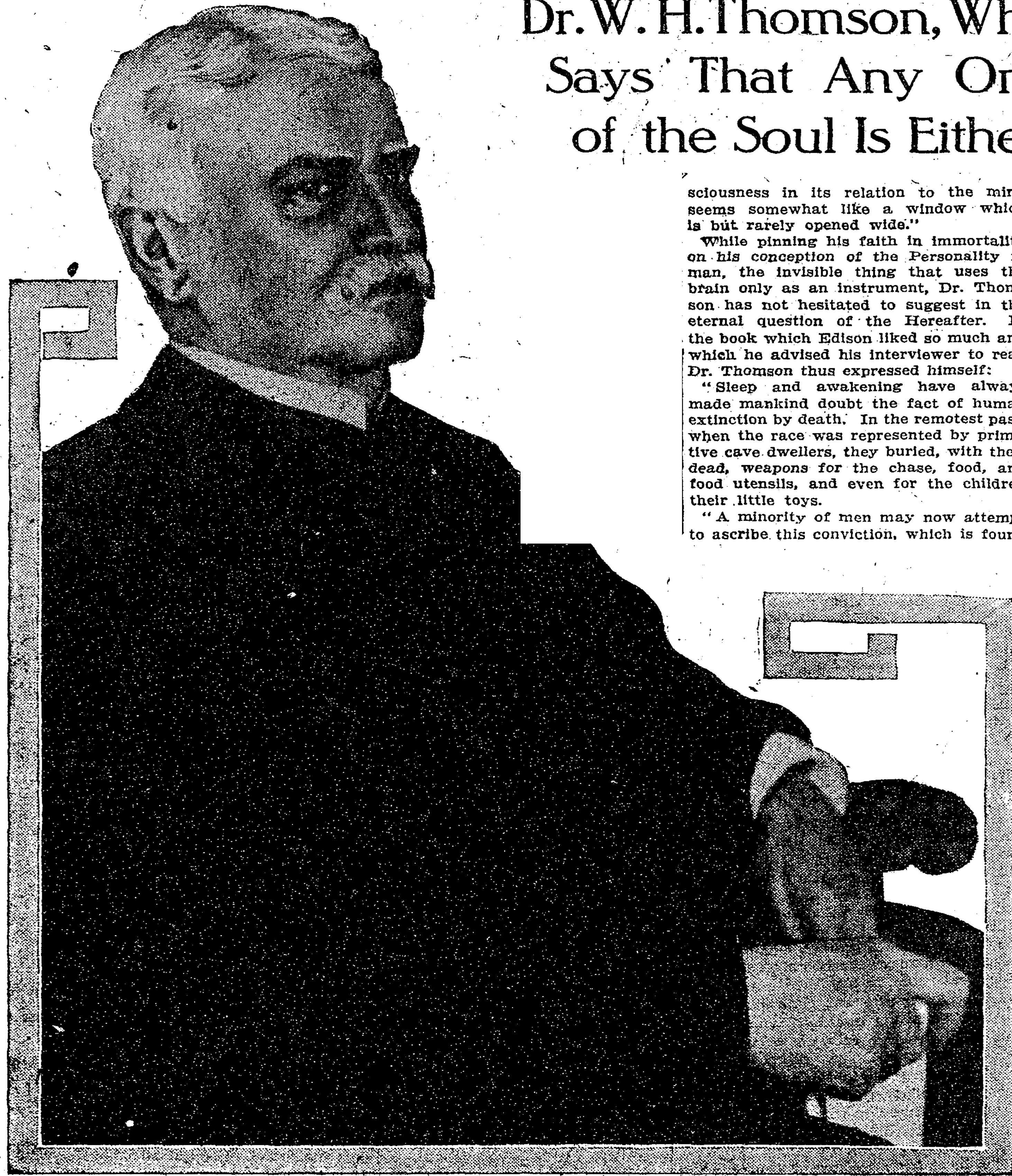


# AUTHOR OF "BRAIN AND PERSONALITY" REPLIES TO EDISON.

## Dr. W. H. Thomson, Whose Book the Inventor Quoted, Says That Any One Denying the Immortality of the Soul Is Either Abnormal or Pathological.



