

THE RIDDLE OF THE UNIVERSE

Lamettrie, etc. The same opinion was defended by the able friend of the Materialists, the greatest of the Hohenzollerns, the monistic "philosopher of Sans-souci." What would Frederick the Great, the "crowned thanatist and atheist," say, could he compare his monistic views with those of his successor of to-day?

Among thoughtful physicians the conviction that the existence of the soul came to an end at death has been common for centuries: generally, however, they refrained from giving it expression. Moreover, the empirical science of the brain remained so imperfect during the last century that the soul could continue to be regarded as its mysterious inhabitant. It was the gigantic progress of biology in the present century, and especially in the latter half of the century, that finally destroyed the myth. The establishment of the theory of descent and the cellular theory, the astounding discoveries of ontogeny and experimental physiology—above all, the marvellous progress of the microscopic anatomy of the brain, gradually deprived athanatism of every basis; now, indeed, it is rarely that an informed and honorable biologist is found to defend the immortality of the soul. All the monistic philosophers of the century (Strauss, Feuerbach, Büchner, Spencer, etc.) are athanatists.

The dogma of personal immortality owes its great popularity and its high importance to its intimate connection with the teaching of Christianity. This circumstance gave rise to the erroneous and still prevalent belief that the myth is a fundamental element of all the higher religions. That is by no means the case. The higher Oriental religions include no belief whatever in the immortality of the soul; it is not found in Buddhism, the religion that dominates