

THE IDEA OF IMMORTALITY

CHAPTER I

PROBLEM OF IMMORTALITY: ITS PRESENT INTEREST AND IMPORTANCE

IT can hardly be denied that human immortality, if it be a fact, profoundly affects the meaning and value of life in this world. To accept or deny the existence of a world beyond the present, correspondingly influences our conception of our duty here and now: it will matter much to us all if we can reasonably regard this experience as a stage to a higher experience. To establish the reality of an existence after death has been an age-long problem. The universality of death is patent; and though death may be robbed of its sting, the sombre fact remains. The world in which men live is a world full of change and decay, a world where nothing continues in one stay. We commonly speak of death as an evil; yet it is evidently bound up with the

present constitution of the world, and, in the long-run and on the whole, it works for good. The reproduction of the species is not compatible with the ultimate permanence of individuals in the present order of things. Life wears out the organism, and the species can only maintain its freshness and vigour by the constant passing away of the old and effete and the birth of the new. In the case of mankind this continuous coming and going of individuals makes progress possible. To the lower creatures in all their manifold forms death can offer no problem. Governed by instincts and with no self-conscious purpose, they fit simply into the natural scheme of things: they have no outlook beyond it nor desires unsatisfied by it. Death in this instance is a wise provision of nature which manifestly subserves the good of the race.

To man, however, a self-conscious being who transcends the mere life of instinct, who forms ideals and deliberately strives to realise ends, death is felt to be a problem. Can man, it is asked, man who is raised above the natural order and is a living centre of spiritual value, be doomed to annihilation by the same forces which bring about the dissolution of the plant and animal? Does he not belong to a higher realm in which the law which rules in the lower no longer holds? Must some better fate not be reserved for a self-

conscious spirit who looks before and after? These 'obstinate questionings' are peculiarly human: the will to live beyond this narrow 'bourne of time and place' has been strong in men, and it has issued in a faith that what is essential in them survives the disintegration of the body. Hence the human claim to rise superior to the doom of death and to be the heir of immortality.

We are speaking, it is scarcely necessary to add, in broad and general terms. It is not suggested that individuals have everywhere and always precisely the same feelings and ideas on this momentous subject. As a matter of fact, belief in a life hereafter has fluctuated greatly in the course of human history, and the idea has meant much more for some races than for others. It is even possible for a religion to exist without this belief. But, since the advent of Christianity at all events, faith in immortality has formed an essential element in the religious life of Western peoples. Christians stood on common ground in their conviction that God in Christ had brought life and immortality to light. But if faith in a life to come never suffered total eclipse during the Christian centuries, the flame of hope sometimes rose high and it sometimes sank low. In the ages of faith man's high destiny was a sure and confident conviction on which individuals were ready to stake the most vital issues. More-

over, the growth and eventual dominance of the ecclesiastical authority tended to suppress doubt, or at least to make it speechless. Under the shadow of the Catholic Church the thought and ideals of the Middle Ages took on an 'other-worldly' colouring. The earthly life was deemed a passing show, and time was spoken of as the 'anteroom of eternity.' The pattern of piety was to deny the world and the flesh, and to look away from this earthly scene to a bright goal in a realm above. In that religious classic of the mediæval time, *The Imitation of Christ*, one remarks the tendency to regard this mundane sphere and its interests as a passing appearance of minor value, while the true and enduring good of the soul is in heaven. In truth, this preoccupation with the higher world at times became almost morbid. And one may agree with the words of a thoughtful writer: "Indeed, the belief in immortality may easily become an unhealthy occupation with a future salvation, which prevents us from seeking for salvation for mankind here. . . . If it be a consequence of the intellectual conditions under which we live in the present day, that the empirical evidences of a future life that seemed most sure and certain to our fathers, have for some of us lost their convincing power, this, in a religious point of view, may not be altogether a loss."¹

¹ E. Caird, *The Evolution of Religion*, ii, 243.

