

SCIENCE

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THE NATURE OF MAN¹

CONTENTS

<i>The Nature of Man:</i> PROFESSOR CASSIUS J. KEYSER	205
<i>Mendelian or Non-Mendelian:</i> PROFESSOR GEORGE A. SHULL	213
<i>Scientific Events:</i>	
<i>Memorial to James Orton; Vaccination for Smallpox in England; The Work of the Royal Observatory at the Cape of Good Hope; The International Commission on Illumination; Chemistry and Civilization</i>	216
<i>Scientific Notes and News</i>	219
<i>University and Educational News</i>	220
<i>Discussion and Correspondence:</i>	
<i>The Chert Pits at Cozackie, N. Y.:</i> EVERETT R. BURMASTER. <i>The use of Agar in facilitating the Removal of a Swallowed Foreign Object:</i> DR. LEROY S. WEATHERBY. <i>An Inconsistency in Taxonomy:</i> PROFESSOR EDWIN C. STARKS. <i>Estimating the Number of Genetic Factors concerned in Cases of Blending Inheritance:</i> PROFESSOR W. E. CASTLE. <i>The Curve of Distribution:</i> DR. CARL H. P. THURSTON)	221
<i>Quotations:</i>	
<i>Dyes for Bacteriology</i>	224
<i>Special Articles:</i>	
<i>The Second-year Record of Birds which did and which did not lay during Individual Months of the Pullet Year:</i> DR. J. ARTHUR HARRIS, HARRY R. LEWIS	224
<i>The American Chemical Society:</i> DR. CHARLES L. PARSONS	226
<i>The Royal Society of Canada</i>	229

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A FEW years ago, as you may remember, Elie Metchnikoff published a book entitled "The Nature of Man: Studies in Optimistic Philosophy." If you have read that interesting work, you know that it is chiefly concerned with the great problem of death—with the problem, that is, of adjusting human emotions and human understanding satisfactorily to the common doom of living creatures. In Metchnikoff's view that problem has been mainly responsible for the existence of religions and philosophies. In his belief religions and philosophies have not been able to deal with the problem satisfactorily; but their failure, says he, is no reason for despair; for it is his conviction—and here we see why he deemed his study to be one in optimistic philosophy—that the problem can be satisfactorily solved by science and in particular by the science of biology, for the process of dying is one of the processes of life. And so his book aims at being an important contribution to what may be called the science or the philosophy of death.

I hope that this address upon "The Nature of Man" may appear to you, as it appears to me, to be, likewise, a study, or the result of a study, in optimistic philosophy. It is not of death, however, that I intend to speak, but of life. I desire to look towards the possibility—to contemplate the possibility—of a valid philosophy, or a science, of human life.

The core of my message is a certain concept—a concept regarding the essential nature of man. The concept is, I believe, both new and important—strictly new, if I be not mistaken, and tremendously important. This judgment I may express with propriety because the idea

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