

BLACKFRIARS

parties and religious sects, seizing on education, erupting into Mau-Mau. As a narrative the book is lively and good-humoured, but the reflections of the author are disquieting, and would be more so if it were not for his faith.

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IMMORTAL LONGINGS, by Stephen Findlay; Gollancz; 2Is.

Mr Findlay's avowed aims are to discuss the fear of annihilation at death, to examine its foundations and to assess whether it is justifiable; then, assuming that it is, to devise means of alleviating it whether by 'making your interests gradually wider and more impersonal', as Bertrand Russell suggests, or in the love of children, grandchildren, friends or leaders.

Though he writes with vigour, clarity and intelligence, some of his argument is weakened by the assumption that his knowledge of this subject or that is total and final; that what he regards as an Aunt Sally *can* be nothing but an Aunt Sally, a ridiculous painted target for his darts, instead of perhaps a living, ancient and fruitful Sarah. This is especially noticeable in regard to Christian theology. He also proceeds by associating ideas which have no necessary connection with one another; and here the reader feels that an index might have been as useful to the writer in making distinctions as to himself in tracing cross-references.

For instance, Mr Findlay does not, in treating of religion, separate the arguments for the existence of God and for the continued existence of the dead, but treats them as interdependent. This is not so. Thus, ancient Jewry held no very clear ideas about individual survival, but its whole history, from the time when Abraham was impelled to leave Ur onwards, is of contact with Deity in fear, wonder or joy. Again—to swing across the ages to the late nineteenth century—it is plain that in writing an epitaph for her husband dead after forty years of happy marriage Henrietta Huxley distinguished sharply between belief in personal immortality and belief in God:

Be not afraid, ye waiting hearts that weep

For God still giveth His beloved sleep

And if an endless sleep He will, so best.

And, on the other hand, though Buddhism takes for granted the survival of the self, re-incarnated and working out its Karma in life after life after life, its exponents, in the West at any rate, seem to remain agnostic; or, to be more precise, to accept a super-sensible state of Being as a supreme object of experience, into which the separate self may be absorbed, but to ignore, if not to reject, the breath-taking possibility that this 'Beauty most old and most new', this universal consciousness, may also be conscious of Itself and Its purposes, and of Its creatures.

A careful reading of the book, indeed, makes one wonder whether its underlying concern is not so much to discuss the question of personal survival as to

reject, to disprove, to deny this terrifying possibility, with the same vehemence as those who fear the unknown reject the evidence for the existence of a plesiosaurus in Loch Ness.

This is particularly noticeable in Mr Findlay's brief chapter on 'Non-religious arguments'. It is concerned with philosophy, but provides little evidence of his being, as is claimed on the dust-cover, 'in touch with the most recent developments in . . . philosophical thinking'. It is largely based on the thought of Hume; and though Bergson is just mentioned there is nothing to show that the author has so much as heard of the work of the neo-Thomists either in France or in this country. Even the name of Teilhard de Chardin wakes no echo.

It is when Mr Findlay turns to what he calls 'the empirical evidence' that he is seen at his best; detached, fair, fully informed, presenting the facts and setting forth, but not imposing, his own interpretation of them. The four chapters dealing with psychical research, and discussing spontaneous phenomena, experiments in telepathy or clairvoyance, the evidence for precognition, and the implications of precognition and of 'out of time' experiences are admirable. Mr Findlay notes that psychical research cannot of its very nature yield any definite evidence for survival as such, since the information about the dead provided by mediums must, if it is to be verified, be known to someone; and it is just as likely that this information is acquired by paranormal cognition from that someone as that it emanates from a 'spirit'. He admits that the Myers cross-correspondences are difficult to explain on such a basis, but seems content to conclude in this connection as in the implications of the very existence of *psi* that 'the most we can get is a flicker of doubt to mitigate our expectation of annihilation'.

He cites and discusses by the way a fascinating suggestion that the a-causal change of 'a single quantum of energy in a brain cell' may be the physiological concomitant of an act of freewill, and decides that, if this be so, it is an argument against the doctrine of strict determinism. There seems to be a certain confusion here between consciousness and energy. If the conscious act of choice sets off the change, human free will is certainly involved. If the quantum change is the primary event however, then the will would still be determined, only by chance rather than by a chain of causation. It would be interesting to see the question examined by bio-physicists and philosophers.

Even in these chapters however there are curious little assertions of fact and imputations of motive which should not go un-noticed. Is it really true, for instance, that the primary motive of all psychical research workers is not intellectual curiosity but the need to prove survival and that therefore those concerned with it are chiefly the ageing and the old? The existence of flourishing university societies for psychical research among Oxford and Cambridge undergraduates, and the interest shown in the subject by young anthropologists, doctors and psychiatrists might seem to point in a different direction.

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