As hinted in the foregoing quotation, the temper and outlook of the modern world, as regards religion in general and the problem of immortality in particular, stand in contrast to those of the Middle Ages. The Reformation marked the beginning of a revolution in religious thought and life. The principle of spiritual freedom which underlay the Protestant movement gradually undermined the claim of the Catholic Church to exclusive authority in matters of faith and conduct; and in the freer intellectual atmosphere which was engendered by the conflict, science and speculation had opportunities of development hitherto unknown. The intellectual achievements of science drew men away from the barren subtleties of Scholasticism, and led them to a new and rapidly growing knowledge of the world in which they lived. There came to them an enlarged vision of the universe and its bounds in space and time, and a fresh insight into the laws which were involved in the order of nature. In this ampler air a greater tolerance developed, and men felt with increasing force the need of revising the traditional doctrines of the Church in the light of their new knowledge. Individuals learned to doubt and question when their fathers were content to accept without criticism the doctrines handed down from the past. So it was inevitable that the idea of immortality should no

longer receive the unhesitating acceptance which had been accorded to it in earlier times. For men had become aware of difficulties where their ancestors found things simple and easy.

But when all is said, the principle of religious authority appeals strongly to human nature, and to cast off all authority is felt to be a dangerous thing. In the case of a cardinal doctrine like that of immortality, scepticism only developed slowly. Many who were doubtful of other beliefs were not prepared to doubt this belief. It is worth noting that among the Deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries the belief in immortality was widely recognised as one of the features of the pure religion of nature. Men who had quarrelled with most of the doctrines of the Church still refused to relegate faith in a life after death to the lumber-room of antiquated superstitions. But during the nineteenth century the spirit of criticism became more radical and subversive, and beliefs began to be questioned that in former days escaped question. And if we consider for a little the scope and trend of thought in the last century, it will be clear to us why this should be so.

A main characteristic of thought in the nineteenth century was its grasp of the principle of evolution, and its far-reaching application of the principle to nature and human society. The old

hard and fast division between organic types in nature, and between man and the animal world, melted away in presence of the idea of gradual development. Evolution became the solvent which reduced differences to a fundamental unity. And the whole trend of the evolutionary method, in the hands of men like Darwin and Spencer, was to draw man within the naturalistic scheme of things, even though he was acknowledged to be the culmination of the developmental process. Mankind was conceived as the product of a vast evolutionary movement which extended through untold ages. The inward and spiritual side of life was neglected, when man was construed as the product of a purely naturalistic evolution. In this vast evolving universe human beings appeared to occupy an utterly insignificant place. And it seemed plausible to ask, whether an enormous claim like that to immortality could possibly be justified. Hence religious faith in human destiny was confronted by radical doubt. The case for the sceptically minded has been vividly put by Dr. J. G. Frazer in his recent Gifford Lectures: "When they turn their eyes from man himself to the place he occupies in the universe, how are they overwhelmed by a sense of his littleness and insignificance! . . . And they ask, Shall a creature so puny and frail claim to live for ever, to outlast not only the present starry system but every

other that, when earth and sun and stars have crumbled into dust, shall be built on their ruins in the long hereafter? It is not so, it cannot be."¹ To those of this way of thinking, man's demand for immortality seems to rest on a supreme exaggeration of his own importance.

But perhaps we shall be told, that man's high place in the universe and the legitimacy of his hope of a life to come are authoritative religious truths. Yet the force of this argument has been greatly weakened by historical criticism and the study of religious origins. The critical work done last century, whether we accept it or not, has certainly been an important factor in diminishing the authority of traditional religious doctrines. For its tendency has been to emphasise the human element in these doctrines. The former days of simple trust and unquestioning acceptance have passed away, and the appeal to authority has lost its convincing power in the eyes of many. To illustrate what I mean. To those who are sceptical of a future life it would be useless to urge the resurrection of Christ as a proof. The reply would be, that the resurrection is itself in need of proof, and so should not be made a basis for further conclusions. And we have been told recently that "it is impossible to argue from the *bodily* resurrection of a divine being to the survival

¹ *Belief in Immortality*, pp. 470-471.

of the soul of ordinary men.”¹ When doubt adopts a more radical form, the old arguments naturally fail of their effect. Take another illustration of the way in which older lines of evidence have become antiquated. Formerly people were invited to see an argument for immortality in the grain of corn which dies in the earth to live anew, or in the chrysalis which dissolves in giving birth to the butterfly. Now we are told the analogy is not *in pari materia*: we cannot fairly argue from certain transformations *within* the terrestrial order to something which lies *beyond* that order altogether.

