

The Living Witness Doctrine

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The Source of the THE LIVING WITNESS DOCTRINE

Was Reportedly Concluded from the
Chapter: “Biogenesis”
in the Book
Natural Law in the Spiritual World
By Henry Drummond

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Natural Law in the Spiritual World..
Chapter: Biogenesis
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. “He that hath the Son hath Life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not Life.”
—John 3:36

For two hundred years the scientific world has been rent with discussions upon the Origin of Life. **Two great schools have defended exactly opposite views – one that matter can spontaneously generate life, the other that life can only come from pre-existing life.** The doctrine of Spontaneous Generation, as the first is called, has been revived within recent years by Dr. H. C. Bastian, after a series of elaborate experiments on the Beginnings of Life. Stated in his own words, his conclusion is this: “Both observation and experiment unmistakably testify to the fact that living matter is constantly being formed de novo, in obedience to the same laws and tendencies which determine all the more simple chemical combinations.” (Beginnings of Life, by H. C. Bastian, M.A., M.D., Macmillan, vol. ii., p. 633.)

Life, that is to say, is not the Gift of Life. It is capable of springing into being of itself. It can be Spontaneously Generated. This announcement called into the field a phalanx of observers, and the highest authorities in biological science engaged themselves afresh upon the problem. The experiments necessary to test the matter can be followed or repeated by any one possessing the slightest manipulative skill. Glass vessels are three-parts filled with infusions of hay or any organic matter. They are boiled to kill all germs of life, and hermetically sealed to exclude the outer air. The air inside, having been exposed to the boiling temperature for many hours, is supposed to be likewise dead; so that any life which may subsequently appear in the closed flasks must have sprung into being of itself. In Bastian’s experiments after every expedient to secure sterility, life did appear inside in myriad quantity. Therefore, he argued, it was spontaneously generated.

But the phalanx of observers found two errors in this calculation. Professor Tyndall repeated the same experiment, only with a precaution to ensure absolute sterility suggested by the most recent science – a discovery of his own. After every care, he conceived there might still be undestroyed germs in the air inside the flasks. If the air were absolutely germless and pure, would the myriad life appear? He manipulated his experimental vessels in an atmosphere which under the high test of optical purity – the most delicate known test – was absolutely germless. Here not a vestige of life appeared. He varied the experiment in every direction, but matter in the germless air never yielded life.

The other error was detected by Mr. Dallinger. He found among the lower forms of life the most surprising and indestructible vitality. Many animals could survive much higher temperatures than Dr. Bastian had applied to annihilate them. Some germs almost refused to be annihilated – they were all but fire-proof. These experiments have practically closed the question. A decided and authoritative

conclusion has now taken its place in science. So far as science can settle anything, this question is settled. The attempt to get the living out of the dead has failed. Spontaneous Generation has had to be given up. **And it is now recognized on every hand that Life can only come from the touch of Life. Huxley categorically announces that the Doctrine of Biogenesis, or life only from life, is "victorious along the whole line at the present day".** (Critiques and Addresses, T. H. Huxley, F.R.S., p. 239.) And even whilst confessing that he wishes the evidence were the other way, Tyndall is compelled to say, **"I affirm that no shred of trustworthy experimental testimony exists to prove that life in our day has ever appeared independently of antecedent life."** (Nineteenth Century, 1878, p. 507.)

For much more than 200 years a similar discussion has dragged its length through the religious world. Two great schools here also have defended exactly opposite views – one that the Spiritual Life in man can only come from pre-existing Life, the other that it can Spontaneously Generate itself.

