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# Science and Immortality by Dr. William Osler

Science and Immortality, by William Osler, M.D., F.R.S. Boston and New York: Houghton, Mifflin and Co. For sale at Tyrrell's 9 King Street East, Toronto.

WHEN Miss Caroline Haskell Ingersoll died in Keene, N. H., in 1893 she carried out the wishes of her father, George Goldthwait Ingersoll, by bequeathing \$5,000 to Harvard University to establish a Lectureship, one lecture to be delivered each year by some distinguished scholar, who may be of any denomination or profession, but who must take as his subject "The Immortality of Man." Since 1896 the lecturers have been in order: George A. Gordon, D.D., Prof. William James, President Benjamin Ide Wheeler, Prof. Josiah Royce, John Fiske, LL. D., and in 1904 Dr. William Osler. Each has discussed the subject from a different standpoint, but to the average man or woman the point of view of the scientist, especially the medical scientist, who brings his science "to the confines of the shadow land," cannot but excite the keenest interest of them all. Dr. Osler discusses the subject with the authority of the strong mind. The subject will probably never be disposed of, and it is therefore well that Miss Ingersoll's bequest takes the form of a perpetuity. Yet Dr. Osler's conclusions have a certain reasonable finality that compels respect. His contribution to the literature on immortality is a valuable one, and should find a place in the library of everyone who has any interest in the subject. In style he reveals a

### Mastery of English

and a wealth of allusion, classical and otherwise, for which an early rectory training is undoubtedly responsible. Where, asks Dr. Osler, do we find any desire among mankind for a future life? It is not a subject of drawing-room conversation, society shuns the man who tries to introduce it; it is impolite, even on the part of the clergy, to refer to it, and "most ominous of all, as indicating the utter absence of interest on the part of the public, is the silence of the press." As for the natural man, "he has only two primal passions, to get and to beget—to get the means of sustenance (and to-day a little more) and to beget his kind." Among the great national and public issues immortality finds no place and has not the slightest influence in the settlement of the grave social and national problems which confront the race to-day. A reason for indifference to a future life he sees in the unreality of such descrip-

tions as have been vouchsafed to mankind. The glory of the apocalypse was intended for the Oriental mind, and has little influence over the matter of fact Occident.

Dr. Osler divides mankind into three classes: Laodiceans—lukewarm sabbatical Laodiceans—concerned less with the future life than the price of beef or coal; Gallionians, who with cold philosophy deliberately put the matter aside as one about which they know nothing, and have no means of knowing anything, and who are wholly uninfluenced by any thought of the hereafter; and Teresians, strong souls laden with fire, who have kept alive the sentiment of immortality and who form

### The Moral Leaven

of humanity. The Laodiceans constitute the great bulk of this generation; the Gallionians are the men of science and their followers, and the Teresians are the little band of idealists who live by faith and not by sight. One might naturally suspect Dr. Osler of being one of the Gallionians, but he tells us in effect in his "Confession of Faith" that he would rather be in error with the Teresians than be right with the Gallionians.

That Christianity or any form of belief in immortality has received the slightest confirmation from science is refuted by Dr. Osler. Science has proved that man is not a degenerate form of the gods, but the heir of all the ages, the climax of evolution, while belief in revelation and in miracles has been simultaneously stunned. The present generation "cannot appreciate the mental cataclysm of the past 40 years." Secondly, modern psychological science dispenses altogether with the soul, though "there is much to suggest that outside our consciousness lie fields of psychical activity analogous to the invisible yet powerful rays of the spectrum." Thirdly, science has searched in vain for "spirits." Fourthly, the modern triumph of embryology in proving that "the individual is nothing more than the transient offshoot of a germ plasm, which has an unbroken continuity from generation to generation, from age to age," gives human life a new and a not very pleasant meaning.

How science and religion are to be reconciled does not yet appear. Whether they will ever reach such a consummation we know not. The one is of the mind and reason; the other of the heart and emotion. And at the present moment they seem to be moving apart rather than together. Though Dr. Osler's lecture has not done much to bring them together he has, in clarifying the situation, rendered a valuable service.