The modern world is perplexed about many things, and it has a new sense of the difficulties that beset the conception of human immortality. It notes problems and discerns objections where formerly all seemed plain and easy. The free and uncritical use of analogy is made a special subject for comment. If there be a higher world, we are reminded, it cannot be depicted after the analogy of the things on earth. The religious imagination, it is complained, has gone to extravagant lengths in drawing a picture of the next world in terms of the present. This uncritical use of the imagination has no doubt provoked

¹ F. C. S. Schiller, *Riddles of the Sphinx*, 2nd ed., p. 373. Of course, Dr. Schiller is not denying the doctrine of immortality here, but simply criticising a particular argument for it.

a reaction, and has probably accentuated the tendency to sceptical doubt or denial. The feeling is intelligible, and we must frankly admit that the other world can only be described, if described at all, in terms of thought and not of sense. In these circumstances it is not surprising that the whole conception of the future life has become a perplexing one to the critically minded in these days. The very difficulty we experience when we try to form a coherent notion of an immortal state of being engenders a feeling of uncertainty. For many it stands for a possibility merely, a hypothesis more or less plausible rather than an assured fact. The late Professor Huxley has told us that on this great subject we can have no knowledge; and Herbert Spencer has spoken of immortality as an insoluble problem. It would be too much, I think, to say that the prevailing opinion on this topic among thinkers and men of science is one of dogmatic denial. But the attitude of many is that of nescience, and the tone of clear and confident hope is lacking.

But, it may be replied, the great body of ordinary people do not share the doubts and questionings of the cultured few. And it is true that, in this country at least, there is little sign of a deliberate and widespread abandonment of the doctrine. This, however, is not tantamount to saying that belief in immortality is an active and

general belief, a belief which deeply affects life and conduct. Can we affirm that the subject of immortality is one which is much in the minds and thoughts of average men and women? Can we honestly say that the belief intimately affects their daily ways of acting? I hardly think we can do so. A recent writer on the subject boldly asserts: "While accepting a belief in immortality, and accepting the phrases and forms of the prevailing religion, an immense majority live practically uninfluenced by it."¹ This may be too strongly put, but it seems to me we must at least admit that the men and women who do the world's work are not much occupied with the thought of a future life. How different the feverish interest with which multitudes follow the fortunes of a war or watch the game of politics! Nevertheless, one may draw a too unfavourable inference from this fact. To conclude that faith in immortality had become a faded superstition because it was not constantly on men's lips, would be an error. One must remember that even though the modern citizen's belief in immortality is real, by the force of circumstances mundane interests and events must largely fill his day. The struggle for existence and the urgent pressure of earthly needs claim the thoughts and engross the minds of most people, whatever view they

¹ Osler, *Science and Immortality*, pp. 16-17.

take of the ultimate goal of life. 'The world is too much with us,' and we cannot help it: the work of the day and its multifarious tasks seem to interpose themselves between us and our clear vision of the spiritual world. The other-worldly element in piety fades into the background, and we hear much of a religion realised in common duties.

But though the idea of a future life cannot constantly fill the foreground of a busy man's mind, it may form a stable background which silently yet steadily influences his outlook. Without being a habitual object of thought, it may none the less operate continuously. Is what is possible also actual? Does this great conception work in the popular mind to-day steadily directing the desires and governing the valuations of men? In some cases it may do so; yet it is hardly open to doubt that for many, perhaps for the majority in our age, the thought of a life hereafter has only a very slender influence. The interests and ideals of many seem to lie almost entirely within the mundane sphere, and it would not be easy to say in what way, if in any way, their ostensible belief in immortality acts on their lives. Our age is certainly a worldly one, and it is worth while considering for a little the causes that have made it so.

