

ST. PAUL ON LIFE AND IMMORTALITY.

SOME months ago the *Spectator* permitted, in its correspondence columns, a discussion of the passage (1 Cor. xv. 32) in which St. Paul quotes from Isaiah the words "Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." But the writers seemed more interested in commenting on some strong words of Professor Huxley's than in arriving at a real understanding of the meaning of the Apostle, and the correspondence fizzled out in a very disappointing manner. In a letter to Charles Kingsley, Huxley wrote: "As I stood behind the coffin of my little son the other day, the officiating minister read as a part of his duty the words, 'If the dead rise not again, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.' I cannot tell you how inexpressibly they shocked me. Paul had neither wife nor child, or he must have known that his alternative involved a blasphemy against all that is best and holiest in human nature. I could have laughed with scorn."

These words are undoubtedly very interesting, as well for the profound faith which they reveal—faith in the reality and importance of human life—as for their criticism of St. Paul. There is also a point of curious interest. Huxley punctuates the passage in the manner which may now be regarded as correct, the manner adopted in the Revised Version, not as in the Authorised Version and the Burial Service. Are we to conclude that the officiating minister was a careful scholar whose knowledge guided his reading, or that Huxley himself made the change instinctively in obedience to his acquaintance with the text or his understanding of St. Paul's whole argument?

But it is much more important to determine St. Paul's meaning than to discover why Huxley quoted the words as he did. Adopting the punctuation of the R.V., let us con-

sider whether the Apostle's argument is in truth open to criticism. Does he mean to affirm that, apart from belief in a future life, we may as well fall to the level of the animals, "renounce our manhood, howl and grovel in bestiality"?

St. Paul knew as well as we do—probably much better—that among the Pagan Greeks and Romans, and among the Sadducean Jews, there were many who, without any definite faith in a future beyond the grave, were yet capable of living noble and truly human lives in accordance with the standard of nobleness and humanity to which they had attained.

It fortifies my soul to know
That, though I perish, Truth is so.

So sings a modern English poet. But the sentiment is not modern. It has inspired great and heroic souls in all ages. And St. Paul elsewhere frankly acknowledges the great attainments of Pagan virtue and the reality of the illumination which the human soul, even in its natural condition, receives from God. In his Epistle to the Romans (chap. ii. 14, R.V.) he declares that "when Gentiles which have no law do by nature the things of the law, these, having no law, are a law unto themselves; in that they show the work of the law written in their hearts." And he upbraids the Jews on account of the frequent superiority of Pagan virtue (*v.* 24) saying "the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles because of you" (i.e. you Jews), adding (*v.* 26, 27), "if therefore the uncircumcision keep the ordinances of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be reckoned for circumcision? and shall not the uncircumcision which is by nature, if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who with the letter and circumcision art a transgressor of the law?" This was very liberal doctrine for a Jew of those days.

Now surely it is absurd to suppose that the man who

dared to adopt such an attitude in regard to the illumination of the Pagan conscience and to Pagan virtue held that the absence of belief in the Resurrection left man altogether without motive for a good and noble life. The man whose calm judgment is expressed in the carefully balanced argument of the Epistle to the Romans was not likely to be so carried away by his eloquence as to declare, in however rhetorical a manner, that without the great hope man lost his humanity and became as one of the beasts.

What then does St. Paul mean when he says, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die"? We must recollect that the whole argument in which this saying occurs is addressed to people who professed belief in Christ, but denied, or doubted, the resurrection of the dead. It does not appear that these people were prepared to deny our Lord's own resurrection. For St. Paul bases part of his argument on their belief in the risen Christ. "If," he says (*vv.* 13, 14), "there is no resurrection of the dead, neither hath Christ been raised; and if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain, your faith also is vain." The Apostle is therefore contending with professed believers in Christianity who denied the future resurrection. When this is understood the force of his reasoning in verses 30-32 becomes evident. It amounts to this, "Why do we Christian workers live a life of unceasing toil and danger? Why do we stand in jeopardy every hour? I protest that my daily existence is a continual death. At Ephesus my life was no better than that of a fighter with beasts. Now what is the good of all this if we have no more than the ordinary hopes of men?" Thus may be expressed the meaning of the *κατὰ ἀνθρώπων*, "if after the manner of men I fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me?" That is, what is the good of it all if it be merely human, if it be merely for the ordinary ends which men set before themselves? Why should the

Christian live a life of *other-worldliness* if he has no hope beyond *this* world? Why should he sacrifice himself utterly, wearing out heart and brain and bodily frame in a strife for things which do not belong to the course of this world if he has no hopes beyond this world? "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die." That is, if there is no future life before us, let us give up our great conflict and subside into the ordinary life of humanity.

