

## Eternal Life.

THE difference between human life and the divine life, the life of the body and the life of the spirit, is the difference between appearance and reality. Human life waxes and wanes : it is transient, temporal and imperfect. It is sinful, weak and vacillating. But behind the passing glories of space and time there is another life, that boundless energy of God which first created and now sustains the universe. It is the source of all existence ; that life which mysteriously is in all things and behind all things and yet is yearning to break into our mortal realm. That higher and perfect life once did break through in the person of Jesus Christ, and the teaching of the New Testament is that, although in a lesser way perhaps, it may continue to break through in other human lives through the mediation of Him who first revealed it to us. This other and holy life is Eternal Life, and we could never have known it had not Jesus Christ graciously made it manifest to us. In Him we see that Eternal Life is the life of God. It is just, true, holy, perfect and divine. We cannot attempt a definition, but may only describe what we have seen in Jesus, and from a study of His most marvellous life we discover that through Him men are able, if they so desire, to attain to that supremely beautiful and holy state of existence which we know as Eternal Life.

Eternal Life is not a religious conception to be defined : it is a spiritual reality to be experienced. Christ has made it wonderfully possible for all men to share in the life of God, to pass from the human to the higher and richer level of the divine. This divine life is first of all moral and ethical in its significance, for it reveals its presence mainly by its regenerating power in the conduct of human existence. It comes to bring about a complete inward change, a transforming of character and the creation of an entirely new individual being whose life is henceforth governed by new motives and new desires such as had no place in his former nature. As Dr. Selbie has said : "There is given to every man the capacity to fit himself into a wider environment than that of the flesh. Man is made for God, and until he is born into the spiritual world he remains undeveloped, frustrated and only half alive." Eternal Life implies a change of outlook, a change of mind and a change of life. When we become true and sincere believers in the Gospel

of Jesus Christ and are making it known not only with our lips but by our lives, we enter into Eternal Life. When we have cast aside the old man and have become new creations, born again, as it were, beginning a new life with minds gripped and moulded by the sovereign rule of God; when our whole life and attitude is governed by a new scale of values and daily living is determined by self-sacrifice and not greed, by faith and not a wavering hope, by justice and not dishonesty, by love rather than mistrust and hatred, then we reveal ourselves to be true sons of God manifesting in our own existence the moral qualities that pertain to the life of God, and we inherit that infinitely precious gift, the quality and power of Eternal Life. Those who yield themselves to the God they see in Jesus become possessed of a will that is infinitely higher and greater than their own. They enter upon a new phase of life which has all the marks of the divine. Character is transformed; more pure, more earnest and more gracious living becomes apparent. Life is ruled by complete and utter belief in Christ and absolute obedience to His holy will. Through this believing and because of this obedience there comes a spiritual communion which brings the gift supreme, the bestowal through God's Son of Eternal Life.

In some respects the expressions "Eternal Life" and "the Kingdom of God" are synonymous. They both refer to the reign of God in the human life and to quality of living here and now. The entry into this life and this Kingdom is by the way of belief and obedience. It marks the end of a former manner of life and the beginning of a new way of living which is controlled and governed by the law of love which Christ revealed in His teaching and earthly life. When the Kingdom is eventually consummated, that is, when history is brought to its fulfilment, then all who dwell within the universal bounds of the Kingdom will have entered into Eternal Life, for Jesus will be King of individual lives and monarch of the entire world.

To many people the term "Eternal Life" suggests at once the idea of immortality, life continued after death. These terms, however, are not synonymous, as most people seem to imagine. Immortality refers to quantity of life, while Eternal Life has the significance of quality. The implication is that a mortal life becomes immortal only when it deserves to be so. Life here on earth has to be of such a quality that it cannot possibly come to an end. Eternal Life means that Heaven begins here and now. "It is not in Heaven that we are to find God," says Godet, "but in God we are to find Heaven." The chief characteristic of Eternal Life is not endless duration, but its moral and spiritual quality, and after death the difference of life will be of degree rather than kind. Eternal Life begins now. It is consummated

beyond, and death is but an incident on the way. Eternal Life means living the type of life that Jesus lived. It is not to be assessed by the length of its existence on earth, but by its goodness, its spiritual beauty, the depth and extent of its capacity to love. Eternal Life and immortality have been mistakenly regarded as meaning one and the same thing because of the common error of imagining unending time as synonymous with eternity. Eternal Life is the life of God, for ever indestructible. It is a great ocean of life sweeping in upon a myriad shores which are human souls, and death is but the short twilight that covers the sea for a while only to pass away again before the light of a new and eternal day.