An outstanding feature of last century was the

marvellous application of scientific knowledge and technical skill to the exploitation of nature in the service of man. The vastly enhanced control of the forces of nature which has been the outcome of scientific insight and mechanical invention has multiplied the means of subsistence, and it has gradually transformed the organisation of society. Hence despite an ever-increasing population, there has been a growing standard of comfort; and with the constant emergence of new wants there has gone the means of supplying them. Material progress during the last two or three generations has been very great, and it is based on the mechanical conception of nature successfully applied to the subvention of human needs. The enormous development of modern industry was rendered possible by the triumphant use of the machine to do the work of many human hands. As we look around us one of the most striking things we see is the application of mechanical skill to supply the multifarious wants of daily life: everywhere we remark the successful application of mechanical means to the ends of productive activity. Now I do not raise at this stage the question of the adequacy of the mechanical view of things. It is a working conception of nature which, within its own limits, is entirely successful: it justifies itself by its results. On the other hand, it is a conception which in itself has no

spiritual or ideal value: its primary use has been the manipulation of nature for the production of material goods and the furtherance of material interests. The most we could claim for the mechanical conception of the world in relation to man's higher good is, that it has helped indirectly to emancipate him from illusion and superstition. Over against this we have to set the fact, that the vast production of material goods and comforts, which has been rendered possible by mechanical science, has fostered the growth of worldliness and materialism. Nature at the bidding of science seemed capable of yielding so much, it ministered so abundantly to human comfort, that men became preoccupied with this world and felt little inclined to look beyond it. Man appeared so well able to win satisfaction for himself through the manipulation of nature, that he felt no compelling motive to turn away from this world to a good above it. One can understand that in such an atmosphere, though there was no deliberate adoption of materialism as a creed, and while religion in its conventional forms was always in evidence, there was none the less a serious impoverishment of the spiritual life. Life lost in spiritual inwardness and depth: thought played on the surface of things instead of penetrating to the reality. Men dwelt comfortably in the realm of appearance; they concerned themselves little

with the realm of ideal truth. Hence the complaint that modern society is superficial, frivolous, and easy-going has had some justification. And yet how little avails it to run to and fro on the earth,

“And see all sights from pole to pole,
And glance, and nod, and bustle by,
And never once possess our soul
Before we die !”

The dominant temper of our age has been selfish and worldly. Many appear in practice, if not in theory, to adopt the sober verdict of Hume in his unpublished *Essay on Immortality*: “But if any principle of nature is clear, we may affirm that the whole scope and intention of man’s creation, so far as we can judge by natural reason, is limited to this life.”

This prevailing worldliness has gone hand in hand with religious indifference and a lack of interest in the ultimate destiny of the soul. When man’s treasure is on earth, his heart will be there also: if the mind is full of this world, there is no room for the thought of a higher one. Nor can we draw much comfort from the fact that dogmatic denial of a future life is relatively infrequent, when we know that the stress of earthly interests makes men ignore the question. It is hardly in the nature of things that the worldling should ‘think nobly of the soul’; and

even if a form of belief linger on, still a belief which has no working value is doomed to fade and die. One cannot expect that a real faith in immortality will maintain itself, if that faith stands in no vital relation to life. In these circumstances the stupendous crisis through which the European nations have been passing, a crisis whose effects are felt intensely through the whole structure of society, may help to emphasise truths that have lately fallen into the background. The terrible catastrophe which has overtaken Western civilisation, involving as it has done the annihilation of millions of human lives as well as the unlimited destruction of material goods, is calculated to make the most superficial pause and reflect. The unexampled waste of wealth and of individuals who create wealth has shown, as no mere argument could do, how precarious is man's tenure of earthly things. Those who fondly supposed that modern civilisation ensured the continuous existence of a stable society which would duly conserve an abundant supply of temporal goods for human enjoyment have been rudely disillusioned. The boundless egoism and the fierce passions of the natural man have not perished: they are still powerful, and they have shaken to its foundations the existing order of society. The European war has demonstrated the awful danger which besets modern society,