Taking its stand upon the initial statement of the Author of the Spiritual Life, one small school, in the face of derision and opposition, has persistently maintained the **Doctrine of Biogenesis**. Another, larger and with greater pretension to philosophic form, has defended Spontaneous Generation. The weakness of the former school consists — though this has been much exaggerated — in its more or less general adherence to the extreme view that religion has nothing to do with the natural life; the weakness of the latter lay in yielding to the more fatal extreme that it had nothing to do with anything else. That man, being a worshipping animal by nature ought to maintain certain relations to the Supreme Being, was indeed to some extent conceded by the naturalistic school, but religion itself was looked upon as a thing, to be spontaneously generated by the evolution of character in the laboratory of common life.

The difference between the two positions is radical. Translating from the language of Science into that of Religion, the theory of Spontaneous Generation is simply that a man may become gradually better and better until in course of the process he reaches that quality of religious nature known as **Spiritual Law**. This Life is not something added "*ab extra*" to the natural man; it is the normal and appropriate development of the natural man. Biogenesis opposes to this the whole doctrine of Regeneration. The Spiritual Life is the gift of the Living Spirit. The spiritual man is no mere development of the natural man. He is a New Creation born from Above. As well expect a hay infusion to become gradually more and more living until in course of the process it reached Vitality, as expect a man by becoming better and better to attain the Eternal Life.

The advocates of Biogenesis in Religion have founded their argument hitherto all but exclusively in Scripture. The relation of the doctrine to the constitution and course of Nature was not disclosed. Its importance, therefore, was solely as a dogma; and being directly concerned with the Supernatural, it was valid for those alone who chose to accept the Supernatural.

Yet it has been keenly felt by those who attempt to defend this Doctrine of the Origin of the Spiritual Life, that they have nothing more to oppose to the rationalistic view than the "*ipse dixit*" of Revelation. The argument from experience, in the nature of the case, is seldom easy to apply, and Christianity has always found at this point a genuine difficulty in meeting the challenge of Natural Religions. The direct authority of Nature, using Nature in its limited sense, was not here to be sought for. **On such a question its voice was necessarily silent; and all the apologist could look for lower down was a distant echo or analogy. All that is really possible, indeed, is such an analogy; and if that can now be found in Biogenesis, Christianity in its most central position secures at length a support and basis in the Laws of Nature.**

Up to the present time the analogy required has not been forthcoming. There was no known parallel in Nature for the spiritual phenomena in question. But now the case is altered. With the elevation of Biogenesis to the rank of a scientific fact, all problems concerning the Origin of Life are placed on a different footing. And it remains to be seen whether Religion cannot at once re-affirm and reshape its argument in the light of this modern truth.

If the doctrine of the Spontaneous Generation of Spiritual Life can be met on scientific grounds, it will mean the removal of the most serious enemy Christianity has to deal with, and especially within its own borders, at the present day. The religion of Jesus has probably always suffered more from those who have misunderstood than from those who have opposed it. Of the multitudes who confess Christianity at this hour, how many have clear in their minds the cardinal distinction established by its Founder between "*born of the flesh*" and "*born of the Spirit*"? By how many teachers of Christianity even is not this fundamental postulate persistently ignored? A thousand modern pulpits every seventh day are preaching the doctrine of Spontaneous Generation. The finest and best of recent poetry is colored with this same error. Spontaneous Generation is the leading theology of the modern, religious or irreligious novel; and much of the most serious and cultured writing of the day devotes itself to earnest preaching of this impossible gospel.

The current conception of the Christian religion in short — the conception which is held not only popularly but by men of culture—is founded upon a view of its origin which, if it were true, would render the whole scheme abortive.

Let us first place vividly in our imagination the picture of the two great Kingdoms of Nature, the inorganic and organic, as these now stand in the light of the Law of Biogenesis. What essentially is involved in saying that there is no Spontaneous Generation of Life? It is meant that the passage from the mineral world to the plant or animal world is hermetically sealed on the mineral side. This inorganic world is staked off from the living world by barriers which have never yet been crossed from within. No change of substance, no modification of environment, no chemistry, no electricity, nor any form of energy, nor any evolution can endow any single atom of the mineral world with the attribute of Life. Only by the bending down into this dead world of some living form can these dead atoms be gifted with the properties of vitality, without this preliminary contact with Life, they remain fixed in the inorganic sphere forever. It is a very mysterious Law which guards in this way the portals of the living world. And if there is one thing in Nature more worth pondering for its strangeness it is the spectacle of this vast helpless world of the dead cut off from the living by the Law of Biogenesis and denied forever the possibility of resurrection within itself. So very strange a thing, indeed, is this broad line in Nature,

that Science has long and urgently sought to obliterate it.

