

Paul's Autobiography.

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Phil. 1: 21-26.—For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if to live in the flesh,—if this is the fruit of my work, then what I shall choose I know not. But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better: yet to abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide, yea, and abide with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith; that your glorying may abound in Christ Jesus in me through my presence with you again.

We have here,

PAUL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

That we may grasp the thought a little more firmly we will first paraphrase the passage as follows:—“Others may make choice between life and death. I gladly accept either. If I live my life is one with Christ; if I die my death is gain to me. Yet when I incline to prefer death, I must be, for may not my life—this present existence, which I may call life—may not my life be fruitful through my labors? Nay, I know not how to choose, I am hemmed in, as it were, a wall on this side and a wall on that. If I consulted my own longing, I should desire to dissolve this earthly tabernacle and to go home to Christ, for this is very far better. If I consulted your interests I should wish to live and labor still; for this your needs require. And a voice within assures me that so it will be. I shall continue here and abide with you all; that I may promote your advance in the faith and joy in believing; and that you, on your part, may have in me fresh cause for boasting in Christ when you see me present among you once more.”

Shakespeare gives us the passage likeliest to this in the world's literature. It is Hamlet's soliloquy. Place that beside this, that we may compare the spirit of the two utterances.

“To be, or not to be,—that is the question;
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer
The stings and arrows of outrageous fortune,
Or to take up arms against a sea of troubles,
And by opposing end them? To die,—to sleep,—
No more; and by a sleep to say we end
The heartache, and the thousand natural shocks
That flesh is heir to,—'tis a consummation
Devoutly to be wished. To die,—to sleep,—
To sleep! perchance to dream! Ay, there's the rub;
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come
When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,
Must give us pause: there's the respect
That makes calamity of so long life;
For who would bear the whips and scorns of time,
The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,
The pangs of despised love, the law's delay,
The insolence of office, and the spurs
That patient merit of the unworthy takes,
When he himself might his quietus make
With a bare bodkin? who would fardels bear,
And grunt and sweat under a weary life,
But that the dread of something after death,
The undiscovered country from whose burn
No traveller returns, puzzles the will,
And makes us rather bear the ills we have
Than fly to others that we know not of?
Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all,
And thus the native hue of resolution
Is sicklied o'er with the pale cast of thought,
And enterprises of great pitch and moment,
With this regard, the currents turn awry,
And lose the name of action.”

Shakespeare's words are the highest utterance of merely human philosophy. In it the thought for self dominates all. Paul's utterance gives the attitude of highest faith which seeks its own in other people's good. Behold the difference! Notice

I. PAUL'S AUTOBIOGRAPHY PROPER.

“For me to live is Christ.” Only six words of one syllable each! In my somewhat extensive study of biography I have never found a richer one. Let us see what it implies. It is this: My life is another name for Christ. The glory of Christ is my sole aim and object in life. Paul's whole being, his every activity, was his Lord's. If he travelled it was on Christ's errand; if he suffered it was in Christ's service, when he spoke his theme was Christ; when he wrote first filled his letters. Indeed every activity of his life sought the glory of Christ as its supreme end.

In his letter to the Galatians, Paul uses a somewhat similar expression,—“Christ liveth in me.” But that does not mean the same as this. That means that Christ was the source of his life—that from Christ as a perennial fountain his life issued. But here it is the issue of his life itself. Christ is the object of his life, and for him Paul lived.

Can we say with Paul, “For me to live is Christ.” This should be the aim of every Christian. Nothing short of it will ever fulfil the Christian ideal of life. Can we say of each day's work, I am doing today's work that Christ may have the glory of it? If so we shall realize that he is very near to us, indeed, that nearer he cannot be. Perhaps it is ours to sweep, or dust, or scrub, then this thought of all to the glory of Christ makes drudgery divine. Perhaps you are a fisherman. Then take Christ in your boat and give him the glory of your catch. You are a farmer sowing the seed and awaiting the golden harvest. In all this you may give the glory to Christ. You are a fruit-raiser, you till the soil, you prune the trees, you carefully gather and honestly pack your fruit, and in so doing you may truly give glory to Christ.