when men and nations become indifferent to the ethical and religious values. If our modern civilisation is to be saved from the baser elements within it, it must be through the frank and full recognition that right is higher than might, and love is better than hate. These are times of sifting and testing, when we are called to ponder well the evil which the gospel of selfishness has brought upon the earth. It may be that Providence is purifying the world as by fire, and that after these calamities the things which cannot be shaken will stand out with new clearness. These tragic experiences will carry an ennobling element within them, if they purge society of its grossness, and cause men to turn with a fresh devotion to the spiritual and eternal values. If life becomes plainer and in some ways harder, we shall thereby learn better the lesson, that "man cannot live by bread alone." To know how to put the things which matter in the first place is a knowledge that is of supreme importance; and this knowledge springs from religion as an inner life of the soul. It is not, I think, too much to expect that the future will bring a revival of religious interest; and it is religion which can deliver the world from the obstinate delusion that a full and satisfying good is to be found in this mundane order of things. If this be the movement of human minds in the days to come, it will carry with it a

fresh sympathy and interest in the problem of immortality. For faith in the higher values means faith in the destiny of the human personality which sustains and realises these values.

The question of immortality, it has already been said, is one of the most important of all questions. The acceptance or rejection of the idea, or indifference in regard to it, radically affects our attitude to life. It bears most intimately on our outlook on things, whether we have to take this present world as the only reality, or if we must regard it as a stage which leads up to some higher form of experience. There is no denying that the point is a vital one, whether or no the whole meaning of life is contained within the present spatial and temporal order. A man cannot be indifferent to the way in which these questions are answered without being indifferent to the highest human interests. Those who frankly face the problem will ask themselves whether man, in the striking phrase of Berkeley, is only 'a thriving earth-worm,' or whether he is the living centre of powers and aspirations which cannot find a full satisfaction in the mundane system of things, and therefore point beyond it. In the Essay from which we have already quoted, Hume boldly accepts the former alternative. "The powers of man," he remarks, "are no more superior to their wants, considered merely in this life, than those of foxes and hares

are, compared to their wants and their period of existence. The inference from parity of reasoning is therefore obvious.”¹ But the issue on which Hume spoke with such tranquil assurance is by no means so clear as he supposed. That man’s powers in no way exceed his earthly wants is a proposition no one is entitled to assume at the outset; and even a brief consideration will make it plain that there is evidence which tells against it. If man were a purely mundane creature, then he ought to be content with his earthly environment and satisfied with the goods it offers. But if we find that worldly gain and enjoyment do not satisfy him; if there is a ‘noble discontent’ in human nature which material goods cannot assuage; if the inner poverty of a purely earthly life provokes a reaction of the soul against it;—if these things are true, then there is something in human experience that should make those pause who are tempted to conclude that this present existence is all. Now, that human life does reveal such features few will care to deny. That they carry us far in the direction of a doctrine of immortality we do not assert. But here are facts which do not fit in with the naturalistic scheme of things, and they point clearly to the conclusion that man is something greater than the natural order in which he appears. He is in

¹ Edit. Green and Grose, p. 401.

it, yet not entirely of it. And when we frankly recognise the greatness of human nature, we do not find it hard to think hopefully of human destiny. Those who think meanly of man are commonly most hopeless about his fate. Meanwhile an age which is drawn to religion through painful experience of the poverty and instability of worldly things, may be expected to give a more patient and sympathetic hearing to the case for immortality. Man cannot live on negations nor thrive amid uncertainties ; and the true issue of doubt is a return to faith in some form. When the spirit of faith beats strong within, it carries a man beyond the seen and temporal, and causes him to embrace and hold fast the hope of eternal life.

Let us pass from this aspect of the subject, and make clear to ourselves, if we can, the true nature of the problem of immortality. What is the real question at issue when man claims to be immortal? Is the continued existence of the present body involved in the idea of a future life? The reply to this query, as most will agree, must be in the negative. The decay and dissolution of the corporeal organism after death is an assured fact, and an exact restoration to its former condition presents insuperable difficulties. The idea is definitely rejected by St. Paul, for he says "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

And it is inconceivable that an organism in which the seeds of dissolution are immanent from the first, and which the life-process gradually wears out, should serve as an abiding basis of spiritual life. If immortality is to be possible, the present body cannot be necessary to the persistence of the soul hereafter.

