

THE PREMIER IDEAS OF JESUS.

II. AGELESS LIFE.

JESUS reigns supreme among teachers not only by the perfection of His character but also by the grandeur of His subject. A prophet has many things to say to his generation; one is his message. Jesus treated every idea of the first order in the sphere of Religion; His burden was Life. He did not set Himself to teach men how to organize the state, nor how to analyze their minds, nor how to discharge elementary duties, nor how to form a science of Theology. This was not because Jesus despised these departments, it was because He proposed to dominate them. He would not localize Himself in one because He would inspire all. Behind the state is the individual, behind the individual is the soul, and the one question of the soul is life. The soul is the organ, and life the function; and although exact scholars may be horrified, the translators of our Bible had hold of the facts of the case when they used $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ generously, rendering it in one verse "life" and in the next "soul" (St. Matt. xvi. 25, 26). Ethical life implies the soul, and a dead soul is a contradiction in terms. The chief necessity of man is life, and when Jesus opened its spring He fertilized human nature to its farthest border. He was not a Politician, but the Democracy is His creation; He was not a Philosopher, but He has given us the modern metaphysic; He was not a Moralist, but He has inspired the coming ethic; He was not a Theologian, but the creeds are built out of His teaching. He revived the body of humanity by the regeneration of the individual. Before Jesus, life was a wistful longing: it was also a hopeless mystery. With the thinkers of one nation it was a speculation, as in the Phædo: with the saints of another it was a vision, as in the sixteenth Psalm. Jesus brought life to light and declared the doctrine of immortality. History

acknowledges Him as the first and last authority on the biology of the soul, and experience has proved Him to be the only medium of life. Life was the gift Jesus carried in His hand ; as He said, in His magnificent way, " I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly " (St. John x. 10).

An instinct is any part of our spiritual capital which has not been contributed by education or revelation, and our two chief instincts are God and immortality. The hope of the future life has always nestled in the heart of the race, and found wings upon occasion. When savages bury his weapons and utensils with the dead man in order that he may start with a full equipment, they believe that he is somewhere ; and when the Athenians went out to Eleusis twice a year, in March as the life of the year springs, and in September as it fades, and held a solemn function, it was not only that they might live happily, but, as Cicero puts it, " die with a fairer hope." The Eleusinian mysteries must have been a great support to the pious of the day, and served the purpose of a conference for the deepening of spiritual life. This instinct dies down to the root in the winter of Agnosticism, but it never loses its vitality. Clever people point out that no one can demonstrate immortality, which goes without saying, and high-minded people condemn the desire for continued individuality as a subtle form of selfishness, which is very superior. There may be an insignificant minority who would be content that their life should be flung back like a cupful of water into the stream from which it was taken. But to the race the destruction of this hope would be irreparable, since it is laden with a wealth of compensation and reparation. Mourners are content because those " loved long since " are only " lost awhile." St. Stephen, cut off in his youth, does not complain because he sees Jesus standing at God's right hand. The scholar gathers his apparatus for unending work.

What's time ? Leave Now for dogs, and apes ;
Man has Forever."

Arthur, betrayed and beaten, does not despair :

" My God, Thou hast forgotten me in my death " ;
" Nay, God my Christ, I pass, but shall not die."

This sublime instinct Jesus found and did not belittle. He confirmed it with His sanction and built on it His doctrine of Ageless Life.

It was not Jesus' function to add to our nature, it was His to glorify it, and in His hands the instinct of immortality was raised to its highest power. Jesus began with a tacit distinction between existence and life which gives a characteristic lift and splendour to His words. Existence is physical, and is dependent on the energy that works in matter. Life is spiritual, and is dependent on the energy that works in mind. One comes upon a person that has not one point of contact with the thought-world : he eats, digests, moves,—we say he exists. One comes on another full of ideas, plans, dreams, ambitions,—we say he is alive. It is the approximate statement of a fact in human history. When the former dies we are not astonished, because it had never struck us that he was alive. When the latter dies we are shocked, the disappearance of that radiant man is a catastrophe. Jesus recognised similar conditions in the spiritual world—existence which meant an inert and unconscious soul, and life which meant a soul receptive and active. Mere existence He called death, and used to startle men into thinking with paradoxes : " Let the dead bury their dead " (St. Luke ix. 60) ; " Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live " (St. John v. 25). Whether Jesus believed in the continued existence of this lowest grade in the human kingdom can hardly be disputed when a soul eaten up by selfishness like Dives, and a soul purified by trial like

