it himself. Moreover, how can what is wrong here be made right in the next world? What, for instance, can make Joan of Arc's atrocious murder—a girl of nineteen, who had saved her country, roasted over a slow fire—right in heaven? What explanation can the Deity give to us which shall reconcile us to so infamous a crime. A million eternities, it seems to me, cannot alter the character of that act. The deed cannot be undone. That frightful page cannot be torn from the book of life. You cannot destroy the memory of that injustice; you cannot rub so foul a stain from the hands of even a God. Suppose God were to say to us in the next world that this crime was necessary to the progress of civilization. Would that satisfy us? Would we not still wish for a God who could have contributed to the progress of civilization without resorting to so unspeakable a murder? And there you are. Another world can never reconcile us to a policy that required the commission of crimes whose stench rises to our nostrils. What is wrong can never be made right.

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You remember that to illustrate the thought of Professor James, I spoke of my visit to the Pasteur Institute in Paris, where, in the vivisection hall, I saw the physicians operating on live rabbits. Professor James thinks that if the rabbit could see everything, it might say to the physician, "Thy will be done." But the rabbit might also say this: "It is well to advance science and civilization; and if it is a part of the *scheme* to make me contribute to it by my sufferings, I am resigned; but what about the character of the *schemer* who must torture to death some of his creatures—slaughter with excruciating pain a portion of his family—in order to make secure the lives of the rest?" The existence of evil in a world created by a perfect God is the rock upon which all religions go to pieces. If God can prevent misery and crime, but prefers to work through them, he is to be feared; if he cannot help himself, then he is to be pitied. Who would not rather be the rabbit on the operating table, with the knife in his flesh, than such a God! A God who cannot make a rose red except by dipping it in human blood can be sure that no human being would ever envy him his office. On the last day of judgment, if such a day there be, it will not be the rabbit, or man, who will fear the opening of the books; it will be God.

And how do we know that things will be better in the unseen world? Suppose they should be worse? Jesus intimated that the next world would be worse, for he says in Matthew 7:13-14, "Wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat; because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it."

Surely this is not an encouraging prospect. A future which offers happiness to a small minority

cannot be looked forward to with enthusiasm. Neither is the thought of a few saved and the many damned a consolation. One of the oft-repeated claims is that the belief in God and immortality is such a happiness that he must be an enemy of his race who would deprive people of it. Even Rationalists are said to envy the believer his peace of mind. But the truth is the very opposite of this. There is abundant testimony to prove that of all people the real and consistent believer is the most unhappy being in the world. The proverbial unhappiness of the Rationalist, like the proverbial death-bed horrors of a Thomas Paine and a Voltaire, is a pure fabrication. While there is absolutely nothing in Rationalism to make anybody miserable, since it does away with fear, which is the only thing to fear, Orthodoxy, on the other hand, starts by not only calling this a vale of tears, but proceeds forthwith to make it so. If we were to place the greatest known Christian saints on the stand to interrogate them on this subject, they would one and all confirm our statement. Listen, for instance, to the confession of Thomas à Kempis: "Lord, I am not worthy of thy consolation.... Thou dealest justly with me when thou leavest me poor and desolate, for if I could shed tears as the sea, yet should I not be worthy of thy consolation. I am worthy only to be scourged and punished."^[A] These are not the words of a buoyant and happy soul. And listen to the lamentation of John Bunyan: "Sometimes I could for whole days together feel my very body as well as my mind to shake and totter under the sense of this dreadful judgment of God.... I felt also such a clogging and heat in my stomach by reason of this terror that I thought my breast-bone would split asunder. Oh, how gladly would I have been anything but a man."^[B] I could quote long chapters from the biographies of the saints to show the wretchedness, the despair and the agony of the believer, shuddering upon the brink of eternity—uncertain whether heaven or hell awaits to receive him. I could give you a similar chapter from my own experience. When I was much younger, I had implicit faith in the bible and the unseen world. What was the effect of this belief upon me? Did it make me happy? I can never forget the moments of agony I spent on my knees, at the "throne of grace." My pillow was often wet with weeping over sins I had never committed, and fearing a depravity I could never be guilty of. Christianity in its virile form took hold of my young heart as the roots of a tree take hold of the earth in which they grow. I was as sensitive and responsive to its influence as fire is to the wind that fans it into flame. "Am I saved? How can I be sure that God has forgiven me? Where would I open my eyes if I should die tonight? Oh, God! what if I should after all be one of the reprobates—damned forever." Such was the terrible superstition that cheated me out of a thousand glorious moments, and made my youth a punishment to me. One day a member of my church came to me in great distress of mind. He behaved like one who had actually seen hell. "I am damned, I am damned," he cried. "God has forsaken me; there is no hope for me." If a wild beast had its paws in his hair, or a hound its teeth in his flesh, he could not have been more scared. If he could have only laughed at the stupid superstition, all the devils of his distorted imagination would have melted into thin air.