Multitudes are to-day wondering what precisely is the significance of life. They desire to know why they are here, what life is for, what meaning has it, if it has any meaning at all. Many find their answer in the things which are seen and temporal, while many give themselves up to black despair since they can find no answer of any kind. What are we here for? The answer is that we are on this earth in order to train ourselves for the world to come. History, whether it be the story of a man's individual life or the story of the world at large, has no meaning at all unless it is interpreted in terms of something that transcends all history. A man's life, like the life of the world, acquires significance only in terms of the eternal. We are in this world for only a little while, but during the short time we are here we are meant so to order our lives that we enter into Eternal Life, and the purpose of our stay amid the shades of this present life is that we should achieve just that. To squander one's life, a life which, as we are always told, is given us on trust by the Creator, upon a wild and prodigal search for the "good things," so-called, of the mortal and fleshly existence, and a reckless reaching out for the tawdry rewards and tinsel crowns which the world has to offer is not only stupidity, but deliberate crime against God. To do that is to throw life upon a dung heap. Life is given us here that we might, by loving, sacrificial, wholesome living, prepare for the glories of the eternity in which God dwelleth and where the soul may behold the Son in the fullness of His majesty.

To enter Eternal Life here and now is possible only by means of Jesus Christ, who is the great Life-giver. Jesus set aside the robes of eternity and stepped into this world of mortal men and things in order to be the medium by which the life of God could be imparted to human souls. The first condition of the granting of this life by Jesus is belief in Him; that is the first step. Utter and absolute belief in Jesus draws men into that relationship with Him which somehow brings Christ's

power as Life-impartor into action. It is the particular stress of the Fourth Gospel that this glorious, new life which Jesus bestows is in some inexplicable way inherent in His very Person: "In Him was Life." It is not sufficient, therefore, to give only intellectual assent to the doctrine Jesus taught. Neither is a patronising approval of His way of life, nor a hazy adherence to His Gospel, enough to obtain Eternal Life. In order that Christ may impart of His very self to the believer there must be, first, a full and complete belief in Jesus and, arising and developing out of that belief, such a deep, abiding and real intimacy of fellowship with the Saviour as to make possible the communication of Himself and the Life which is in Him.

In his deservedly renowned work on the Fourth Gospel, Prof. E. F. Scott shows how John explains the imparting of Eternal Life by Jesus Christ. It is, in the first place, transmitted by the word of Jesus, since the message of Jesus consists of the words of Eternal Life. "If ye abide in Me and My words abide in you." "The words which I speak unto you are Spirit and Life." The second way in which Christ communicates Life is through the sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Scott maintains that John believes the bread and the wine to be more than mere symbols: they have a validity of their own. Around the table of the Lord the believers enter into communion and fellowship with Christ the Life-giver. The third way is by means of a permanent fellowship and mystical union. Fellowship with Christ is not to be merely a matter of communion at special occasions, but rather a daily living with Him. It is a union as complete and intimate as the union of the branch to the main stem of the vine. The believer becomes one with Christ, so that the very mind of Jesus becomes his mind and he can say: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Christ is alive, and of His Life we may all receive.

Eternal Life is not something to be acquired after death, a vaguely blissful existence in the next world. It is the present possession of the believer in Christ, a life of spiritual communion with Jesus Christ which, by its participation in the divine, results in moral and ethical fruit of a particularly valuable and lasting nature. It is a life prompted and governed by a love that is stronger than death, a life which begins here as a stream and after death becomes an ocean. "The Christian religion means one thing and one thing only," said Harnack, "Eternal Life in the midst of time, by the strength and under the eyes of God." The mission of Jesus in this mortal world is explained in His own words: "I am come that ye might have Life."

The difference between the arid, mortal life and the sublime, divine Life which Jesus imparts is described by Prof. A. J.

Gossip when he pictures the world as it possibly was before life appeared upon it. The earth span in space, cold, dead and silent. But one day there appeared somewhere upon its surface a tiny and almost invisible spot. "But with its coming history had begun: and the mind of man and the sacrifice of woman, the witcheries of Beethoven, the genius of Shakespeare, the mystery of Jesus Christ, all had grown possible, for life was here." Life had come to the earth, and within that tiny spot lay all the potentialities of everything that is most glorious in human history. So it is with the individual soul. Before it is laid in belief and obedience at the feet of Jesus Christ it is worth little more than dust and ashes. But when He is given control transformation begins, another Life has come, awakening in the heart and mind all those dormant, spiritual powers which surpass, beyond imagination, those of the life lived within the shadow of earthly things. "I am come that ye might have Life." How it is all done we cannot adequately describe, but that it is done no man dare deny.

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