

READERS OF THE TIMES TAKE ISSUE WITH EDISON'S STATEMENTS

"Which View Uplifts Men?"

To the Editor of The New York Times:

IN last Sunday's issue of your paper Mr. Edison is made responsible for the belated nonsense that what we are accustomed to understand by a human "soul" is only the mechanical output of innumerable cells in the brain. On the same day I read the following item of news in The Soul Press of Sept. 2: "A ceremony was held to-day before the tomb of the late Prince Ito in order to announce to the spirit of the first Resident General the annexation of Korea by Japan."

Now let us suppose that both of these views are equally superstitious and untenable when brought to the judgment of a scientific psychology and then let us inquire which of the two is better fitted to supply the needed moral and spiritual uplift to the individual and to make the nation great and strong.

In my mind there can be no hesitation as to the appropriate answer to such a question. It is not, indeed, to be supposed that anything like a majority of his countrymen, even including those who are much better informed in physics, cerebral physiology, and psychology than Mr. Edison can reasonably be supposed to be; hold to the same opinion with him. But there is little doubt the many thousands in the country are sharing in something like the same view and that this, in part, at least, accounts for the unheroic and cowardly way in which they are refusing deliberately to face the hardships and trials of life and to render a self-sacrificing service to their fellow-men.

On the other hand, there is absolutely no doubt that one principal cause of the splendid courage of the Japanese troops in the Russo-Japanese war was the fact that almost every private soldier fought in the faith that his conduct was noted by a "great cloud of witnesses" composed of the noble dead in all the past time of the nation's history. Indeed, to take from the nation the faith in the enduring existence of the souls of their ancestors would undermine the entire social and political fabric of the national life.

In America at the present time, hundreds are annually committing suicide because they can not face poverty or disappointment in love, or even parental scoldings and whippings which they so richly deserve. By promises of big pay and the allurements of foreign travel at the expense of the Government, we are making frantic efforts to add a few thousands to our small, depleted army.

A materialistic Utilitarianism, which discredits, and even sneers at those moral and religious ideals which have always been the mighty uplifting forces of the race in history, is masquerading under the title of "Pragmatism," and has been until lately spreading widely among all classes of the people.

But in Japan, although no one can confidently see how long it is destined to last, this idealistic faith in the "soul" would make a million men spring gladly to arms; gray-haired widows would again be committing suicide because the law forbids their only sons to go forth to die for the country; and the eager strife for the trade of the Orient would for a time be set one side.

Call it fanaticism, if you will, but I am pressing the question: Which one of the two views of the nature and destiny of man's soul is the better fitted to afford moral and spiritual uplift to the individual

and to make nations really strong and truly great?

GEORGE TRUMBULL LADD.
New Haven, Oct. 3, 1910.

"An Exploded Theory."

To the Editor of The New York Times:

UNDOUBTEDLY, some "wise man of Gotham," or elsewhere, will take in hand that weapon traditioned "mightier than the sword," and with one fell swoop decapitate the Edison-Marshall amazing pronouncement printed in Sunday's TIMES.

Our inheritance of future immortality has been so often impugned, it seems hardly worth while to haggle over a conviction one has to die to confirm; but, while there are those apparently deprived of the "right to call their soul their own," it is startling to be suddenly informed that such an asset does not, never has belonged to us, or even existed.

Certainly in respect of scientific research and erudition, there are countless "individuals" more qualified to attack the assertion than the writer, who, nevertheless, is impelled to "make a stab" at it.

Has Mr. Edison "solved many (or any) problems for us" other than of a purely material nature? True, he has recognized and utilized physical forces with prophetic genius; he has invented many marvelous mechanical devices; he has "canned lightning" and "embalmed the human voice," but he has not answered the fundamental question nor unraveled the "master knot" in the line of his own most profound investigation. He can state to a nicety what electricity does, but he cannot say what it is. In a limited fashion we have sensed the workings of the soul, but what the soul is we know not.

Admitting that the brain may be likened to "a piece of meat-mechanism," and that the will is the driving power, there is yet, in the final analysis, something as indisputable as indefinable, back of it all—the "invisible commander" of the "aggregate of cells," which constitutes the "individual."

Though not quite of the "oldest inhabitants," the undersigned has lived sufficiently long to have witnessed rapid and remarkable revolutions in religious thought. The world is wiser and therefore more tolerant. We realize that geography is responsible when we repeat the Nicene creed instead of turning toward the East and proclaiming "Allah is great and Mohammed in his prophet," and chronology that we acknowledge one God rather than many gods. Every man is free to proclaim fervently:

I know not where His Islands lift
Their fringed palms in air;
I only know I cannot drift
Beyond His love and care.

or conclude philosophically:

I sent my Soul through the Invisible
Some letter of that After-life to spell;
And by and by my Soul return'd to me,
And answered, "I Myself am Heav'n and Hell."

There are the enlightened who comprehend that the Truth is eternal, and that only our conception of it varies; there are the frightened who repine, "They have taken away my Lord and I know not where they have laid Him"; there are myriad angles from which our straining vision projects—but this particular "twist of view" obliterating the "individual,"

calls to arms all the ego-possessors.

The suggestion that man's cowardly

fear of dissolution evolved the idea of a soul, is an exploded theory in times when many human beings are so desperately weary they would welcome annihilation for the assurance of rest.

So, all told, the writer, insignificant and ignorant 'tis true, refuses to accept the ultimatum that "man is merely an aggregation of cells," propelled by a "piece of meat-mechanism," for as Hamlet says:

"What is man,
If his chief good and market of his time,
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
Sure, He that made us with such large discourse,
Looking before and after, gave us not
That capability and god-like reason
To rust in us unused."