Dr. W. H. Thomson.

PEOPLE who do not believe in immortality are abnormal, if not pathological.

This flat statement is made by Dr. William Hanna Thomson, author of "Brain and Personality" and many other books, in reply to Thomas A. Edison's denial of immortality of the soul in last Sunday's TIMES.

Dr. Thomson's reputation as a brain scientist is worldwide, and as Mr. Edison referred to his work, "Brain and Personality," many people took it for granted that the eminent author had been busy in shaping the thoughts of the inventor.

Dr. Thomson was quick to point out that his book gave Mr. Edison no reason for coming to the conclusion that there is no such thing as immortality.

There are, perhaps, few of the older students of the human brain more widely accepted as an authority than Dr. Thomson. He was a Professor of Medicine and of Nervous Diseases for twenty-seven years, and was formerly President of the New York Academy of Medicine.

Dr. Thomson lives in the fine, old-fashioned house at 70 West Fifty-fourth Street. He does a great deal of writing, but still keeps up his study of the human brain, and is, physician to the Roosevelt Hospital, consulting physician to the New York Manhattan State Hospital for the Insane, consulting physician to the New York Red Cross Hospital, and Fellow of many scientific societies.

The physician-author is of that gentle and courteous type so frequently met with among the old scholars in the South, whose educations started before the war and who as boys were sent to Oxford and Cambridge to acquire their classics.

A black cigar sent little blue clouds of smoke upward through a drooping gray mustache. A pair of eyes as bright as those of an eager young student searched those of his interviewer. He sat at his library desk with his back to the wide window opening on Fifty-fourth Street. He had motioned his interviewer to sit in an old oaken chair, much higher than the chair in which he sat, and with his interviewer's face full in the light.

"It is true," he said, in answer to the first question, "that there is no mention of deity or religion in my book which Mr. Edison referred to in his Times interview. Yet many lawyers and judges have been impressed by the work as one that has given strength to the belief in immortality. One lawyer wrote me at length, declaring that it had clearly demonstrated to him the existence of a soul. A judge, a member of the Court of Appeals, wrote me an eight-page letter about it. It read as if it was a decision from the Bench to the effect that my book had established the fact that the brain was only the instrument of an invisible personality, a personality independent of the instrument."

Dr. Thomson, in answer to a question as to the existence of a soul in man, declared that he did not use the word soul and that the word was vague. He uses his own term Personality, and, as will be seen, he does not try with conjecture to fashion deity or deity, or merely to give the brain scientists siding in the matter of immortality and the existence of that thing which he terms Personality.

"Mr. Edison's view is unscientific," he said. "The fact that he is prominent in one branch of science does not entitle him to pass on other branches of science. He is very unscientific when he speaks of the human brain. There are two brains, not a brain. The brain with the Logos, or power of speech, is the brain with the mind. The other brain is that of the animal."

"I was the Chairman of the committee that had to welcome Dr. von Helmholtz to the Century Club. Dr. von Helmholtz, now dead, was the greatest of European scientists. He was a right-handed man and in right-handed people the speech centre is in the left hemisphere of the brain. He had two strokes of apoplexy. The first struck him in the right hemisphere and did not finish him. The second struck him in the left hemisphere and he died. The right hemisphere of his brain had no more intelligence than the brain of a cat has. Von Helmholtz was not in the right hemisphere of the brain. He was wholly in the left, and when apoplexy struck him there it laid him low. In one hemisphere there was no von Helmholtz; in the other side was von Helmholtz."

"Now why does the hand decide in which brain the power of speech is to be developed?"