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"Our religion does not trouble us that way," I hear the Christians say in reply. Of course not, they no longer believe in it. They let art, music, science, the drama, business, to divert their attention from this Asiatic fetish. Rationalism has dissipated the terrors of the future, and tinted the horizon with beauty and light. But let them believe in Christianity as their fathers believed in it, let them be sincere with it, and it will make life miserable for them as it has for thousands of others. Yes, believe in Christianity as the Apostle Paul did, for example, and you must agree with him, that, "If in this life only we have a hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable." And listen to the cry of despair from the lips of the Son of God: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" The nails in his hands and feet tore his flesh, but it was the thought that he had been forsaken by God that broke his heart. Surely, if a belief in a future life could make anybody happy, it should have made the death of Jesus a symphony, instead of a tragedy.

In conclusion: Not God, nor the unseen world, but Truth is the sovereign good. There is nothing more excellent. If there be philosophies, they shall pass away; if there be theologies, they shall pass away; if there be creeds, cults, gods, they shall pass away. But Truth is *from* everlasting *to* everlasting.

In my mind's eye, I see a wonderful building, something like the Coliseum of ancient Rome. The galleries are black with people; tier upon tier rise like waves the multitude of spectators who have come to see a great contest. A great contest, indeed! A contest in which all the world and all the centuries are interested. It is the contest—the fight to death—between Truth and Error.

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The door opens, and a slight, small, shy and insignificant looking thing steps into the arena. It is Truth. The vast audience bursts into hilarious and derisive laughter. Is this Truth? This shuddering thing in tattered clothes, and almost naked? And the house shakes again with mocking and hisses.

The door opens again, and Error enters,—clad in cloth of gold, imposing in appearance, tall of stature, glittering with gems, sleek and huge and ponderous, causing the building to tremble with the thud of its steps. The audience is for a moment dazzled into silence, then it breaks into applause, long and deafening. "Welcome!" "Welcome!" is the greeting from the

multitude. "Welcome!" shout ten thousand throats.

The two contestants face each other. Error, in full armor,—backed by the sympathies of the audience, greeted by the clamorous cheering of the spectators; and Truth, scorned, scoffed at, and *hated*. "The issue is a foregone conclusion," murmurs the vast audience. "Error will trample Truth under its big feet."

The battle begins. The two clinch, separate, and clinch again. Truth holds its own. The spectators are alarmed. Anxiety appears in their faces. Their voices grow faint. Is it possible? Look! See! There! Error recedes! It fears the gaze of Truth! It shuns its beauteous eyes! Hear it squeak and scream as it feels Truth's squeeze upon its wrists. Error is trying to break away from Truth's grip. It is making for the door. It is gone!

The spectators are mute. Every tongue is smitten with the palsy. The people bite their lips until they bleed. They cannot explain what they have seen. "Who would have believed it?" "Is it possible?"—they exclaim. But they can not doubt what their eyes have seen. That puny and insignificant looking thing called Truth has put ancient and entrenched Error, backed by the throne, the altar, the army, the press, the people, and the gods—to rout.

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The pursuit of truth! Is not that worth living for? To seek the truth, to love the truth, to live the truth? Can any religion offer more?

What is the remedy for the pessimism that asks, "Is life worth living?" A sound mind in a sound body. There is no better preventive of that depression of spirits whence proceed the diseases which menace life, and mar the happiness of man, than health—moral, intellectual, physical—health; individual and social health. The highest ideal of Christianity is a man of sorrows. The highest ideal of Rationalism is a man of joy!

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[Pg 24]

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FOOTNOTES:

[A] *Imitation*—III 52.

[B] Quoted by Cotter Morrison, *Service of Man*—34.

Transcriber's Note:

The following is a list of changes made to the original. The first line is the original line, the second the corrected one.

other gods before me" which is metaphysical and without
other gods before me," which is metaphysical and without

a *raison d'être*. The part of wisdom as well as of courage then,
a *raison d'être*. The part of wisdom as well as of courage then,

take an undue advantage of one's neighbors." "Truth is not
take an undue advantage of one's neighbors. "Truth is not

manœuvring can truth be shifted to a subordinate rank.
manœuvring can truth be shifted to a subordinate rank.

frantic advice, and a man has to be in a panicy state of mind
frantic advice, and a man has to be in a panicky state of mind

because it makes each passing moment a thrill and an ecstasy.
because it makes each passing moment a thrill and an ecstasy.

straight is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth
strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth

instance, to the confession of Thomas A'Kempis: "Lord, I
instance, to the confession of Thomas à Kempis: "Lord, I

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