St. Paul has in his mind two very different modes of life: the Christian and the Pagan (or earthly) life. The one is characterized by a vast faith and a perfectly measureless hope. While that faith and that hope exist, every sacrifice is worth the making in order to do the Lord's will and be worthy of our place in His kingdom. The other mode of life is earthly and temporal. Or, as St. Paul puts it in this passage, it is *after the manner of men*, just the ordinary human life as known to the average Greek of the time. In its own way and degree it may be a good, and even noble, life. But, compared with the Christian life, it is mere eating and drinking and dying.

Now what St. Paul declares is that you cannot live the former of these two lives if you have no prospect before you but that presented by the latter. If your hopes are merely of this world, your life cannot belong to the Eternal. The great truth which is here presented is that the Christian life and the Christian hope are inseparable; the one cannot exist without the other. And this is a most important lesson for the present age. In our day, as in the time of St. Paul, there are many who have a profound admiration for Christianity, who are indeed willing to call themselves Christians, but have no belief in the creed of Christianity and no confidence in its great promises of a life beyond the tomb. They admire the ethical teaching of Jesus. They believe in the doctrine of love and brotherhood. They give

unstinted admiration to the splendid devotion of those heroes of the cross who could say as truly as the Apostle, "I die daily." They regard the Christian life as the noblest thing under the sun. But they have no belief in the Divine Christ and the Resurrection. The usual way of settling the great question is expressed by some such formula as this, "Well, after all, Christianity is a life, not a creed."

This is exactly what St. Paul denies with all the tremendous energy of his soul in the passage before us. If the creed goes, the life must go too. The creed and the life are inseparable. Christ and the Resurrection give to men the conviction, the spiritual power and the splendid hope which make the Christian life possible. Apart from this creed man must limit himself to merely earthly hopes, and his life must slide back again to the Pagan level. He may be good and great upon that level, but it will be with a goodness and greatness not Christian, but Pagan.

There are, of course, certain intermediate stages. There are those whom the forces of Christian training and Christian influence keep more or less within the sphere of the Christian life. There are also those who cling to the forms and ceremonies of religion on account of the connexion of these things with the moral and social life of the community. But these are mere passing phases. They could not endure if the Christian creed were to vanish from the earth.

St. Paul's argument in this passage becomes far more impressive when his teaching on the nature of the Resurrection is kept in mind. That teaching not only gets rid of all the difficulties which are generally experienced in connexion with the subject, but also presents the most glorious and inspiring vision possible of the great hope which is set before us.

St. Paul forbids us to regard the Resurrection as the re-animation of our corruptible bodies. He also elevates

our thought above any mere doctrine of the immortality of the soul. For him the future life is not a second life of the sort we have here, nor is it a world of shades, a pale copy of reality. His conception is neither the mediæval one nor the Pagan one. It is rather that this life, with all its conditions and modes of existence and of knowledge, shall be merged and completely transmuted in a new state of being. The eternal shall supervene upon the temporal. Mortality shall be swallowed up of life. We shall not lose connexion with life by the loss of our corruptible bodies, we shall gain a far richer, fuller, more abundant life. We shall not be unclothed, but clothed upon (2 Cor. v. 1-5). "What is mortal," that which belongs to this world of corruption, shall be "swallowed up of life." As a dream melts and is lost in the fuller reality of our waking existence, so shall that which here we deem our waking existence melt away and be lost in a far more intense reality. When compared with the eternal world, this life is but a realm of shades, a region of dim, pale, fleeting ghostly things.

That is a doctrine worth having. It makes life worth living and every conflict for truth and right worth engaging in. For it sets before us the hope of a realization which will redeem from failure every justly aimed effort. Moreover this doctrine is important for our own time, because it is in harmony with much of the best thought of the day. Some of our deepest thinkers have been led to hold that there are *degrees of reality*. Some forms of being are more real than others. And St. Paul's doctrine of the Resurrection amounts to this, that there is a degree of reality beyond anything we know here. Surely there are to be found everywhere proofs of the truth of this teaching. For when we look deeply enough into anything, we find mysteries we cannot penetrate, problems we cannot solve, contradictions we cannot overcome; which means that the

final explanation is not here; the most real thing is beyond us.

The Christian hope is that, in Christ, we shall have our share in the enjoyment of a more real life in the future than we have in the present. With that hope in view even the ordinary man can catch something of the spirit of the great Apostle, the spirit too of the great poet of the nineteenth century whose last utterance breathes the same boundless confidence.

One who never turned his back but marched breast forward,
Never doubted clouds would break,
Never dreamed, though right were worsted, wrong would triumph,
Held we fall to rise, are baffled to fight better, sleep to wake.

They are great words, but here are greater. "Behold, I tell you a mystery: we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory."

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