Biogenesis stands in the way of some forms of Evolution with such stern persistency that the assaults upon this Law for number and thoroughness have been unparalleled. But, as we have seen, it has stood the test. Nature, to the modern eye, stands broken in two. The physical Laws may explain the inorganic world; the biological Laws may account for the development of the organic. But of the point where they meet, of that strange borderland between the dead and the living, Science is silent. It is as if God had placed everything in earth and heaven in the hands of Nature, but reserved a point at the genesis of Life for His direct appearing.

The power of the analogy for which we are laying the foundations, to seize and impress the mind, will largely depend on the vividness with which one realizes the gulf which Nature places between the living and the dead.* But those who, in contemplation of Nature, have found their attention arrested by this extraordinary dividing-line severing the visible universe eternally into two; those who in watching the progress of science have seen barrier after barrier disappear – barrier between plant and plant, between animal and animal, even between plant and animal – but this gulf yawns more hopelessly wide with every advance of knowledge, will be prepared to attach a significance to the Law of Biogenesis and its analogies more profound perhaps than to any other fact or law in Nature. If, as Pascal says, Nature is an image of grace; if the things that are seen are in any sense the images of the unseen, there must lie in this great gulf fixed, this most unique and startling of all natural phenomena, a meaning of peculiar moment.

*This being the crucial point it may not be inappropriate to supplement the quotations already given in the text with the following: "We are in the presence of the one incommunicable gulf — the gulf of all gulfs — that gulf which Mr. Huxley's protoplasm is as powerless to efface as any other material expedient that has ever been suggested since the eyes of men first looked into it — the mighty gulf between death and life." — As Regards Protoplasm by J. Hutchinson Sterling, LL.D., p. 42.

"The present state of knowledge furnishes us with no link between the living and the not-living." — Huxley, Encyclopædia Britannica (new Ed.) "Biology."

"Whoever recalls to mind the lamentable failure of all the attempts made very recently to discover a decided support for the "*generatio æquivoca*" in the lower forms of transition from the inorganic to the organic world, will feel it doubly serious to demand that this theory, so utterly discredited, should be in any way accepted as the basis of all our views of life."—Virehow: The Freedom of Science in the Modern State.

"All really scientific experience tells us that life can be produced from a living antecedent only." — The Unseen Universe, 6th Ed. p. 229.

Where now in the Spiritual spheres shall we meet a companion phenomenon to this? What in the Unseen shall be likened to this deep dividing-line, or where in human experience is another barrier which never can be crossed?

There is such a barrier. In the dim but not inadequate vision of the Spiritual World presented in the Word of God, the first thing that strikes the eye is a great gulf fixed. The passage from the Natural World to the Spiritual World is hermetically sealed on the natural side. The door from the inorganic to the organic is shut, no mineral can open it; so the door from the natural to the spiritual is shut, and no man can open it. This world of natural men is staked off from the Spiritual World by barriers which have never yet been crossed from within. No organic change, no modification of environment, no mental energy, no moral effort, no evolution of character, no progress of civilization can endow any single human soul with the attribute of Spiritual Life. The Spiritual World is guarded from the world next in order beneath it by a law of Biogenesis – "*except a man be born again — except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God.*"

