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THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL:

HISTORICALLY, SCIENTIFICALLY, AND
SCRIPTURALLY CONSIDERED.

IN THREE LETTERS BY

EDWARD TURNEY.

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THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL.

HISTORICALLY CONSIDERED.

SIR,—As neither Mr. Chandler nor any one else has accepted the offer of three nights' discussion upon the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, I proceed—construing your silence into consent—to write the first of the three articles before mentioned; at the close of which, as I then said, your valuable space and liberal spirit shall not be again occupied and taken advantage of by me.

Those who defend the doctrine of the soul's inherent immortality are very confident in the alleged fact that it was a doctrine believed by the whole Pagan world. How often has the exclamation been heard: "Why even the Pagans believed in the immortality of the soul!" The multitudes to whom this assurance is given have very little of either inclination or opportunity to investigate the matter for themselves; and it is not too much to say that nearly the whole of them rather take it for granted than form a judgment upon it by enquiry. The Egyptians are the oldest people of whom we possess historical records, and "are the first of mankind who taught the immortality of the soul. They believed that on the dissolution of the body, the soul immediately entered some other animal, and after using as a vehicle every species of terrestrial, aquatic, and winged creature, it finally entered a second time into a human body."—*Larcher's Herodotus*. The Egyptians also believed that after a cycle of 3,000 years the soul would claim its body again. Some of those mummies in the British Museum are said to be 3,000 years old, but up to the present time no souls have put in an appearance to establish their claims. This part of the doctrine is therefore proved to be false. Those who have assented to the soul's immortality have always been puzzled to know how it could think or act without the organs

of sense. Historians are agreed that it was from Egypt that Greece imbibed this doctrine. "It is to Egypt," says Diodorus, "that Pythagoras owed his favourite doctrine of metempsychosis, or transmigration of souls." Here then is inferential proof that prior to this time the Greeks did not understand the doctrine, so that no small portion of antiquity stands in contradiction to the generally supposed universal assent to it. We find, too, that whether true or false, the immortal soulism of the Egyptian and Greek schools was a doctrine greatly differing from that of modern times. They believed the soul to be a part of the Divinity; not therefore something which came into existence at birth; but which had always existed, passing from one body to another. "Pythagoras declared that he recollected the different bodies which he animated before that of the son of Mnesarchus. He remembered to have been Arthaldes, the son of Mercury, to have assisted the Greeks during the Trojan war, in the character of Euphorbus, to have been Hermonotinus, afterwards a fisherman, and last of all Pythagoras."—*Lempriere*. Would modern Christians accept this doctrine? and if not why do their recognized teachers so frequently refer us to the philosophers of Greece as proper examples for our guidance? Pythagoras, it is said, was condemned to drink hemlock for teaching the philosophy he had learned in Egypt. Here is a further proof that the doctrine had not gained universal acquiescence. Next came those great men, Socrates and Plato, who are always held up to our admiration as being scarcely inferior to the Hebrew prophets. We cannot dwell at length on these philosophers—suffice it to say, that Socrates had his doubts about the truth of the doctrine, though he taught it so many years. He says: "Though I should be *mistaken*, I gain at least thus much, that the expectation makes me less uneasy while I live, and *my error* will die with me." Being about to die, he said to his judges, "I am going out of the world, and you are to continue in it; but which of us has the better part is a *secret to everyone*, but God." Surely no candid judgment can rely upon Socrates as an authority; he dare not trust himself. In those days the philosophical world was divided upon the subject. Epicurus, Zeno, and others taught the *mortality* of the soul; another confutation of the universal acceptance of the soul's immortality. The fact is, that the heathen philosophers contradict themselves and one another. Plutarch tells us that Aristotle held the doctrine, and yet he speaks of death as "*the end*, and beyond it there is nothing for the dead