But further, we must be sure what is meant by predicating immortality of the soul. Do we mean that there is something in man, some element or essence, which defies the process of decay, which is indestructible and therefore eternal? Some have thought so, but the belief is exposed to many objections. The idea that the soul is a simple and indestructible substance, in the body yet not of it, is a legacy from the philosophic schools; but it has fared badly at the hands of modern psychology and philosophical criticism. The psychology of our day gives no countenance whatever to the existence of a mysterious entity within the body termed the soul. The notion has no basis in experience, and is a pure product of philosophical abstraction. In the study of this great problem we must try to divest ourselves of certain lingering prejudices which are really a *damnosa hereditas* from the metaphysics of the past. The notion of an abstract soul-substance is one of these prejudices. But though, in sympathy with modern thought,

we discard the old idea of a soul-substance, we are not, in so doing, damaging the case for immortality. For no ethical or spiritual interest is bound up with this conception. What the doctrine of immortality postulates is the persistence of the self, despite the change which is wrought by death. It requires us to believe that, after the dissolution of this material body, there is a survival in some form of that personal life which has been developed on earth. Thus we can agree with a contemporary thinker when he tells us, it is more correct to speak of the immortality of the self than the immortality of the soul, inasmuch as our words will be more free of misleading associations.¹ But no harm will be done by using the old and familiar word, if we are careful to attach a proper meaning to it. For the soul is just the self: it is the self-conscious principle which is the basis and condition of rational thought and action. The conception of immortality centres in the belief that the self, which is the living ground of values and the condition of memory, persists beyond death.

In this connexion it is very common to use the phrase *personal immortality*. Note the significance of the word 'personal' in this connexion. It brings out the truth that the persistence, after the death of the body, of some unconscious substance

¹ J. E. McTaggart, *Human Immortality and Pre-Existence*, p. 10.

or substratum is not the kind of survival that is in view. A survival of this sort, where no conscious connexion was experienced between the new existence and the old, would not conserve elements which are essential to the spiritual idea of immortality. For the endurance of a sub-personal basis of life after death would not be *our* immortality: to this the persistence of a self-consciousness which links the present to the past is necessary. The word 'personal,' however, ordinarily connotes something more than self-conscious: it implies this, but it is a richer notion. The concept of personality carries with it the thought of manifold relations which the self sustains to the outer world and the society of other selves, as well as the body of memories which are involved in these relations. A personal life is the life of a self which maintains its interest and realises its continuity through these relations to the world and other selves. Personality is therefore a more developed idea than that of the self; and it is natural to ask, how far a conception which draws so much meaning and colour from mundane conditions can be carried over into the supramundane sphere. Are there not elements in human personality which must lose their meaning when earthly conditions are transcended? A full discussion of this point is not possible at this stage, for the nature of personality and the limits

it implies raise some of the most difficult problems of metaphysics. It may be enough to say now, that it is not essential that the whole system of earthly memories and relations should be carried into the world beyond, in order that the elements of value in the notion of personal immortality may be conserved. A great mass of our earthly experiences which have silently gone to the making of personality are not consciously remembered by us, yet this does not rob them of significance and value. It is sufficient that we remember enough to maintain a continuity of interest and to recognise our spiritual identity in the experiences through which we have passed. So the essential thing is that a connexion should be consciously realised between the life here and the life to come ; and this, as we know from our own history, is possible, even though a man forgets much and cannot help doing so. This continuity, be it said, means more than mere persistence of being, and it must do so if the elements of value in the idea of immortality are to be preserved. The ethical and religious element in the notion depends on the fact of personal identity despite the transformation of the environment, and the old conception of metempsychosis in sacrificing this continuity becomes destitute of religious worth. If we reduce the idea of immortality to the persistence of an un-

conscious substratum of being, we empty it of any specific ethical value.