It is not said in this enunciation of the law, that if the condition be not fulfilled the natural man "*will not*" enter the Kingdom of God. The world is "*cannot*." For the exclusion of the spiritually inorganic from the Kingdom of the spiritually organic is not arbitrary. Nor is the natural man refused admission on unexplained grounds. His admission is a scientific impossibility. Except a mineral be born "*from above*" — from the Kingdom just above it — it cannot enter the Kingdom just above it. And except a man be born "*from above*," by the same law, he cannot enter the Kingdom just above him. There being no passage from one Kingdom to another, whether from inorganic to organic, or from organic to spiritual, the intervention of Life is a scientific necessity if a stone or a plant or an animal or a man is to pass from a lower to a higher sphere. The plant stretches down to the dead world beneath it, touches its minerals and gases with its mystery of Life, and brings them up ennobled and transformed to the living sphere. The breath of God, blowing where it listeth, touches with its mystery of Life the dead souls of men, bears them across the bridgeless gulf between the natural and the spiritual, between the spiritually inorganic and the spiritually organic, endows them with its own high qualities, and develops within them these new and secret faculties, by which those who are born again are said to "*see the Kingdom of God.*"

What is the evidence for this great gulf fixed at the portals of the Spiritual World? Does Science close this gate, or Reason, or Experience or Revelation? We reply, all four. The initial statement, it is not to be denied, reaches us from Revelation. But is not this evidence here in court? Or shall it be said that any argument deduced from this is a transparent circle — that after all, we simply come back to the unsubstantiality of the "*ipse dixit*"? Not altogether, for the analogy lends an altogether new authority to the "*ipse dixit*." How substantial that argument really is, is seldom realized. We yield the point here much too easily. The right of the Spiritual World to speak of its own phenomena is as secure as the right of the Natural World to speak of itself. What is Science but what the Natural World has said to natural men? What is Revelation but what the Spiritual World has said to Spiritual men? Let us at least ask

what Revelation has announced with reference to the Spiritual Law of Biogenesis; afterwards we shall inquire whether Science, while endorsing the verdict, may not also have some further vindication of its title to be heard.

The words of Scripture which preface this inquiry contain an explicit and original statement of the Law of Biogenesis for the Spiritual Life. *"He that hath the Son hath Life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not Life."* **Life, that is to say, depends upon contact with Life. It cannot spring up of itself. It cannot develop out of anything that is not Life. There is no Spontaneous Generation in religion any more than in Nature.** Christ is the source of Life in the Spiritual World; and he that hath the Son hath Life, and he that hath not the Son, whatever else he may have, hath not Life. Here, in short, is the categorical denial of Abiogenesis and the establishment in this high field of the classical formula *"Omne vivum ex vivo"* — **no Life without [antecedent] Life.**

In this mystical theory of the Origin of Life the whole of the New Testament writers are agreed. And, as we have already seen, Christ Himself founds Christianity upon Biogenesis stated in its most literal form. *"Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit. Marvel not that I said unto you, ye must be born again."* (John iii). Why did he add *"Marvel not"*? Did he seek to allay the fear in the bewildered ruler's mind that there was more in this novel doctrine than a simple analogy from the first to the second birth?

The attitude of the natural man, again, with reference to the Spiritual, is a subject on which the Testament is equally pronounced. Not only in his relation to the spiritual man, but to the whole Spiritual World, the natural man is regarded dead. He is as a crystal to an organism. The natural world is to the Spiritual as the inorganic to the organic. *"To be carnally minded is death."* (Rom. vii. 6). *"Thou hast a name to live, but art dead."* (Rev. iii. 1). *"She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth."* (I Tim. V. 6). *"To you hath He given Life which were dead in trespasses and sins."* (Eph. ii. 1, 5).