Lazarus, both reappear in another world. Jesus assumed existence for all, but existence on this low plane of death was not worth His consideration. Jesus was not an authority on existence, His field was life. He did not labour the barren theory of conscious immortality apart from the condition of the soul: but He transforms immortality into Life by charging immortality with an ethical content and making it to consist in the knowledge of God: "This is Life Eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent" (St. John xvii. 3).

When Jesus invested Life with its new meaning He glorified the idea, but He was embarrassed with the word. Words were polarized before Jesus adopted them, and they were apt to retain their acquired properties in His Kingdom. Nothing could have done full justice to the ideas of Jesus save a new language, and, as that was impossible, Jesus and His disciples were often at cross purposes. With Him Life was something eternal and absolute; with them, something limited and temporary. Life suggested nothing to them at first, except the vitality of the body; death, nothing except its dissolution. Jesus, on His part, never used Life and Death in a physical sense with emphasis, unless when He spoke of laying down His own Life, and no one knows what was hidden in that mystery. "I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again" (St. John x. 18). He reserved the words for their highest use, and ignored the popular reading. "Our friend Lazarus," He said, with careful choice of terms, "sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep" (St. John xi. 11). Lazarus, the brother of Mary, and the friend of Jesus, could not be dead. It was a moral impossibility. The Jews who saw Jesus at Lazarus' tomb and played the informer to the Pharisees were dead. It was a moral necessity. When the misunderstanding was hopeless Jesus had to condescend.

“Lazarus,” if I must speak in your tongue, “is dead” (St. John xi. 14). Physical death Jesus refused to recognise; it was an incident in the history of Life. Death was a calamity of the soul, and a living soul was invulnerable. “I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though He were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth, and believeth in Me, shall never die” (St. John xi. 25, 26). It was a brave struggle for reality, and liberated the first disciples from the bondage of the physical; but the atmosphere is too rare for His modern disciples, and most speak exactly as if they were Pagans in the Street of Tombs at Athens, instead of Christians who had sat at Jesus’ feet.

Jesus had to contend with a more inexcusable misuse which binds up the life of a man, not with his body, but with his material environment. According to this squalid definition, Life is made up of circumstances; if they are pleasant, the man has an easy life; if they are adverse, he has a hard life. Life is stated in terms of food and raiment, and goods and houses. Against this degradation of life Jesus lifted up His voice in a protest which admits no answer. He was never weary of reminding His disciples that such things could not constitute Life, and were, indeed, so unworthy as to be beneath care. “A man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth” (St. Luke xii. 15). “Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than raiment?” (St. Matt. vi. 25). “Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of Man shall give unto you” (St. John vi. 27). Certainly this indifference to circumstances was not due to any want of sympathy with the labouring and heavy laden—witness His parables, or to the favoured experiences of His own life

—witness His poverty. But Jesus was anxious to lift Life above the tyranny of circumstances and convince His followers that one could live like God Himself, although he had a whole world arrayed against him and left nothing behind except a peasant's garment. And Jesus was jealous lest they should confound the rough scaffolding of circumstances, within which the building was slowly rising, with the Temple of Life itself.

Jesus has bequeathed to the world a Monograph on Life (St. John vi.), and its basal idea is Unity. Spiritual Life is not a series of isolated springs, but an ocean laving every shore. It is one and has its source in God, as Truth and Righteousness and Love are one and stand in God. When one thinks of Life in man as one thing, and Life in God as another, he has lost the key to the science of Life. Nothing deserves the name of Life in us that cannot be affirmed of God. Life in the soul is the tide of the Divine ocean flowing as it has opportunity, through the narrow channels of human nature. Everything else is only a colourable imitation of Life, and a mode of existence. Life is in its origin Heavenly, and cometh down. One must be "born from above" if he is to enter into Life. Jesus casts His contrast between physical and spiritual Life into a felicitous figure. "Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die" (vi. 49-50). Life is first in God who is in Heaven, inaccessible, and next in Jesus who is incarnate, and finally in any man who is in fellowship with Jesus. "As the living Father hath sent Me, and I live by the Father; so he that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me" (vi. 57). This is Jesus' theory of Life.