Possibly, were I to ask you why you pursue your various

callings, the most ready answer would be, to support myself and family. Far be it from me to call that an unworthy motive. But it is not the highest one. How many of you would say in response to such a question, I farm, I fish, I buy, I sell, I study, I teach, I sow, I sweep, I cook, I clean, that Christ may have the glory? But why should we not? That is just what the life from Christ and unto Christ involves. We thus move in Jesus' footsteps. Then when perplexing questions come before us we shall no longer ask, what harm is there in such a course, but our constant principle will be, what will bring glory to Christ in these circumstances. Indeed Christ is in those very circumstances and he will be judged according as you represent him. Let us stop trying to divide our life into apartments and saying, Christ shall have this, while the other shall be at my own ordering. Take Christ into all and we too shall say, “For me to live is Christ.”

But Paul completes his biography and writes of his death, “To die is gain.” What, Paul? you have just said “For me to live is Christ.” How then is it possible that death is gain? Yes, the whole object of my life is Christ, yet I have always to contend with my own sinful heart and with this thorn in the flesh. Death will take me into more complete union with Christ, and I shall know him then even as also I am known. Paul might just as truly have written, For me to die is Christ. But realizing that death brings the believer into more perfect union with his Lord, he exclaims with joyous exaltation as he thinks of death, “To die is gain.”

Socrates declares that if death prove to be but a dreamless sleep it would be a wonderful gain. How inferior this utterance to the inspired declaration, To die is gain. It was not impatience with life that transfigured death and glorified it to Paul's view. He was not simply weary of life's burdens and anxious to lay them down. He did not welcome death as the end of all thought and feeling. He looked upon death as the door to a more glorious life. Therefore his triumphant note, “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”

II. PAUL'S DESIRE WAS TO DIE.

As he stood face to face with these two facts—“My life is Christ, My death is gain,” Paul was in a strait which to choose. As Hamlet with the “To be, or not to be,” he is perplexed. But Paul's motives transfigure his perplexity. He looks upon his bonds, buffeting, scourges and scourgings, and realizing that death will free him from all these and bring him into the unveiled presence of his Lord, his desire is to depart. He desires to die, not because death in itself is good, but because it takes him to his Lord. This thought robs death of terror and illumines the grave with living light.

See in this desire the power of faith. All that a man hath will he give for his life. Persons often spend their all in a futile effort to add a trifle to a fast waning life. Though nothing else would draw from them their gold, they lavish it upon attempts to lengthen their days of suffering, so do they dread death. But Paul's eagle-eyed faith lays all sordid motives in the dust as beholding Christ he writes,—“Having a desire to depart and be with Christ which is far more better.” Had he looked upon death as a dreamless sleep would he have written this? No, ah, no!! Such a thought had been to that electric incarnated the most doleful of all doubts.

Socrates called death “a removal to another place.” Paul says it is to be with Christ. How much grander the outlook of the Christian Apostle than that of the noblest heathen philosopher. The apostle had a positive and blessed conception of the future world, but how sad because how uncertain the closing words of “The Apology,”—“Now it is time to depart—I to die—you to live; and which of us is going to the better destiny is known only to the Deity.” How vastly better the Christian faith which desires to depart and be with Christ which is far more better.

III. PAUL'S JUDGMENT WAS FOR LIFE.

Holy desires are good but holy duty is better. So thinking of those to whom he writes, Paul allows holy desires to fade at the dawn of holy duty. Hence his judgment is for life. Life has still duties whose clarion call clashes against the closet of his soul. He sees others' need of him and he writes, “To abide in the flesh is more needful for your sake.” Here is the proof that for Paul “to live is Christ.” Christ's life was one of majestic self-sacrifice. The same motive dominates Paul. His stay on earth is a necessity springing from the need of others. Others need him, that is enough. His desires shall be crucified that others' needs may be ministered to and Christ be glorified. Let us learn the lesson of this noble judgment, that it is more important for us to make heaven real here on earth than it is for us to enjoy the real heaven. Let us fulfil life's holy duties and rest assured heaven will not fail us.

This brings us to Paul's unfolding of this necessity, “And having this confidence I know that I shall abide, yea, and abide with you all.”