There is yet another aspect of the problem which deserves mention in this preliminary survey. I mean the question how far the idea of duration enters into the essence of immortality. In the vulgar conception it certainly plays a considerable part. To the common mind to be immortal usually means to persist indefinitely in time, to go on living through unending ages. And yet to sober reflexion the bare idea of an indefinite quantitative extension in time is not satisfying. It is not the mere endlessness of the life which seems of so much account, as the quality of the life itself. Pure duration in time, for beings constituted as we are, does not seem specially desirable: indeed it might mean an unbearable monotony.¹ Tennyson has given expression to this feeling in his *Tithonus*, who pines 'a gray-haired shadow' at 'the quiet limit of the world,' cursed, not blessed, with the gift of unending life:

"Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,
And after many a summer dies the swan.
Me only cruel immortality consumes."

To go on indefinitely doing nothing, or doing the same thing, is not attractive to us: a life of perfect

¹ On this point cf. Jowett's remarks in his Introduction to the *Phædo* in his translation of *Plato*, vol. ii. pp. 175-176.

monotony is a life that no human being would willingly choose.

But if immortality in the sense of endless extension is a very inadequate idea, can we give a better and more satisfying content to the notion of eternal life? Or, to put it differently, can we make plain to ourselves what is the essential and really valuable element in the idea of immortality? We shall perhaps be led to an answer, if we ask what is the human need that finds its satisfaction in the doctrine. From the practical point of view it is the limitations and uncertainties, the divisions and separations incident to the time-process, which man dreads. He longs to be delivered from the law of mutability and decay which he sees at work all around him. It is freedom from this law and superiority to it that he hopes to gain through the possession of eternal life. He seeks in immortality to win a security of being and a fulness of life which the world cannot give. The doom of mortality is felt to be hard, for it entails painful breaks and separations; and death is bitter when it cuts short the developing life in its incompleteness. Time carries men away as with a flood, and the place which knew them once soon knows them no more. To be immortal is to transcend the power of time and of death and all that death means. Immortality is not mere endlessness; it is fulness and completeness of life.

I come back for a moment to the thought already emphasised—the thought that, if immortality be a fact, it is a fact of the most far-reaching importance to mankind. No scientific problem which exercises human thought can compare with it in this respect. For a scientific problem only deals with a particular bit of experience and in some one of its aspects: it carries within it no message for life as a whole, nor are man's outlook and ideals profoundly affected by it. The problem of immortality is far wider in its scope, and its issues are deeper and more urgent. If the idea which underlies it be true, then this earthly experience points beyond itself. The history of finite selves is then but a stage in a larger movement, and through the temporal history the soul passes on to a higher good. It deeply concerns human interests and ends whether this mundane experience is a final or only a transitional one. It should make a great difference to human conduct, whether the ultimate good lies within the world-process or transcends it, whether here and now we can realise the best, or if 'the best is yet to be.'

Before drawing this chapter to a close, I shall try to indicate briefly the lines which the present investigation will follow. Our treatment to some extent will proceed on historical lines, and we shall begin by tracing the development of the idea

of a future life. We shall sketch broadly its growth from the lower to the higher culture, indicating the salient features in the development. In this way we shall satisfy ourselves how far the conception is a genuine outgrowth of man's nature and represents a persistent human demand. We shall then deal with the attitude of science to this question, and consider whether it is in a position to draw conclusions either favourable or adverse to the idea. In this connexion something will be said on the recent results of Psychological Research in so far as they bear on our problem.

We shall then turn to the conception of immortality as a historic problem of philosophy, and endeavour to form an estimate of what the speculative treatment of the question has yielded. The two concluding chapters will discuss what is most vital in the subject, most vital because here if anywhere positive conclusions may be reached. In the first of these chapters the ethical argument for immortality will be examined. The issue will be a decision, whether the conception can be put forward as an ethical postulate or not. In other words, Is immortality necessary to the coherency of our world of values, or, in a large sense, to the rationality of our universe? The last chapter will consider the place of immortality in a religious view of the world. We shall ask if the legitimate

demands of the religious consciousness require us to find a place for it in the spiritual scheme of things. Or, to put it briefly, Is immortality an idea which must enter into a truly religious view of the world?