It is clear that a remarkable harmony exists here between the Organic World as arranged by science, and the Spiritual World as arranged by Scripture. We find one great Law guarding the thresholds of both worlds, securing that entrance from a lower sphere shall only take place by a direct regenerating act, and that emanating from the world next in order above. There are not two laws of Biogenesis, one for the natural, the other for the Spiritual; one law is for both. Wherever there is Life, Life of any kind, this same law holds. The analogy, therefore, is only among the phenomena; between laws there is no analogy — there is Continuity. In either case, the first step in peopling these worlds with the appropriate living forms is virtually miracle. Nor in one case is there less of mystery in the act than in the other. The second birth is scarcely less perplexing to the theologian than the first to the embryologist.

A moment's reflection ought now to make it clear why in the Spiritual World there had to be added to this mystery the further mystery of its proclamation through the medium of Revelation. This is the point at which the scientific man is apt to part company with the theologian. He insists on having all things materialized before his eyes in Nature. If Nature cannot discuss this with him, there is nothing to discuss. But Nature can discuss this with him — only she cannot open the discussion or supply all the material to begin with. If Science averred that she could do this, the theologian this time must part company with such Science.

For any Science which makes such a demand is false to the doctrines of Biogenesis. What is this but the demand that a lower world, hermetically sealed against all communication with a world above it, should have a mature and intelligent acquaintance with its phenomena and laws? Can the mineral discourse to me of animal Life? Can it tell me what lies beyond the narrow boundary of its inert being? Knowing nothing of other than the chemical and physical laws, what is its criticism worth of the principles of Biology? And even when some visitor from the upper world, for example some root from a living tree, penetrating its dark recess, honors it with a touch, will it presume to define the form and purpose of its patron, or until the bioplasm has done its gracious work can it even know that it is being touched?

The barrier which separates Kingdoms from one another restricts mind not less than matter. Any information of the Kingdoms above it that could come to the mineral world could only come by a communication from above. An analogy from the lower world might make such communication intelligible as well as credible, but the information in the first instance must be vouchsafed as a *revelation*. Similarly if those in the Organic Kingdom are to know anything of the Spiritual World, that knowledge must at least begin as Revelation. Men who reject this source of information, by the Law of Biogenesis, can have no other. It is no spell of ignorance arbitrarily laid upon certain members of the Organic Kingdom that prevents them reading the secrets of the Spiritual World. It is a scientific necessity. No exposition of the case could be more truly scientific than this: *"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."* (I Cor. ii. 14). The verb here, it will be again observed, is potential.

This is not a dogma of theology, but a necessity of Science. And Science, for the most part, has consistently accepted the situation. It has always proclaimed its ignorance of the Spiritual World. When Mr. Herbert Spencer affirms, *"Regarding Science as a gradually increasing sphere we may say that every addition to its surface does but bring it into wider contact with surrounding nescience"* (First Principles, 2nd ed., p. 17), from his standpoint he is quite correct. The endeavors of well-meaning persons to show that the Agnostic's position, when he asserts his ignorance of the Spiritual World, is only a pretence; the attempts to prove that he really knows a great deal about it if he would only admit it, are quite misplaced. He really does not know. The verdict that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, that they are foolishness unto him, that *"neither can he know them,"* is final as a statement of scientific truth — a statement on which the entire Agnostic literature is simply one long commentary.

We are now in a better position to follow out the more practical bearings of Biogenesis. There is an immense region surrounding Regeneration, a dark and perplexing region where men would be thankful for any light. It may well be that Biogenesis in its many ramifications may yet reach down to some of the deeper mysteries of the Spiritual Life. But meantime there is much to define even on the surface. And for the present we shall content ourselves by turning its light upon one or two points of current interest.

It must long ago have appeared how decisive is the answer of Science to the practical question with which we set out as to the possibility of a Spontaneous Development of Spiritual Life in the individual soul. The inquiry into the Origin of Life is the fundamental question alike of Biology and Christianity. We can afford to enlarge upon it, therefore, even at the risk of repetition. When men are offering us a Christianity without a living Spirit, and a personal religion without conversion, no emphasis or reiteration can be extreme. Besides, the clearness as well as the definiteness of the Testimony of Nature to any Spiritual truth is of immense importance.

