

NEW VISTAS OF IMMORTALITY.

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“VISTAS” is the fitting word for describing the latest revelations of science from the viewpoint of religion. Not every one perhaps has remarked the startling similarity between these vistas of science and the latest amended conceptions of the significance of Christ’s doctrine of the heavenly sovereignty, of the Fatherhood of God, of his own unique claim of sonship, and of the destiny of humanity.

In Dr. William Osler’s Ingersoll lecture on “Science and Immortality,” surprise was expressed that science, “knowing nothing of an immortality of spirit” should have “put on an immortality of the flesh.” But amid the revolutionary discoveries of current physics and biology it is precisely this conception of a reversionary immortality which makes the scientific vista and the teaching of Christ almost identical.

A brief survey of the amended conception of scholars,¹ about Christ’s teaching, compared with the most recent scientific views on matter, energy, and life, will make this point clear:

1. God is Father to man, Christ taught, through *reversion*; through a “subtracting from” rather than by an “adding to,” human nature. This view, it will be noted, affords sanction to Wordsworth’s dictum,

“.....by grace divine
O Nature, we are thine!”

2. Christ always implied that he was the unique son of God, in the sense that he alone had experienced “naturally” a reversion to the Origin of life. This “intimacy with the Father” was thus, to him, the “natural order.” His sonship was unique and natural.

3. Christ knew that other men had not experienced this natural reversion to their Father, the Origin of their being. An alien and

¹ G. Dalman, N. Schmidt etc.

evil power separated them from him. Their "Father" was unknown. Christ undertook the mission of removing, of taking away, of "subtracting" this evil and alien power. The result was *conversion*, that is, reversion by his own personal initiative—by divine grace.

4. Physical nature, including the stars, was the "heavenly sovereignty," the kingdom prepared from the beginning, into which he who strictly disciplined himself should enter, or towards which he should revert; but "in possession," that is, constructively rather than destructively.

The voice of the people, it may be added, has gone further than Dr. Osler in making the most material of all objects, namely the stars, the true symbol of immortality. Dr. Osler stated in a popular form the conclusions of August Weismann that life was naturally immortal, death being an accident incidental to the evolution of many-celled animal life, and the single-celled animals experiencing no death in the normal sense of the word. More radical still than this was Christ's teaching that the coming of the divine sovereignty was man's reversion, maintaining his individuality, to the stellar universe; or, might we say, the possession of the kingdom was the absorption of life by morality and through faith, hope and love, not into the reputed "higher" or metaphysical sphere, but into the reputed "lower" or physical sphere, with the one single new phase that in this reversion to the physical individuality was preserved.

A few years ago the statement of this view would have sounded too absurd to need consideration. A brief survey, however, of the most modern conceptions of science will show that the gospel merely states *religiously* what physics and biology imply *scientifically* in the vistas of life that these sciences now afford.

It is noteworthy that the more radical the investigators are and the more they eschew the metaphysical, the more substantial support they apparently give to the view of a divine reversion towards immortality.

1. In physics, J. J. Thomson, Rutherford, and Soddy—in fact every leading physicist, carrying on the noble line of mathematical conceptions of Faraday, Maxwell, and Hertz—openly admit a parallel to the stellar universe in the composition of matter itself and of its atoms. There is here both the parallel gravitational or *directive* force, and the parallel radiating or *expressive* force to that which reigns in the stars.

2. In biology the radical views of Professors Loeb and Matthews are now well known. Life, says Prof. Albert Matthews, in brief, is a ferment in which the directive force called the "difference

of potential energy" becomes operative in cells and complexes of cells. First of all this sounds shockingly materialistic, but on more careful inspection the same vista recurs of reversion to "stellar" immortality within the individual.

In evolutionary studies a recent noted work on *Evolution by Atrophy* stated that there were actual multicellular organisms reputed among the "dying" which had "degenerated into immortality," that is, reverted into the natural immortality of the unicellular organisms.

3. In psychology and psychical research the significance of the fact should be noted that the so-called psychic phenomena have been clearly identified with protoplasmic activities of the brain and nerve cells. Prof. S. N. Patten recently showed the importance of the fact that the germ cells in their extreme responsiveness and adaptivity have more extraordinary powers than any other more specialized cells. Loeb himself admits that brain and nerve cells retain the original powers of the unicellular organisms. Since "personality" may be physically defined as a specific tuning of memory waves, why may not each man possess a manifold existence among the memory cells of all those whom his personality has influenced? In genuine modern science there are no metaphorical, only real existences, nor are considerations of "great" or "small" to be accounted philosophical. In the shrine of our memories therefore the deceased may really live. The attuned memory waves *are* the person of the deceased, and in no mere pleasantry of speech or metaphor.

Again, may not each vital memory, say of the deceased individual A, itself retain the wave rhythms of all whom A himself knew,—say his parents—but whom his living friend did not know?

A goal to evolution on the vista of the psychical might then be set as the reversion of humanity to the complete consciousness of all its vital memories, with the corresponding emergence of these individualized memories into a new consciousness which would be equivalent to a resurrection.

Since it is now admitted that directive force is as universal in atomic existence and in cellular life as it is admittedly also universal in the stellar universe under the name of gravitation; and since directive force and gravitation are both manifestations of the same single law of the "difference of potential of energy," it becomes conceivably within the reach of mathematical demonstration that the goal of humanity is the reversion to a state of exact counterpart to the stellar equilibrium of forces, but interrelated in individual careers. Would not such a reversion be identical with Christ's con-

ception of a heavenly sovereignty towards the possession of which humanity tended as to its birthright?

The ministry of Christ in the world from this viewpoint would not lie in "adding to" humanity, an idea which is inconceivable to evolution; but in "subtracting from" humanity an evil influence, or power, which blocked its reversion into these immortal ways. Christ's teaching of God's universal Fatherhood cannot coincide with any other view of "conversion" than that included in this conception of a "restoration to nature." The new vistas of life revealed by science, no less than Christ's own intensely pious regard for the kingdom of nature, both call for a new reverence on the religious man's part for the physical world. The physical truth of things is not only not evil, but rightly interpreted, it becomes the "heavenly sovereignty" itself, the reign of the stars in individual life. The discovery, lamented over by Dr. Osler, that the physical alone was immortal, was in truth then, a good augury of the advent of the kingdom of heaven. Unless the spirit of man enters into the immortality of the physical world, it cannot see nor possess the heavenly sovereignty of God; for this is nothing else but the eternal law of give and take in the cosmos.