"At birth neither hemisphere knows anything of speech. But as the child grows its personality wants to communicate with others. The brain makes no effort to communicate by speech. The child reaches out its hand and gestures, with right or left hand predominating in the sign language. It is the first language. Then the child makes faces and moves its lips. Gradually, if the child is left-handed, the brain in the right hemisphere develops the speech centre, and if it is right-handed the speech centre develops in the left hemisphere. The personality of the child teaches the brain and uses it as an instrument after shaping it. This personality is invisible, but we know that this is the way that a child starts the power of speech."

"The child gets older and takes up another language. Who ever heard of any one learning a new language spontaneously?" The child must work hard to get this new language, and this work makes a new layer or shelf in the brain come into action, just as the first speech centre was made alive by effort of the personality. A new language is added just as a record is made on the leaf of a phonograph. The phonograph turns out the sound, but it is not responsible for the sound, is it?"

"The phonograph is no more responsible for the sound from its record than the brain is for speech that is uttered. In speech, in the Logos, as it is called, the brain is the instrument of a Personality just as the phonograph is the instrument for a reproduction of sound."

"If Mr. Edison's objections are based on scientific facts exclusively he shows a great ignorance of brain discoveries."

"I prefer to use the word Personality instead of soul. The Personality of a human-being has Will, Feeling, and Purpose. These are the functions of Personality and they can mold the brain to be the instrument of Personality. The will is independent of the brain. It is a stimulus to the brain."

"We have made experiments with light as a stimulus to the retina. We have overstimulated the retina and it has degenerated as a result. This was overstimulation from the outside. There is often overstimulation by the will, as you know of in what is called writer's cramp. The will keeps your fingers moving in writing and finally comes writer's paralysis. But this stimulus is not from the outside. It is from the inside. The will working,

the fingers until the brain centre controlling them gives out.

"The will outlasts the rest of us. Gladstone at 88 made one of his most powerful speeches. His will kept his brain serving him when his body showed the decay of his years. This will comes with the interest that the Personality keeps for itself. It is shown in the miser who is interested to the very last in getting money. I knew a man in Wall Street, who, although feeble in body, was a hard man to make a bargain with. He was a famous man as a money getter. He was the equal of many younger men, and the better bargainer for that matter.

"Personality is the Self, and it is not destroyed by death of the body."

"What is the greatest certainty in the world? Your own existence, of course. It is the certain 'I am.' All the rest is relative. Does the brain give you this certainty, this knowledge? It is the Personality that gives it and makes the brain an instrument only."

"People who do not believe in immortality are abnormal if not pathological."

"You mean by pathological?" his interviewer asked.

"Diseased," he replied.

"The belief in a personal immortality is generic," Dr. Thomson continued. "The Chinese and the Japanese are the largest division of our race. You would not call them inferior. They worship their ancestors and believe them alive. The message of Admiral Togo to the Mikado after the battle of the Sea of Japan was that the victory was not due to the skill and bravery and devotion of himself and his officers and men, but was due to the virtues of his Majesty's ancestors. It was the work of the powers that were long dead in the flesh but Personalities still existing."

"The Chinese have forgotten God altogether. It is difficult for the missionaries to find a suitable word for God in the Chinese language."

"Belief in Immortality does not need a belief in God."

"Then, if we subtract the Jews, Mohammedans, and Christians along with the Chinese and Japanese as those who believe in immortality from those who do not believe in it—what is left? Even in India, where there is the belief of transmigration, this does not mean a failure of belief in immortality. Yes, I believe that people who do not believe in immortality are abnormal."

Many of the younger and untired thinkers have been shocked during recent years by the brain operations that have shown that utter lack of morality and absence of accepted virtues has been caused by the pressure of a bone fragment on the brain, thus giving what was seemingly a fair chance to deduce that morals were a matter of accident, or lack of accident.

"It is an argument that has been used to some extent," said Dr. Thomson, touching this subject. "It is a poor argument, for those who use it fail to realize that the Personality does not ordain this injury to the brain. The brain is like an opera glass in such a case. It offers a colored or distorted lens to the Personality that looks through it. The Personality itself is not distorted or poisoned. The brain is only the instrument. The Personality must use the brain as it is and see through it."