Paul's “abiding” would contribute to his disciples “progress and joy in the faith.” This is no small triumph of the gospel. Paul constantly protests against infant church-membership. He was not content that Christian people should always be fed but never feed. His religion was not merely the saving of the soul, it was the trans-

forming of the life. He realized that progress in the faith is the only thing that will lift one out of spiritual infancy. That such progress be made is the joy for which Paul is willing to live. And what joy is there so great to the true servant of Christ as seeing those for whom he has longed and labored growing up into Christ. But nothing else is so distracting as that so many go through life spiritual infants. They are found in all of our churches. They must be constantly fed, they never feed. O, that something might be done to further their progress and joy in the gospel.

One other motive contributed to Paul's judgment. His presence with his spiritual children would make their glorying about in Christ Jesus. They would thus obtain in larger measure and in richer fulness the possessions of the gospel and the privileges of the Christian life. Paul's joy in Christ knew no bounds. He would impart to them an increased measure of that wherein they boasted, but he would do it in the strength of Christ so that to him would be all the glory. Here, too, is a practical lesson. It is that all our joy should terminate in Christ, in short let “In Christ” be the motto of our life, then will Christ indeed be glorified in our life as he was in Paul's.

This passage reveals the deepest principle and the highest aspiration of Paul's life. There is no higher view of his character than this where we see his perplexity as to whether it were better to depart and be with Christ, or to live and labor longer that he may gather more of the luscious fruit of the gospel. It is only a superior spirit that would hesitate thus. But even in his hesitation no trace of self appears. If he thinks of death it is of Christ he thinks. If he thinks of life it is of Christ's work he thinks. In either case self is wholly forgotten.

Let us learn that he only, who is dead to self has learned to live.

The Peak.

Up, up, into the boundless sky,
In grandeur and in awful might,
The mountain lifts its head on high
All bathed in Heaven's glorious light;
And to its loftiest peak the soul
Is looking, for it is its goal.

Ah, ever trusting to the heart,
And seeking out the paths that climb,
It is the living spirit's part
To labour up this peak sublime;
And drinking in its light to feel
It is the only thing that's real.

And when the valley's lost in gloom
Of distance, and the path is steep,
The beacon of the peak doth loom
And glory round the soul doth leap
Until its longings find a voice
And looking up it doth rejoice.

Oh mother of the avalanche,
And torrents wild in roaring flight,
And thunders that the soul doth blanch,
Thy summit ever bathed in light,
And while I take it for my goal
A glory's shining round my soul.

Salisbury, N. B.

ARTHUR D. WILMOT.

Joy.

“A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.”

“In Thy presence is fulness of joy.”

The foundations of the home—Love, Honesty, Truth and Purity—being firmly laid, it still remains for us to fill our homes with the sunshine of joy, a deep-seated, spontaneous, radiating joy. Children are essentially merry, light-hearted and gay. Peculiarly sensitive and susceptible also to sadness or shadow are these little ones. With the keen intuition of the unclouded soul they become instantly, subtly conscious of the sorrow which is wringing your heart while you go about with a smile on your lips. The feigned joy may deceive the cold, careless world, but to our clear eyed cherubs our hearts are bare, and the sorrow and dispeace they find there shadows their lives, and thus they “get too early over-solemnized.”

The attractive power of the sunshine is recognized by all. Few choose shadow; happiness, joy, sweet simple merriment is the sunshine of our larger spiritual life. If we would have our homes the most delightful of all places we must fill them with the golden sunshine of joy.

So, and only so, shall we be able to save our children from the seductive power of the outside world which leads into the lower life. To make goodness strongly attractive and satisfying we must be absolutely true to the spirit of goodness which is essentially bright. “If your morals make you dreary, depend upon it they are wrong.” Noble disappointment, noble self-denial, are not to be admired, not to be pardoned even, if they bring bitterness. “Love, Honesty, Truth and Purity in themselves should bring joy, but if not joy must be sought on her own account.

There are two great schools of philosophy, the optimistic “whatever is, is best,” and the pessimistic “cheer up, the worst is yet to come.” To one or other of these two schools each one consciously or unconsciously belongs. Some are born optimists, some achieve optimism. For most of us, perhaps, it is a distinct achievement to see life good, all good. It is not always easy or possible to see