

Life and Its Forms.

THE essence of Christianity is life. It is not a creed, although creeds are necessary as its intellectual expression. It is not a ritual, although ritual is necessary to its aesthetic expression. It is not an organization, although organization is inevitable under its impulse. Christianity is life. Its unfolding history will therefore follow the general laws of life. Christianity is divine as well as human life. Its history will therefore manifest the characteristics of both, the natural and the supernatural.

Life grows. When Christianity appeared in the world it began at once to expand itself intensively and extensively. It permeated and spread over the Roman world. It grappled with the individual, and by working his regeneration wrought profound changes in the temper and spirit of the whole people. Like the Roentgen rays, it pierced to the very core of things and laid bare the moral rottenness and inadequacy of the ancient systems. Roman society was seen to stand upon foundations honey-combed by the dry rot of a hopeless atheism, and fast sinking with all that rested upon them into the bottomless quicksand of despair.

The new force was a life. While much of the old system was beyond hope of resuscitation, enough was left to form the nucleus of a new empire, the persistent survival of which is one of the romances of history.

What took place in the first Christian centuries has been repeated in all epochs since. The new Life wrought revolutions, broke off ancient forms with which men had encrusted themselves and created new forms to take their place. These, too, after a while became emptied of Life, which at once appeared in a new quarter, with a new manifestation. Under new conditions these experiences have been periodically repeated. Luther and the movement he led was but the withdrawal of Life from its ancient forms and its reappearance in the guise of evangelicalism. A century ago William Carey opened a new avenue for the pent-up energies of Christianity to spread themselves over the heathen world. The missionary movement for a hundred years has been, as it was intended to be, the vital breath of the church.

It is plain that to-day the regular channels of religious activity are unequal to the task of carrying the stream of divine energy, which