The second idea which underlies this discourse is Community. Jesus and His disciples share the same Life. He is the "Bread of Life," and they "eat." Jesus with this

startling image flashes a description of Life and answers the question, ever in the background of one's mind, "What is Life?" It is fellowship with the Spirit of Jesus, something that cannot be estimated by the beating of the pulse, or the inventory of a man's possessions, that must be tested by conscience and the intangible scales of the Kingdom of Heaven. It will lie in a certain mind, in a certain ruling motive, in a certain trend of character, in a certain obedience of will, in a certain passion for goodness, the same as that of Jesus. Or, as Jesus put it in a passage misunderstood too often by Jews and Gentiles, yet simple enough when read according to the mode of Jesus' thinking, "Whoso eateth My flesh, and drinketh My blood, hath eternal life" (vi. 54). This is Jesus' practice of Life.

The third idea which inspires the deliverance of Jesus is Eternity. Again and again, with heartening reiteration, Jesus pronounces Life "everlasting," and Jesus' expression is evidently shaped by a contrast. It is His appreciation of Life; it is His depreciation of its travesty. There is, He means, what may be called life by concession, which consists in health, and riches, and ease, and pleasure. This is life centred, and imprisoned, and satisfied in this present age. Its environment is local and temporary, and when it is shattered this life must perish, because it has no roots elsewhere. With its age it vanishes. He that findeth this life shall lose it. Life, as Jesus understood it, consisting of Love and Sacrifice, does not belong to any age because it is the inhabitant of all. Its roots are struck into the unchanging and eternal. It has already a spiritual environment, and when this present state of things is removed Life will rise to its full height and find itself at home. This is Life which cannot be lost. Life to-day, it would have been Life when the Pyramids were new, it will be Life when the earth is an ice-cold ball. Life is contemporaneous with all the centuries, it anticipates and closes them. "Time

is a parenthesis in eternity," says a fine old classic. When an earth-born man is baptized into the Spirit of Jesus the brackets are removed and he begins to live in the ageless state. "He that believeth on Me hath ageless Life" (vi. 47). This is Jesus' prophecy of life.

Life with Jesus was a condition of the soul disentangled from any physical mode of existence, and with this profound conception before His mind, He did not need the classical arguments for immortality. One would be surprised if Jesus proved the future life from the analogies of nature or the law of continuity. One would be as much surprised if He described its circumstances even in the sublime poetry of St. John or followed the soul in its experiences as in the "Book of the Dead." For one moment we do wonder why Jesus did not describe at length the details of the unseen state, who, alone of all men in this world, had been within the veil; in the next we understand such an apocalypse would have been alien to Jesus. Life before His eyes was not divided into sections, each depending for its character on local colouring. Life here and there—everywhere—in its essence and intention, must be the same—conformity to the Divine Will—an inward peace and joy. As a man lived here in this age, he would live in all the ages; carrying Heaven within him rather than going into Heaven. The Life of the soul could not be affected by the death of the body. Jesus would have considered the question, "Shall I live after death?" beside the mark. He would have asked, "Have you Life now?" for Life is ageless.

If one insist on proof that Life is ageless, then Jesus was content to offer Himself. Life hinges on this word of Jesus. "Because I live, ye shall live also" (St. John xiv. 19). Suppose Jesus was the victim of a fond delusion when He ignored the death of the body and preached the ageless life of the soul and insisted on the unseen, then He is dead.

“And on His grave with shining eyes
The Syrian stars look down.”