## Some Extracts From Dr. Osler's Book

### Dr. Osler On Death.

THE popular belief that however careless a man be while in health, at least on the "low, dark verge of life," he is appalled at the prospect of leaving these warm precincts to go he knows not where—this popular belief is erroneous. As a rule, man dies as he has lived, uninfluenced practically by the thoughts of a future life. . . . I have careful records of about five hundred death beds, studied particularly with reference to the modes of death and the sensations of the dying. The latter alone concerns us here. Ninety suffered bodily pain or distress of one sort or another, eleven showed mental apprehension, two positive terror, one expressed spiritual exaltation, one bitter remorse. The great majority gave no sign one way or the other; like their birth, their death was a sleep and a forgetting. The Preacher was right;

in this matter, man hath no pre-eminence over the beast—"As the one dieth so dieth the other."

### Dr. Osler On Laodiceans.

Take wings of fancy, and ascend with Icaromenippus, and sit between him and Empedocles on a ledge in the moon; whence you can get a panoramic view of the ant-like life of man on this world. What will you see? Busy with domestic and personal duties, absorbed in civic and commercial pursuits, striving and straining for better or worse in State and national affairs, wrangling and fighting between the dwellers in the neighboring ant hills—everywhere a scene of restless activity as the hungry generations tread each other down in their haste to the goal, but nowhere will you see any evidence of an overwhelming, dominant, absorbing passion regulating the life of man, because he believes this world to be only the training ground for another and a better one. And this is the most enduring impression a scientific observer would obtain from an impartial view of the situation to-day.

### Dr. Osler On Woman's Influence.

The serene faith of Socrates, with the

cup of hemlock at his lips, the heroic devotion of a St. Francis or a St. Teresa, but more often for each one of us the beautiful life of some good woman whose—

Eyes are homes of silent prayer  
Whose loves in higher love endure,

do more to keep alive among the Laodiceans a belief in immortality than all the preaching in the land.

### Is There No Such Thing as Soul?

The association of life in all its phases with organization, the association of a graduation of intelligence with increasing complexity of organization, the failure of the development of intelligence with an arrest in cerebral growth in the child, the slow decay of mind with changes in the brain, the absolute dependence of the higher mental attributes upon definite structures, the instantaneous loss of consciousness when the blood supply is cut off from the higher centers—these facts give pause to the scientific student, when he tries to think of intelligence apart from organization.—Dr. Osler.

### Dr. Osler On Spirits.

Dare I say,  
No spirit ever brake the band  
That stays him from the native land  
Where first he walked when claspt in clay?

Who dare say so? But, on the other hand, who dare affirm that he has a message from the spirit-land so legible and so sensible that the members of the National Academy of Sciences would convene to discuss it in special meeting?

### No Special Providence.

It makes us "falter where we firmly trod" to feel that man comes within the sweep of these profound and inviolate biological laws, but it explains why nature—so careless of the single life, so careful of the type—is so lavish with the human beads, and so haphazard in their manufacture, spoiling hundreds, leaving many imperfect, snapping them and cracking them at her will, caring nothing if the precious cord on which they are strung—the germ plasm—remains unbroken. Science minimizes to the vanishing point the importance of the individual man, and claims that the cosmic and biological laws which control his destiny are wholly inconsistent with the special Providence view in which we are educated—that beneficent, fatherly Providence which cares for the sparrow and numbers the very hairs of our head.—Dr. Osler.

### The Scientists' Husks.

The man of science is in a sad quandary to-day. He cannot but feel that the emotional side to which faith leans makes for all that is bright and joyous in life. Fed on the dry husks of facts, the human heart has a hidden want which science cannot supply; as a steady diet it is too strong and meaty, and hinders rather than promotes harmonious mental metabolism. In illustration, what a sad confession that emotional Dryasdust, Herbert Spencer, has made when he admits that he preferred a third-rate novel to Plato, and that he could not read Homer. . . . To keep his mind sweet, the modern scientific man should be saturated with the Bible and Plato, with Homer, Shakespeare, and Milton; to see life through their eyes may enable him to strike a balance between the rational and the emotional, which is the most serious difficulty of the intellectual life.—Dr. Osler.

### Dr. Osler's Confessio Fidei.

Better that your spirit's bark be driven from the shore—far from the trembling throng whose sails were never to the tempest given—than that you should tie it up to rot at some lethean wharf. . . . Some of you will come at last, I trust, to the opinion of Cicero, who had rather be mistaken with Plato than be in the right with those who deny altogether the life after death; and this is my own confessio fidei.

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