

SOURCE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE.

(Lutheran Observer.)

The Christian life is not self-originated. It does not spring into being by an act of merely human will, resolve or power. It is a divine product alike in its beginning and progress. It is of God. There is a memorable passage of St. Paul's wherein he touches upon this problem of Christian psychology, speaking with the firm conviction of one who draws his knowledge from the depths of an indubitable personal experience. So far as the life I once lived is concerned, he says, "I am crucified." But he immediately adds, "Nevertheless I live;" then, as if to correct a possible misapprehension, he explains, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." That is to say, the real author of the change he has experienced is his divine Redeemer. The source of his new views and feelings, of all the new activities of his mind and heart, of the new direction of his choices, making a new life within and without, is Christ—the mind of Christ becoming Paul's mind, the will of Christ becoming Paul's will, the truth of Christ becoming the governing and directing truth and light for Paul, Christ himself, with all his mighty powers and inspirations, being thus taken into the very love and life of the soul.

Some hint of this mystery of Christ's life in the believer may be found in the human fact of one man entering, through the means of word and action, into the mind and heart of his friend, and there controlling his thinking and shaping his life. But this is only a hint. The living Christ in the Christian, making and directing his life, is a much deeper, more intimate real and vital thing than any merely human relationship can illustrate. For Christ, by his divine power, by his Holy Spirit, can enter more directly and positively into our minds and hearts—can supernaturally place himself in his truth and quickening energy in the very citadel of our personality. So completely does the reality transcend the analogies of human relationships, and yet go deep and vital is it, that it is sometimes called the "mystical" or mysterious union. Christ himself illustrated it by the way in which the branches live in and by the vine. It is a connection mysterious in itself, but one which makes the fruits of righteousness in the Christian's life as truly the products of Christ's power and energy as the fruits on the branches are the products of the life of the vine. St. Paul illustrates it in another place by the relation of the head to the members of the body—the members showing the thought and will of the head and acting by its direction.

Nor is the fact that the course of the Christian life is explained by the phrase, "Christ liveth in me" inconsistent with the truth asserted in that other declaration of Paul's, "Nevertheless I live." Rather, it was only because he could affirm "Christ liveth in me" that he could also say, "I live." In other words Christ in him was the only adequate reason and explanation of his new life—the efficient cause of his resurrection from the death in trespasses and sins. It is not until Christ lives in us that we can live our own true life. But whatever Christ is within us and does within us, whatever suggestion and quickening and help he may bring us, he cannot and does not live our lives for us, or instead of us, but enables us to truly live. He gives us the freedom, light, strength, but we do and must do the living—impossible without him, real and holy by him. If he works in us to will and do we must actually ourselves both will and do if we are to work out into real life our salvation from sin. Whatever life-power Christ may be in us must flow into effect in the progress of our own thinking, feeling, acting, day by day. St. Paul might have inverted the order of his statement and

said, "Christ liveth in me; therefore I live the new life."

We see in St. Paul's case also how this new life operates. He was still in the flesh, limited and held under physical laws like the unrenewed men about him, moving under like circumstances, using the same bodily organs as before and before. He still ate and drank and labored and slept and handled earthly things, but in a different spirit, with a different outlook, and from different motives. They were held in their true relation as servants of his higher, spiritual life—used as means whereby to serve God. The Christian is a spiritual man, one in whom the spiritual, immortal part, purified and quickened by Christ, has been delivered from the bondage of evil and is growing up into the holy character for which he was created and redeemed. Only in walking after God's Spirit do we strike into the path which our spirits were meant by their Maker to follow. Through Christ's life our human lives are recovered from their misdirection and started toward their own proper goal. Christ's life in us means our own true life restored.

TROUBLED WITH DOUBTS.

By C. H. Wetherle.

There are thousands of Christians who frequently doubt that they are real Christians. They are often saddened by the thought that, notwithstanding the fact that there was a time when they believed that they were changed in heart and life by the grace of God, they may have been mistaken. A darkening doubt troubles them. They do not presently feel either happy or hopeful. The former spirit of rejoicing is now absent. The pall of uncertainty clouds their vision.