Suppose He knew, when He declared Life the supreme fact of human experience, and death the escape of the butterfly from the chrysalis and the world a passing show, then Jesus is alive evermore. How can one be certain that Jesus is with God? It is a question of the last importance. There are four lines of proof. The first is to lead reliable evidence that Jesus rose from Joseph's tomb—this is for a lawyer. The second is historical—the existence of the Christian Church—this is for a scholar. The third is mystical—the experience of Christians—this is for a saint. The fourth is ethical—the nature of Jesus' life—this is for everyone. The last is the most akin to the mind of Jesus, who was accustomed to insist on the self-evidencing power of His life. He is alive, because He could not die. “I am the Resurrection and the Life” (St. John xi. 25).

It is impossible to appreciate a picture with your face at the canvas; but even His blind generation were arrested by Jesus. There was a note in His words that caught their ear, the echo of Divine authority; there was an air about Him, the manner of a larger world. No man could convince Him of sin, none confound Him. He was ever beyond criticism. He ever compelled admiration in honest men. “Thou art the Christ,” said a Jewish peasant with instinctive conviction, “the Son of the Living God” (St. Matt. xvi. 16). Centuries have only confirmed this spontaneous tribute to Jesus' life. No one has yet discovered the word Jesus ought not to have said, none suggested the better word He might have said. No action of His has shocked our moral sense; none has fallen short of the ideal. He is full of surprises, but they are all the surprises of perfection. You are never amazed, one day by His greatness, the next by His littleness. You are ever amazed that He is incomparably better than you

could have expected. He is tender without being weak, strong without being coarse, lowly without being servile. He has conviction without intolerance, enthusiasm without fanaticism, holiness without Pharisaism; passion without prejudice. This Man alone never made a false step, never struck a jarring note. His life alone moved on those high levels where local limitations are transcended and the absolute Law of Moral Beauty prevails. It was life at its highest. Jesus was the supreme Artist in Life, and had a right to say, "I am the Life" (St. John xvi. 6).

Was this Life something that could be quenched by death or that death could touch? Granted that they scourged and crucified Jesus' body, that it died and was buried. Could Jesus who gave the Sermon on the Mount and the Discourse of the Upper Room, who satisfied St. John and loosed St. Mary Magdalene from her sin, and who remains the unapproachable ideal of perfection, be annihilated by a few nails and the thrust of a Roman spear? If the lowest form of energy, however it may be transformed or degraded, be still conserved in some shape and place, can any one believe that the Author of Life in this world was extinguished on a Roman cross? The certainty of Jesus' Resurrection does not rest in the last issue on His isolated appearances during the forty days; it rests on His Life for thirty-three years. His Life was beyond the reach of death; it was Ageless Life.

Jesus' Life impressed His generation as unparalleled and inexplicable, a Life with inscrutable motives and incalculable principles. What was its explanation according to any known standard? Jesus was accustomed frankly to admit that it had none; that it was an enigma from the earthly standpoint. But He pled that it was supreme and reasonable from the Heavenly standpoint. It was foreign here; it was natural elsewhere. He did the works He had seen His Father do, He said the words He had

received of His Father, He fulfilled the will of His Father. There was a sphere where His Life was the rule, where His dialect was the language of the country and His was the habit of living. His unlikeness to this world implies His likeness to another world. One evening you find among the reeds of your lake an unknown bird, whose broad breast and powerful pinions are not meant for this inland scene. It is resting midway between two oceans, and by to-morrow will have gone. Does not that bird prove the ocean it left, does it not prove the ocean whither it has flown? "Jesus, knowing . . . that He was come from God and went to God," is the Revelation and Confirmation of Ageless Life.

JOHN WATSON.

A REPLY TO MR. CHASE.

II.

ON the preliminary part of this discussion, viz. the question whether the South-Galatian theory is grammatically possible, enough probably has been said; and we now enter on the real subject, viz., Is that theory right or wrong? Perhaps it might seem better to have dispensed with the preliminary part altogether, and begun at once to the main question; but, in answering any critic,¹ I have always met him on his own ground. Now Mr. Chase chose this method of attack, and pressed home the charge of grammatical impossibility in reiterated assertions. It seemed to me that a reply was imperatively required, and that it must be immediate; and there was naturally very little time be-

¹ In this case I spent some time in trying more than one device to avoid the necessity. Mere pressure of college work, besides other reasons, p. 45, counselled silence. Only the fortnight's vacation at Christmas has made the following series possible.