SCIENCE AND IMMORTALITY: THE CHRISTIAN REGISTER SYMPOSIUM, REVISED AND ENLARGED

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Science and Immortality: The Christian Register Symposium, Revised and Enlarged by Samuel J. Barrows

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SAMUEL J. BARROWS

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The Christian Register Symposium,

REVISED AND ENLARGED.

EDITED AND REVIEWED

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SAMUEL J. BARROWS.

BOSTON: GBO. H. ELLIS, 141 FRANKLIN STREET. 1887.

PREFACE.

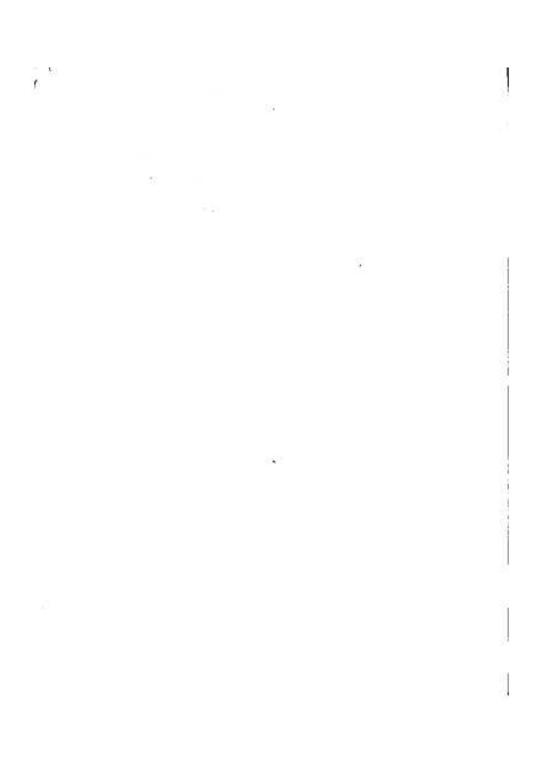
THE major part of the discussion which follows was published in the Christian Register of April 7, 1887. It attracted wide attention, and a desire has been expressed to have the "symposium" in a more permanent form.

In reprinting it for the present volume, the contributions have all been submitted to their authors for revision; and the work has been much enriched by additional contributions from Prof. A. Graham Bell, Gen. A. W. Greely, of the United States Signal Service, Prof. Joseph Le Conte, of the University of California, Prof. Ira Remsen, of Johns Hopkins University, and Prof. Edward C. Pickering, of Harvard Observatory. These new contributions give a fresh interest to the book.

In the "Notes on the Testimony" following the symposium, the converging and diverging lines of debate-are indicated.

Interest in the discussion will be increased by the biographical notes which follow it, giving a brief outline of the scientific career of the writers of this volume.

S. J. B.



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SCIENCE AND IMMORTALITY.

Wishing to obtain the opinions of some of the most prominent scientific men in this country concerning the relation of science to the question of immortality, the editor of the Christian Register submitted to them the following questions:—

- I. Are there any facts in the possession of modern science which make it difficult to believe in the immortality of the personal consciousness?
- Is there anything in such discoveries to support or strengthen a belief in immortality?
- 3. Or do you consider the question out of the pale of science altogether?

These questions are asked, not too strictly to limit the scope of reply, but to indicate the directions in which testimony is desired.

The answers to these questions are given in the interesting and important communications which follow.

I.

CHARLES A. YOUNG, LLD.,

PROFESSOR OF ASTRONOMY IN PRINCETON COLLEGE, NEW JERSEY.

I understand that what is wanted is simply a brief statement of personal opinion upon the bearing of science on the credibility of the doctrine of immortality, without any extended discussion of the grounds for this opinion,—merely a juryman's verdict.

As to the first point raised in the editor's letter, I think it must be frankly admitted that what is known about the functions of the brain and nervous system does, to a certain extent, tend to "make it difficult to believe in the immortality of the personal consciousness." The apparent dependence of this consciousness upon the health and integrity of a material structure like the brain renders it, a priori, more or less probable that consciousness could not survive the destruction of that organism. But this difficulty is only the same it always has been from the beginning, and I cannot see that the newest