

THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL

the most far-reaching character. It is our task, therefore, to submit every aspect of this important dogma to a critical examination, and to prove its untenability in the light of the empirical data of modern biology.

In order to have a short and convenient expression for the two opposed opinions on the question, we shall call the belief in man's personal immortality "athanatism" (from *athanes* or *athanatos* = immortal). On the other hand, we give the name of "thanatism" (from *thanatos* = death) to the opinion which holds that at a man's death not only all the other physiological functions are arrested, but his "soul" also disappears—that is, that sum of cerebral functions which psychic dualism regards as a peculiar entity, independent of the other vital processes in the living body.

In approaching this physiological problem of death we must point out the *individual* character of this organic phenomenon. By death we understand simply the definitive cessation of the vital activity of the *individual* organism, no matter to which category or stage of individuality the organism in question belongs. Man is dead when his own personality ceases to exist, whether he has left offspring that they may continue to propagate for many generations or not. In a certain sense we often say that the minds of great men (in a dynasty of eminent rulers, for instance, or a family of talented artists) live for many generations; and in the same way we speak of the "soul" of a noble woman living in her children and children's children. But in these cases we are dealing with intricate phenomena of *heredity*, in which a microscopic cell (the sperm-cell of the father or the egg-cell of the mother) transmits certain features to offspring. The particular personalities who produce those sexual cells in thou-