Dr. Thomson asked his interviewer which was the greatest of the senses given man and answered the question for himself.

"The sense of touch," he said. "You

can see this landscape here on the wall, given if he could have cabled to St. Petersburg that he had actually seen the Self of Komura. He did not see Komura. He only saw the outside frame, the smiling Japanese statesman. "Man is just as invisible as God. "The Personality itself is always invisible. A living brain when exposed, though it then be the conscious, shows no more evidence of the mind which is there than does any other bodily thing. The nearest we ever come to seeing this invisible Self. In the treaty negotiations at Portsmouth, N. H., what would Witte have

everywhere and in all times, merely to human aspiration. It is true that the human heart has much to say and to ask, when loved ones lie dead, but it is the sure fact of sleep which makes hope so reasonable, by giving the lie to every doctrine of extinction.

"We have already tried to picture a world whose inhabitants, though otherwise like ourselves, had never seen any one sleep, and what a number of questions such a sight would occasion among them. But the sight of one death would be to them unspeakably awful, because,

unlike us, they had never been prepared beforehand by any example of a real drawing away followed by a real coming back.

"Yet for us the only serious difference as regards Personality between sleep and death is that after death there is no return. In both states the absence of the Personality is complete, but does the failure to return make the same absence then mean extinction, when it never did so in sleep?"

"No one really believes it, though one may say he does. What is generic cannot be got out of us by logic or by anything else, and a belief in a hereafter is as generic as mankind, as the faculty of speech itself. The men who nearly sixty centuries ago built those tremendous tombs, the pyramids, cared more about the other world than this. To judge him by what he accomplished in every direction, unaided by foreign teaching or by inheritance from the past, the old Egyptian of the fourth dynasty was no fool. Some would say that his solicitude about the future life was because his priest frightened him; but then the question immediately arises, How came the priest to have such power to scare him?"

"As a historical fact disbelief in the unseen world does not prevail among nations until they begin to rot. In Greece it was not in the age of Marathon or of Aristides that such infidels abounded, but in the wretched times when only rhetoricians and sophists flourished. When Rome was all iron the Roman was a devout man, but in the slavish days of a Tiberius and a Domitian he became an Epicurean. The brain does not work well with the blood reaching it after coursing through gangrenous tissues."

"The lack of any returning traveler to tell of the world beyond caused primitive and ancient peoples to picture it each for themselves. But as the imagination can do nothing but reproduce earthly scenes, so the Egyptian had another Egypt, the Greek had the Elysian fields, and the American Indian happy hunting grounds. On the other hand, with the dark grave as its portal an association of gloom often remained inseparable from thoughts of the gods of the dead."

"But the light which modern science has shed upon the facts of life can suggest, too, when duly pondered, quite different trains of thought, or, if you please, of mental pictures of another life than this awaiting us. The mental and moral equipment of man seem sufficient for any future life, however limitless its conditions. Locality, which held such an exclusive place in ancient conceptions, can be wholly subordinated now to questions about states of being. We can now conceive of a body no longer made of the most temporary forms of all that matter which is itself passing away, but fashioned to be a dynamic body of power which need not shrink, as here, from the heavy burden of will."

"There should be no night there, for sleep will not be needed when purpose

does not weary nor its exercise fatigue, these as to the mind: We know that at present the brain is only an instrument, and the opportunities for knowledge in a universe would not be too many for his desires. But above all rises a conception of a perfect being, when the will so responds to the highest motives alone that there could be no conflict with lower motives whatever!

"Often we fail to appreciate all which death implies when it comes at the end of a long, wasting disease, marked by progressive enfeeblement of the bodily powers and by clouding of the mind. At such times it may simply appear as a physical process, like a candle slowly burning itself out. But it is quite otherwise when a man—it may be an exceptional man as regards mind—altogether leaves us in an instant. How are we, then, stunned at being thus confronted with a whole mystery of our being? There is nothing so impressive as this: a living embodiment of personal mental power before us one moment and in another gone from us forever. Here and the hereafter cannot now be divided in our minds, for the one follows, too quickly upon the other to let us believe that there is no link between them."