man, either good or bad." Seneca calls the immortality of the soul a "splendid illusion." Pliny also wrote against it. Cicero read Plato again and again; but he says, "no sooner is the book out of my hands than I begin to *doubt whether man is immortal.*" The next piece of evidence we have to present against the alleged world-wide belief in this theory, comes from Arabian theology. Dr. Good writes as follows: "If we turn from Persia, Egypt, and Hindostan, to Arabia, to the fragrant groves and learned shades of Dedan and Yemen,—from which it is certain that Persia, and highly probable that Hindostan, derived its first polite literature,—we shall find the entire subject of the immortality of the soul left in as *blank and barren a silence* as the deserts by which they are surrounded; or if touched upon, only touched upon to betray doubt, and sometimes disbelief, in such a doctrine. Ecclesiastical historians have marked the fact that the philosophers of Arabia denied the natural immortality of man, and tell us that Origen was sent thither to teach them the Pythagorean philosophy." Though there is much more historical testimony that might be adduced from Pagan times, we must stop here on account of space, having to bring forward evidence from other sources. The Jewish sects were at discord on this question. Josephus says that the Essenes built all their notions of future bliss and punishment "on this first *supposition* that souls are immortal." The Sadducees denied the doctrine; while the Pharisees held it in a singular form, thinking that there was an imperishable vigour in the soul, by which it revived and lived again. As for the Rabbis, a large amount of contradictory testimony is found in their writings. Rabbi Jalkut Reubeni said the wicked "shall die the second death, and shall *not live* in the world to come." Rabbi Eliezer affirmed that "from the second death *no one can come to life again.*" Abarbinet, Maimonides, Nachmauides, Bechai, Kimchi, Jehuda-bar-Elii, Jarchi, J. Albo, Manasseh Ben-Israel, and others, regarded the second death as utter irreversible destruction. And what shall we say of the first Christians? Their writings furnish conflicting testimony; but the nearer we keep to the days of the apostles, the more frequent and striking are the denials of the mortality of the soul. Justin Martyr wrote: "If therefore you fall in with certain who are called Christians who say that immediately when they die they are received up into heaven, avoid them, and esteem them not Christians." Iranceus, like Justin, calls these heretics, who expected glorification immediately at death, and before resurrection. In his

"Voice of the Church," Mr. Taylor shows what a large number of others there were who looked for a future life *only through resurrection*. From the death of the apostles down to the Reformation we find both views ardently held and contended for; and from that glorious epoch till now there have not been wanting many of the most illustrious of mankind for learning and morality who have declared that there is no foundation for the doctrine, either in Scripture or reason. Such names as Milton, Luther, Wesley, Tyndale, Law, Watson, Hall, Tillotson, Whateley, and a host of others that might be set down promiscuously, ought really to have great weight with the impartial examiner of this doctrine. There are also some later names of note in the learned world who maintain that the Scriptures are in nowise responsible for this dogma. Macaulay, the historian and poet, says that all attempts to prove the immortality of the soul have failed deplorably, and that the wisest philosopher knows no more about the matter than a Blackfoot Indian. In my next I propose to deal with the subject in the light of science.

Yours obediently,

EDWARD TURNEY.

Alexandra Park, Nottingham.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL SCIENTIFICALLY CONSIDERED.

SIR,—A sound mind in an unsound body has often been urged as a strong proof that the *mind*, or soul, is superior to the body, and capable of living apart from it. But if this hypothesis were true, it would apply with equal force to any period of human life—to infancy and childhood, as well as to extreme old age. The *mind* should, according to this theory, shine with as much brilliancy and perfection in the suckling as in the decrepit old man, for it is as superior to the body of the one as it is to that of the other; and if an aged, emaciated body be no hindrance to the luminosity of the mind, it cannot well be contended that the body of a healthy infant would be any obstacle to its manifestations, intellectual or moral. The striking parallel, however, which exists between the human infant and the lower orders of the animal creation is a sufficient answer to such an argument. Physiological evidence goes to prove that the development of the mind is concurrent with that of the body, and that after the body is well developed the mind may be more and more expanded. This fact