C. I. H.
Hotel Albert, N. Y., Oct. 3, 1910.

"Why Is It Amazing?"

To the Editor of The New York Times:

IN THE TIMES to-day I read the following under the signature of Edward Marshall:

"Thomas A. Edison in the following interview for the first time speaks to the public on the vital subjects of the human soul and immortality. It will be bound to be a most fascinating, an amazing statement from one of the most notable and interesting men of the age."

A "fascinating statement" it certainly was, coming from so able a source and written by so able a pen, but why should it "amaze" any intelligent person that Mr. Edison holds the opinions that he does? Are there any other opinions that would be consistent with his experience and education, and does he not hold them in common with many of the greatest minds not only of this century, but of all ages?

The "amazing" part, it seems to me,

is that Mr. Edison is willing to give his views to the world and take the petty furor of undeveloped minds that will doubtless rage at his statements.

This is not an age of martyrdom, and few people will bother to expound their faiths, especially if by so doing they are bound to joggle the pedestal of some mythological belief, unless in the words of commercialism "there is something in it."

Mr. Edison does not need to preach even the most intelligent faith; he can go right on eating without telling any one what he thinks, but the fact that he has "put himself on paper" so fearlessly is certainly "amazing"—delightfully so, in fact—now who else in his rank and file will follow his example?

LURANA W. SHELDON.
New York, Oct. 2, 1910.

"Not Consoling to the Race."

To the Editor of The New York Times:

THE NEW YORK TIMES, in its edition of Sunday, Oct. 2, 1910, publishes an interview with Mr. Thomas A. Edison, the great electrical wizard, in which he is reported to have stated that he does not believe a human being has a soul; that man is only an aggregation of cells and the brain only a wonderful machine, &c.

These convictions, emanating from such an eminent source, would at first appear to carry much weight, and cause the poor layman's heart to sink hopelessly in the possibility that, after all, he is but a living machine, and the brain, to use the great man's own reported words, after giving the illustration of the man injured at the Kensington Museum by an umbrella, which injured only a part of his brain—i. e., the lower part of the fold of Broca, and lost a language—which, by the way, is the same bugaboo which Mr. Edison brought out in November, 1909—"Doesn't that prove that the brain is like a phonograph cylinder?" Perhaps when the great electrician gives more study to the living brain he may astonish the world by actually manufacturing one, and thus solve the problem which has baffled the giant intellects for ages, puzzled specialists on mind and matter—specialists in their line, as Mr. Edison is a specialist on matters electrical.

Edison is quoted as stating: "We are, as you know, made up, each part of us, of millions of cells. These cells are not absolutely independent, any more than you, as an individual living in New York City, are independent. But each cell is an individual, as you are an individual. You are a part of the city; each cell is a part of you."

No, we are not individuals; we are aggregates, made up of mighty little things.

If a man be a city, then how infinitely more wonderful than an ordinary city. New York requires a host of employes to keep the city clean; the body does not. When repairs are necessary, outside aid is necessary. When the body is cut or bruised it is self-healing, under normal conditions. The human body is like a city. It thrives under good government and suffers under bad. We read somewhere that the human body is also a temple—the temple of the Holy Ghost.

I quote the following paragraph of the interview with Mr. Edison:

"A merciful and loving Creator he considers not to be believed in. Nature, the supreme power, he recognizes and respects, but does not worship. Nature is not merciful and loving, but wholly merciless and indifferent."

Along this line it might be well for the reporter, after perusing Thomson's "Brain and Personality," as suggested by the Wizard, to also read, and read carefully, Prof. J. Arthur Thomson's work "The Bible of Nature," from which is the following excerpt:

"Let us make a curve of the ascent of vertebrates from water to dry land, and mark the position of the leading types according to the degree of their brain development, (which is generally a reliable index of structural progress.) As the curve ascends, we find that the plummet of marital affection, the intensity of parental care, the expression of the gentler emotions, are all on the increase.

The natural conditions in which each is said to be for himself are evidently not antagonistic."

The interview with Mr. Edison is not consoling to the human race, and those who have believed they were more than living machines, and that their brains were not like his phonograph records, that, after all, morality and goodness were spiritual attributes, and that there is an Intelligence higher than human—will have to hope that possibly Mr. Edison may be mistaken, as we believe he was mistaken several years ago, when his phonograph machine was advertised for business purposes. Stenographers, reading the circulars, became discouraged, and some were alarmed; but subsequent history has shown that Mr. Edison was mistaken if he believed his cylinders "just like the human brain," would supplant stenographers with "living brains."

EDWARD MASON.
East Orange, N. J., Oct. 3, 1910.

"Soul Is in the Brain."

To the Editor of The New York Times:

BEING an ardent reader of your paper I naturally am interested in its contents. But the most interesting article I've ever read was the one written by Edward Marshall for Thomas A. Edison.

As my mind is constantly working on the subject of psychic research, I beg leave to state I do not quite agree with Mr. Edison. I firmly believe there is a supernatural being, and I thoroughly believe of life after death, life in this same world; that the soul reappears in the shape of another body, and that the soul is in the brain.

Contrary to the general idea that animals have only instinct, my theory is they also have souls. Future reward and punishment seems to me to be yielded us in the life to follow. That is why I make what some call a remarkable statement concerning animals.

Is there a heaven? No. Is the brain immortal? Yes. And as I believe the brain is in the soul so I believe when the soul enters the new body it is the same brain. At death we are relapsed into unconsciousness long enough to forget the past, and at the reincarnation the recent born babe is the same brain with a new body.

ADELE MALETTE.
New York, Oct. 3, 1910.