Dr. Thomson's final words on this subject, as relating to the sudden death of a great statesman of splendid mind, as he was making a striking speech in this city on Jan. 20, 1901, are:

"His tongue faltered, he sank to the floor, and in a moment of time he was gone. Human science and human philosophy hardly know what to say in reply. A higher voice than either of theirs answers: He fell asleep; for after sleep cometh the awakening!"

And yet, while Dr. Thomson has indulged in suggestion as to the hereafter, he could never be classed as a psychologist.

"Psychology," he told this interviewer, "is only a modern name for the long-discarded metaphysics."

"Then you are not interested in the psychological researches?" he was asked.

"Oh, I have read the books of those who have indulged in psychological studies," he replied. "I knew Prof. William James of Harvard, who died not long ago. We had a talk in the Century Club one night on this subject, in which he was so deeply interested. We discussed the so-called subconscious mind and the subliminal self. There is no subconscious mind. What they call evidence of subconscious mind are cases of lapsed memory. Every event leaves a brain impression. In time a human being's brain becomes a vast library. There is only one librarian and he is Association. You ask a man if he remembers such a thing another man said 'Yes, not.' The questioner recalls that the man who said it had a red beard. Gradually the mind begins to trace by association this hook of the library where is stored that thing he said. He finds it tucked away in an alcove, where he has tucked it, where his Personality has filed it away, using the brain as an instrument. That is the thing psychologists call the subconscious mind."

Dr. Thomson was asked about Mr. Edison's remarkable experience with the stranger who came into his studio and answered a question the inventor had written secretly.

The brain scientist laughed.

"It was a trick," he said. "It was nothing else. There is no such thing as mind reading. That has been exploded a long time ago. You may recall the man Bishop, who did many mystifying tricks of that sort. He wrote and told just how he did it."

Dr. Thomson has made a special study of the Logos, the speech centre of the brain, and has revelled in the delights of the philological student. He believes that the Personality of the human forming this brain power of speech is the differentiating quality of mind that separates man from monkey or the highest order of animal life from the next in order.

The conformation of the brains of man and chimpanzee are identically the same. But the chimpanzee lacks the Personality, that brings the power of speech into existence. The chimpanzee is without soul.

"I studied Arabic among the Arabs," said the scientist, returning to his favorite topic. "The Arabs claim to have 25,000 books on grammar. I think they must have at least 10,000. But they have only three parts of speech: the noun, the name of a thing; the verb, which is an event, and the participle. Now a dog knows the noun, his name, and he knows the verb, an event. He will lie down or get up if you command him. But he does not know the participle. It belongs entirely to the human. If puts men in this position of knowledge: if a man with a worthy cause comes to my house to ask for a subscription, I do not give him a description, a proscription, a prescription, or an inscription. That is the difference, and it is the difference that keeps the monkey a monkey and a human a human."

"The conclusion which the philologist must come to is that the source of all words is the conscious mind or human Personality itself. It is not, as some reasoners loosely state, that language makes man, but it is man who makes language. The mind comes first, and is altogether the beginning and cause of the word. We need to emphasize this primary truth lest it escape us when we find that all words have their material anatomical seats in the brain upon which we can put our index finger. Otherwise we might infer that these material localities, these speech areas of gray matter, do themselves originate the words which are located there. We find instead that the material seats of words in the brain matter no more make these words than the shelves of a library make the books arranged on them. The ultimate fact is rather as revealed by the physiological study of speech, that words are the instruments which the thinker invents or makes for himself for the purpose of defining his thought."

It is the Personality, the immortal and invisible thing, that creates this speech area to use it in a brain as an instrument for its expression.

If the glint of life in the human eye gives hint of this Consciousness, Personality or Soul existing behind the retina which shows it and the brain that sends it as a wire sending a message Dr. Thomson has a soul, for despite his years his mind seems to be the mind of an eager young student and his eyes are crystalline.