of progression, applicable almost alike to youth and age, is an insuperable barrier to the doctrine that the soul is a particle of the Divinity, and therefore always perfect like Himself. Another argument in favour of the popular belief is drawn from Reason. Some contend that this is an attribute of the immortality of the soul, but a study of nature soon dispels the illusion. Numerous instances of reasoning faculties in the lower animals are on record, and may every day be witnessed by the attentive observer. In fact, so gradual is the ascent from instinct to reason, that it is not possible to say where the one ends and the other begins. In the human species, too, the difference of capacity is very great, so much so that an individual taken from the lowest type is, compared to one taken from the highest type, scarcely above a sagacious beast, as regards mentality. But whatever follows from the existence of reason in man in favour of the popular view of the soul, determines also the existence of the same soul in brutes, seeing that they are, though in a less degree, possessors of the same faculty. The argument from reason, then, proves too much, and therefore proves nothing. Like as the old philosophers referred the motions of the heavenly bodies to some vague "principle of motion," so do many theologians refer the operations of the mind to some abstract Vital Principle; but the most eminent physiologists affirm that no such assumption is necessary to account for any of the facts connected with organized living beings, and that such a mode of procedure in the science of physiology is just as absurd as that which we condemn in the ancients. To whatever source we attribute the mental endowments of man, to the same source must be attributed those of beasts, for the difference is one of degree rather than of kind, the logical consequence being (were the popular doctrine true) that the brutes would claim inherent immortality in common with man. There are several phenomena which afford the strongest argument against the theory we are combating; sleep, for example. It is well known that in sound sleep the mind loses all knowledge,—man becomes totally unconscious. Such is also the case in fainting fits, and partial suffocation. How shall we explain this fact on the assumption that the soul is the thinking, conscious part, which neither disease nor even the death and the dissolution of the body can impair, or cause to cease? The extraordinary powers theologically assigned to the soul give rise to most serious doubt, and demand a more satisfactory explanation than has hitherto been given. Disembodied, the soul is said to be able to see to any distance, by day or

night; to find no obstacle even in stone walls, or, in fact, any other objects; while in the body these godlike powers are interrupted by the trifling consideration of something less than an inch of flesh, which is nearly all fluid matter. All that we know, or can know, of *mind* is indissolubly connected with organized living matter. It is not possible to figure to our senses a living, thinking agent which is not a substance of some sort. Though the soul is styled immaterial, after all it stands before the imagination as a body of some kind, give it what descriptive title we please, and it is with this rarified substance that our ideas of mentality are associated. The science of language is alike destructive of the general idea of the soul. We are told that it is *immaterial*: this is just saying logically that it has *no existence*. The very terms, therefore, in which the doctrine is conveyed, are powerful weapons for its destruction. If immaterialists would only reflect a little, they would soon see that they are quite as much materialists as those they treat with scorn and derision. Their ideas of a separate state, and of the bliss of heaven, take shape in some bright, thin kind of matter, like an illuminated cloud; but in whatever way they view it, they cannot possibly discard something which has form, size, and other characteristics with which we are acquainted in matter of a grosser kind. This effort of the mind to realize bodiless existence has arisen in part from the erroneous notion that matter is essentially corrupt. When the Creator pronounced His benediction on the creatures of His hand on the morning of their birth, were they material or immaterial? and is not all the glory of Christ's reign on earth to be material glory? Another objection to the doctrine I am advocating is made on the supposition that *matter* cannot think. This has been reiterated till men fear to call it in question. Let us ask, Can matter live? If the answer be no, then it follows that the body cannot die; for that which cannot live cannot be deprived of life. On the other hand, if the answer be yes, then we ask why matter which can live should not also be able to think? True, we know not *how* matter can think; neither do we know *how* it lives, nor how it attracts other matter; but no reasonable man would deny these facts. If science is capable of proving anything at all, I think it will show that the Almighty Creator of the brain of men and animals has endowed it with the power of thought, and that in proportion to its development and cultivation so is its thinking power exhibited, precisely the same as physical strength is exhibited in other parts of the body. For instances of reason in beasts and birds I make a

