

IS LIFE WORTH LIVING?

BY REV. A. J. TINSWORTH, CHELSEA.

There is a new intellectual and spiritual flora developing in our age, or being most painstakingly cultivated,—it is perhaps too early to determine which. Whether we have really passed the boundary between two ages, and are now in another moral clime from that our fathers lived in, or some particularly busy husbandmen of the devil are forcing certain plants in our intellectual and spiritual garden which will prove unsuited to stand the climate of our nineteenth century Christianity—we cannot say; but one thing is sure, there are appearing in these late years among us, as all along in the history of men's thinking they have appeared somewhere or other, certain noxious weeds of speculative inquiry, which cannot thrive under truly Christian skies, and which, if they do come to thrive among us, will furnish all the proof any one need ask that we are passing through an intellectual, but particularly a spiritual, crisis in our civilization.

For illustration, hear this significant question: "Is life worth living?" which, from being whispered here and there in private circles of men and women, made misanthropic by disappointments, or spiritually dyspeptic by elegant idling, victims of self-worship, contempt for the average humanity, *ennui*, vanished faith, has grown into an articulate vocalism, has even got itself printed and distributed by express and post to reviewers' hands first; then, through their indorsement and condemnation alike, has made itself heard far and wide, till it has become a familiar question wherever liberal education reaches. The significance of this question is that it covertly purposes not so much to ask whether, as to deny that, life is worth living. Not every one so asks it; perhaps not he who gave the question widest currency by definitely framing it in printed words; but the action which speaks louder than words, which continually illustrates the question, the atmosphere in which it moves and by which it lives, admits of no doubt as to the moral force of the question.

It goes of itself to say that such a question, so asked, is not a natural product of a Christian consciousness; to thrive, it must have other than a Christian soil, other than those moral-climatic conditions which are properly called *Christian*. To ask it, with the inclination already formed to answer it negatively, one must have turned away in dissatisfaction from the very premises of the Christian faith. Life is too loosely bound up with God, and too pregnant with possibilities opening before the Christian out of it, to be despised under its worst conditions. If such a question grows naturally in the soil and climate of our age, we have lost more than we suspected of the Christianity out of our times and our civilization.

If this question have any such real hold upon our thinking as shows it to be not an exotic transplanted to our Christian years from the Sotic wastes of Rome, or the atheistic deserts of France, but indigenous, growing freely in our open fields and common gardens, then of the speedy appearance of another plant of the same order we may be quite sure. If life is *not* worth living, what more logical or natural than that here and there one, tired of it, should throw away the worthless thing? There can be no reasoning from cause to effect if increased disdain of life do not issue in increased courting of death as the short and easy way out of it. The state of mind which asks and welcomes the question, "Is life worth living?" will be followed, unless men's common sense throws their logic, by a state of mind welcoming suicide as a quick release from the "weary, stale, flat and unprofitable uses of this world." Hamlet's will be the inevitable soliloquy:

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 wish'd.

And we may expect a literature questioning the value of life and inferentially denying it, to be followed by a literature coolly canvassing the scientific and moral right of suicide.

But we are not left to *a priori* reasoning, safe as that might be; history furnishes more than one close parallel to the state of things which may force itself painfully upon our notice presently. Take what they call in England "agnosticism"—fashionable unbelief, unbelief assuming to give social and intellectual rank, dignifying itself as the creed—or want of creed—of certain upper classes. In this we have a striking repetition of what was true in Rome in the time of the Julian Emperors. Belief in the gods had vanished; luxury had enervated the people on the one hand, misery and poverty had maddened them against life on the other. Faith was dead and life was a disappointment. What was the issue? Hear some of Rome's agnostics: *Pliny*, declaring: "There is nothing certain but that nothing is certain; the best thing that has been given to man amid the many torments of life is, that he can take his own life." *Seneca*: "Seest thou yon steep height? Thence is the descent to freedom. Seest thou yon sea, yon river, yon well? Freedom sits there in the depths. Seest thy neck, thy throat, thy heart? They are ways of escape from bondage." Thus that sated, spoiled, atheistic people answered the question: "Is life worth living?" Their philosophy defended, their literature panegyricized suicide, and by logical consequence suicide was frightfully common.

Then look at France for connection between atheism and flippant disregard of human life. Sweden, a conservative, Christian state, furnishes suicides at the rate of one in every 92,000 inhabitants; the United States one in every 15,000; London one in every 21,000; England one in every 13,000; *Paris one in every 2,700*. Unbelief—disdain of life—suicide; these are three steps in a logical movement of human life, not noticeable in individual cases except here and there, but sure to take their places in the order of development when large masses of men share in the thought which lies at their beginning, when nations and ages give themselves up to the disintegrating work of unbelief.

It is worthy of note that the two men most conspicuous in English history as champions of unbelief in the Christian system of truth, Gibbon and Hume, were both strenuous defenders of the right of suicide.

The Christian religion is often charged with abandoning a proper concern for the present life out of undue regard for one to come. Men scoff at Christ's teaching in the question: "What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" In their hearts and their practical conduct they affirm that it is folly to forego immediate and tangible advantage for any such chimera as an inheritance in heaven. And with this practical antagonism to Christ and His teachings there is coming to be joined more and more in our day the avowed and open opposition of certain schools of science and the bitter resistance of such men as Mr. Ingersoll, whose pet idea is that it is man's sole business to attend to this life; that the future is too hazy and problematical to make it worth while to bother one's self about it. But Christ is grossly misrepresented when he is made to teach less than a proper concern for the life that now is. His teachings show His acquaintance with the underlying truth which His critics seem not to know, but which a thoughtful common sense and history abundantly justify, that this life is most truly conserved and utilized by him

who lives it, keeping the other in view; that the value and reality of this life fade away before that man who ignores the other. "He who knows no goal in the life beyond, has no true aim in the present life; but when a man has found the goal of existence in the other world . . . life continually retains for him the sublime significance of a school for the life to come, and, in darkest seasons, never becomes empty and unmeaning."

This life, considered in itself, is too palpably inadequate to the demand of the human spirit that it have opportunity to assert itself, for men to fasten their attention and regard long upon this life exclusively without coming to feel unrest and dissatisfaction with life and contempt for it. And no exaltation however lofty, no idealization however refined or æsthetic, no purpose in this life however pure and noble, can long bar out of the spirit of man that deep and radical disappointment in life which comes of ignorance of the heavenly complement of the earthly part of it; or secure man against that canker of discontent with this life which eats out at the same time its significance and its joys.

This life is like a seed; he who buries it, giving it up to the use of the laws which promise a future for it and him, shall at the same time show his truest knowledge of the nature of the seed, and reap his harvest. While the harvest first, and presently the seed itself, shall seem of no reality or value to him who holds it ever in his hand, seeing in it no potency and promise of a future. *Congregationalist*.

Is one of the Rondout Churches on a recent Sunday, the supply, a minister from New York, after listening to the fine singing of an anthem, is reported to have said: "Now that the choir have had their little fun, we will commence the worship of God by singing the 90th hymn."

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