I may have some readers of this class. If so, I would like to help them. A few questions may serve the purpose. Do you presently have any yearning to please God? Have you any special interest in reading the Bible? Have you any appetite for purely spiritual things? Are you inclined to have seasons of quiet communion with God? Are you desirous of being on a much higher plane of spiritual life than you now occupy? Do you know whether or not you love God, His Word, and His people?

These test questions ought to aid a doubting Christian in deciding what his relation to God now is. I advise such a person not to be governed by his or her doubts. If one be a real Christian he may have doubts in respect to certain things, but the doubts are not likely to long be his master. Certainly they will not be so if the Christian will set himself resolutely against them. Much depends upon one's power of will. Let him firmly say that he will not be the slave of doubts, and the good result will surprise and gladden him. The harrowing doubts will soon flee away from him.

But I would not encourage anyone to take it for granted that he is a true Christian simply because, years ago, he made a profession of religion. There are those who, at a certain time, changed their course of living. It proved to be only a temporary reformation. For a while they seemed to be zealous for the Lord's cause. While everything went smoothly with them they maintained a sort of religious activity. But there was no radical change of nature or character, and therefore they were formalists. Such ones are not apt to be troubled with doubts, though they ought to be alarmed about themselves. To the true Christian I say, cultivate your best faith in God, and thus destroy bad doubting.

God never called a lazy man to preach the gospel, nor a man that would not strive to prepare himself to preach.

LESSONS FROM ISAIAH.*

By Robert E. Spear.

"I saw the Lord." Isaiah looked out over his life in the light that fell upon it before the presence of God. His vision of the Lord was a vision of his own life as it appeared to the Lord. That vision banished pride and selfishness. The trouble with most of us is that we think of life as belonging to ourselves, and we do with it just what we would do with whatever was our own. And also we forget eternity. We take it for granted that our life has no range beyond death, and no wider sweep than its human relationships. We will know better if we will look upon the Lord and reconsider our lives in the light of his countenance.

The sight of God destroys pride. When Isaiah had his great experience in the temple, his first effort was to humble himself. When man measures himself against his fellow men he may be proud, but not when he measures himself against God. God is our true standard, and when we stand before him we are unclean. This was Peter's experience. Before the power of Christ he could only fall down and say: "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But it is just when we have discovered before God our own unworthiness and impatience that we are where we can be made strong and omnipotent. Those who humble themselves before God and so know their own true place and character are where God can uplift them and cause them to stand in the solid strength of God.

The sight of God destroys selfishness. We see that the end of life is not our own pleasure but the will of God. The contact with the fundamental realities which a great disaster gives men, brings to them this revelation. When the Republic was struck by the Florida and the passengers ill clad and in peril of their lives stood shivering on the deck, petty selfishness appeared in its true shame and wickedness, and each one thought of the need of others. The sight of God is the vision of the ultimate reality of all things, and when we see him and life before him, we realize that life is not to be used for pleasure but to be spent in work, and that the work is to seek not our gain, but the world's good and the glory of God.

The man who thus sees his life in the presence of God rejoicingly realizes that it is his life in order that he may freely give it to God. "Whom shall I send and who will go for us?" asks God. The man does not want to be a conscript. He instantly volunteers. There are many Christians who say, "Yes, I would go as a missionary if God called me," or "Yes, I would help in that needy work at home if God would assign me definitely to it." God wants not conscripts but volunteers. At the time of the Ashantee expedition the Scots Guards were drawn up at Windsor and their colonel explained the call to them, and asked any men who would offer themselves to step one step forward from the line. Then he turned away for a moment, and when he turned back saw the whole line just as it had been before. "What," he cried in shame, "the Scots Guards and no volunteers?" "Sir," said an officer, "the whole line stepped forward."

Paul did not stop preaching because all of his converts did not hold out. Many of the converts even of Jesus went back "and went no more with Him." If a man tumbles into the river, are we to refuse to rescue him because he may fall in again?

*Y.P. Topic, May 2, 1909: Life Lessons for me from the Book of Isaiah, Isa. 6: 1-8.