general reference to Doctor Carpenter's works on physiology having no space here to give extracts. But, with regard to the human brain I beg to present the following interesting accounts:—"Richmond mentions the case of a woman whose brain was exposed in consequence of the removal of a considerable part of its bony covering by disease. He says: 'I repeatedly made pressure on the brain, and each time suspended all feeling and all intellect.'" Professor Chapman says: "I saw an individual with his brain exposed. His intellect and moral faculties disappeared on the application of pressure to the brain." Sir Astley Cooper describes the case of a man whose head was injured. Mr. Clyne removed a portion of the bone that had been pressing on the brain thirteen months, and in three hours sensation returned; the first thing the man recollected was his last act before the accident occurred. Medical science abounds with such testimony, while there is not a single instance on record of the manifestation of thought where no brain exists, or of rational thought where the brain is injured to any extent. From this evidence I am led to the conclusion that brain matter is endowed with thinking power, and that, therefore, the theory of a separate Vital Principle styled the immortal soul is contrary to the infallible testimony of scientific demonstration. Did not space forbid, other cases might be considered, and among them lunacy; but here I must be content to leave the scientific aspect of the subject, and shall, in my next letter, conclude all I have to say, in the presentation of the scriptural view, which I am afraid will upset a good deal that has been too confidently asserted.

Yours obediently,

EDWARD TURNEY.

Alexandra Park, Nottingham.

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL SCRIPTURALLY CONSIDERED.

SIR,—The first step to be taken in an argument is to define the terms to be used. Without this, all sorts of misunderstanding and confusion may arise, because one person may use a term in one sense, and another in quite a different and sometimes even an opposite sense. Hence, instead of the discussion elucidating and possibly settling the question, it but too often leaves it in more mystery than it was before. One thing, however, is generally accomplished, namely, the setting up of strong and improper

feeling on one side, and not unfrequently on both, by which much injury is done to truth in relation to a certain class of people who love quiet, and abhor anything savouring of angry debate. I shall, therefore, first of all, state the terms Scripturally employed in this enquiry, and then give the definitions founded on the universal authority of the learned, without regard to theological or any other bias. Let us take the Old Testament first. Here are three words of constant occurrence, *Ruach*, *Neshamah*, and *Nephesh*. *Ruach* is a noun, of which the verb is *ruach*, meaning to breathe, to blow. Hence it is rendered wind, blast, air, tempest, breath, spirit, and in several other ways, which, however, do not affect on enquiry. Now the first thing to be observed is, that in no single passage of Scripture is there a statement which assigns to *ruach* the quality of eternal existence. In other words, immortality, which means life through an incorruptible body, is not once predicated of *ruach*. On the other hand it is affirmed of beasts in common with man, "They (men and animals) have all one breath" (*ruach*) Eccles. iii. 19. "All flesh wherein is the breath (*ruach*) of life" Gen. vi. 17. "In whose hand is the breath (*ruach*) of all mankind" Job xii. 10. This being the fact, it is incorrect to speak of this *ruach* as though it were an immortal intelligence dwelling in the bodies of all mankind, but capable of living after their bodies are mouldered into dust. What is the effect of the withdrawal of the *ruach* from the bodies of men and animals may easily be seen. The Scripture on this point agrees with universal experience. "Thou takest away their breath (*ruacham*), they die, and return to their dust" Ps. civ. 29. "His (man's) breath (*ruchu*) goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish." Ps. cxlvi. 4. The Scripture here, as in numerous other places, teaches that the withdrawal of the breath, or what we call the vital air, consigns men and animals alike to their original nothingness. That instead of setting the thoughts free, and enabling them to operate on an almost infinitely larger scale, exactly the reverse is the truth, that is, they do not operate on any scale at all; they perish.

Neshamah. The verb is *nasham*, to breathe. Genesis says the verb is not found in the Hebrew Bible. *Neshamah* is the synonym for *ruach*. See Professor Leo's Lexicon. *Neshamah* is rendered breath. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath (*nishmath*) of life." Gen. ii. 7. We have seen that *neshamah* and *ruach* are synonymous terms. Therefore what is called here *nishmath* of life,

is, in Gen. vi. 17, styled *ruach* of life. "All flesh wherein is the breath (*ruach*) of life shall die." This *nishmath*, *ruach*, or *breath*, is not a *living being*; it is the influence, or power by which man and all other animals are made alive; and when it is withdrawn they all perish. "All in whose nostrils was the breath of life . . . died." Gen. vii. 22. In this verse the *two* Hebrew words occur. As I said of *ruach*, so I say of *nishmath*, there is no passage in the Bible in which it occurs that favours the popular idea concerning the soul of man.

Nephesh is a noun, derived from the verb *Naphash*, to *breathe* or *expire*. It is therefore translated *breath*. In this it is similar to the other two words of which I have written. *Nephesh* is also translated *creature*. "God created great whales and every living creature (*nephesh*)." It is used of beast, fowl, and creeping things, in a word, of all air-breathing animals. And this is true of man. "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul (*nephesh*)." Gen. ii. 7. In this testimony there is not a syllable to lead us to believe that man is immortal, or possesses an "immortal soul." That which is said of man is said also of the other animals; he is "a *living* soul," or creature. We find nothing about *ever-living* or *never-dying* soul in this or any other Scripture evidence,—that was an invention of man himself. *Nephesh* is rendered *life*, not *eternal* life; and scores of passages attest its application to beasts and men alike. "A righteous man regardeth the life (*nephesh*) of his beast." Pro. xii. 10. "All that a man hath will he give for his life (*naphsho*)." Job ii. 4. To show further that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul has no countenance in a correct use of these terms, which I have shown are synonymous, I may mention the fact that *nephesh* is often employed in reference to dead bodies. "He shall come at no dead body (*nephesh*)." Num. vi. 6. "Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead (*nephesh*)." Lev. xix. 28. Though very much more might be said, the foregoing explanation and use of these three Hebrew words is, I think, quite sufficient to make it conclusive that the Old Testament cannot fairly be held responsible for the popular doctrine, but that the evidence all points to quite another conclusion.

Let us now consider certain terms found in the New Testament. *Pneuma* and *Psuche*. *Pneuma* is a noun; the verb is *pneo*, to *breathe*, to *blow*. Here we have the same meaning in a Greek

dress. *Pneuma* is rendered *wind, breath*. "The wind (*pneuma*) bloweth. Jno. iii. 8. "The body without the spirit (*pneuma*, margin *breath*) is dead." Jas. ii. 26. This *pneuma* is nowhere said to signify an immortal soul, nor is there anything in the etymology of the word which indicates that immortality is any part of its meaning. In the English version *pneuma* is often rendered *ghost*, old English, and means *breath*. Again, *pneuma* is translated *spirit*, and *spirit* comes from the Latin *spiro*, to *breathe*. This affords no authority for calling the spirit immortal. Evidently, as a noun, its meaning is a breathing thing; or an animal which lives by breathing; and agrees with the Hebrew word *nephesh*, soul or creature. Such, however, is the effect of early impressions that it is not easy for some persons to shut out of view everything that is not justly comprised in the terms before them. They no sooner see *soul* and *spirit*, but their imagination is filled with the notion that these words signify *immortal* soul; *never-dying* spirit; and in many prejudice is so strong, that they not only refuse to investigate the matter for themselves, but they soon feel suspicious of those who desire them to do so. Their unreasoning tenacity to their own imagination is as strong as was that of our ancestors to witchcraft and commerce with evil spirits. Our religious teachers are largely responsible for this; no class of men has done more to retard true mental and scientific progress; still the onus lies to a great extent on the systems in which they are educated, as well as on their own individual consciences. Instead of leading the people, the people often push them, by the advancing spirit of the age, which moves all before it, and cannot be arrested.

Psuche is our next Greek term. Its radical meaning is *breath*. The verb is *psucho*, to *breathe* or *blow*. Like *nephesh* in the Old Testament, it is frequently rendered *life*. "Take no thought for your *life* (*psuche*)."
Popular teaching being true, this would mean "take no thought for your *immortal soul*," a sense which could only be styled nonsense. The passage is perfectly intelligible when taken to mean that if you lose your life, or die for the cause of Christ, you shall find your life, or live again at the resurrection of the just. "The Son of Man came to give his life (*psuchen*) a ransom for many." Matt. xx. 28. This accords with Isa. liii. 12. He hath poured out his soul (*naphsho*) unto death." Again, the popular view being correct, the meaning would amount to absurd contradiction. "He poured out his *immortal* or *deathless* soul unto *death*;" while the very Christ of whom this was pre-

dicted, declared that they which are immortal *cannot die any more*. Luke xx. 36. Some dealing with this subject before they have sufficiently thought about it, allege the impossibility of man killing the soul; but if they would consult Joshua x., they would find that many *souls* have been "utterly destroyed" by the sword. But no man can kill the *soul*, or destroy the *life*, so that God cannot restore it, which I take to be the meaning of Mat. x. 28. When God destroys a soul in His wrath, that soul is *extinguished*, like a lamp which is never to be lit again. "They are *extinct*, they are *quenched* as tow." Isa. xliii. 17. God will not raise them again to life. "They are dead; they shall not live; they are deceased; they shall not rise." Isa. xxvi. 14. To conclude under this head. It is plain that if to be a *soul* mean to have an *immortal soul*, then there is nothing that lives, moves, and has its being, from the most microscopic insect to the hugest mammoth, but what, had it the power of speech, might justly sing,

"A never-dying soul to save."

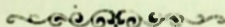
I affirm that whencesoever may have originated this doctrine, it is quite a mistake to charge it upon either the Old or the New Testament.

Before closing this letter, I should like to say a few words about two other terms—I mean *for ever* and *everlasting*. It has been asserted that because these words are applied to the punishment of the wicked, that therefore the wicked themselves are never-dying. It will be seen, however, that if this way of reading such texts were proper, the whole of the testimony before adduced and ten times more identical with it, would be falsified. Before we allow such a supposition to take possession of our minds, we ought very carefully to examine the subject. Now the words *Olalm* (Hebrew) and *aion* (Greek) translated *ever* and *everlasting*, do not define time at all. The duration of time intended must always be sought for in the context. Moreover, there are numerous passages to show that in no language could there possibly be words whose meaning is more variable and elastic than *olalm* and *aion*. The Hebrew word *olalm* is frequently used to indicate short periods of time, and so is the Greek word *aion*, both in the Septuagint and the New Testament. *Aion* is, in fact, the Greek for *olalm*. Any good Greek Lexicon will prove this. What then is the value of predicating the soul's immortality, on the use of these words? On the other hand, we find that while *olalm* and *aion* signify short periods of time, such as the Levitical priest's term of

office, the life of a servant whose ear was bored through with an awl, and so forth ; they also apply to God, and to things which will remain for ever unreversed, as the state of wicked dead, whose *punishment* is Scripturally explained to mean *everlasting destruction*, which common sense and the universal definition of language tell us is the very opposite of *everlasting life* in any state, happy or miserable. And now, Sir, apologising for taking up so much of your valuable space, and thanking you again for your liberality in according so much room to religious questions, I beg to subscribe myself, in hope of eternal life by a resurrection from the dead, or bodily change, if living when Christ appears,

Yours obediently,

EDWARD TURNEY.



[These letters were written for the *Hereford Times*, the Editor of which paper allowed a two months' controversy on the Immortality of the Soul : but they did not appear, in consequence of being held back until the controversy was closed. They are now reprinted from the *Christian Lamp*.]

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