Regeneration has not merely been an outstanding difficulty but an overwhelming obscurity. Even to earnest minds the difficulty of grasping the truth at all has always proved extreme. Philosophically one scarcely sees either the necessity or the possibility of being born again. Why a virtuous man should not simply grow better and better until in his own right he enter the Kingdom of God is what thousands honestly and sincerely fail to understand. Now Philosophy cannot help us here. Her arguments are, if anything, against us. But Science answers to the appeal at once. If it be simply pointed out that this is the same absurdity as to ask why a stone should not grow more and more living till it enters the Organic World, the point is clear in an instant.

What now, let us ask specifically, distinguishes a Christian man from a non-Christian man? Is it that he has certain mental characteristics not possessed by the other? Is it that certain faculties have been trained by him, that morality assumes special and higher manifestation, and character a nobler form? Is the Christian merely an ordinary man who happens from birth to have been surrounded with a peculiar set of ideas? Is his religion merely that peculiar quality of the moral life defined by Mr. Matthew Arnold as *"morality touched by emotion"*? And does the possession of a high ideal, benevolent sympathies, a reverent spirit, and a favorable environment account for what men call his Spiritual Life?

The distinction between them is the same as that between the Organic and the Inorganic, the living and the dead. What is the difference between a crystal and an organism, a stone and a plant? They have much in common. Both are made of the same atoms. Both display the same properties of matter. Both are subject to the Physical Laws. Both may be very beautiful. But besides possessing all that the crystal has, the plant possesses some thing more — a mysterious something called Life. This Life is not something which existed in the crystal only in a less developed form. There is nothing at all like it in the crystal. There is nothing like the first beginning of it in the crystal, not a trace or symptom of it. This plant is tenanted by something new, an original and unique possession added over and above all the properties common to both. When from vegetable Life we rise to animal Life, here again we find something original and unique — unique at least as compared with the mineral.

From animal Life we ascend again to Spiritual Life. And here also is something new, something still more unique. He who lives the Spiritual Life has a distinct kind of Life added to all the other phases of Life which he manifests — a kind of Life infinitely more distinct than is the active Life of a plant from the inertia of a stone. The Spiritual man is more distinct in point of fact than is the plant from the stone. This is the one possible comparison in Nature, for it is the wildest distinction in Nature; but compared with the difference between the Natural and the Spiritual the gulf which divides the organic from the inorganic is a hairsbreadth. The natural man belongs essentially to this present of things. He is endowed simply with a high quality of the natural animal Life. But it is Life of so poor a quality that it is not Life at all. *He that hath not the Son hath not Life; but he that hath the Son hath Life* — a new and distinct and supernatural endowment. He is not of this world. He is of the timeless state, of Eternity. *It doth not yet appear what he shall be.*

The difference then between the Spiritual man and the Natural man is not a difference of development, but of generation. It is a distinction of quality not of quantity. A man cannot rise by any natural development from *"morality touched by emotion"* to *"morality touched by Life."* Were we to construct a scientific classification, Science would compel us to arrange all natural men, moral or immoral, educated or vulgar, as one family. One might be high in the family group, another low; yet, practically, they are marked by the same set of characteristics — they eat, sleep, work, think, live, die. But the Spiritual man is removed from his family so utterly by the possession of an additional characteristic that a biologist, fully informed of the whole circumstances, would not hesitate a moment to classify him elsewhere. And if he really entered into these circumstances it would not be in another family but in another Kingdom.

It is an old-fashioned theology which divides the world in this way — which speaks of men as Living and Dead, Lost and Saved — a stern Theology all but fallen into disuse. This difference between the Loving and the Dead in souls is so unproved by casual observation, so impalpable in itself, so startling as a doctrine, that schools of culture have ridiculed or denied the grim distinction. Nevertheless the grim distinction must be retained. It is a scientific distinction. *"He that hath not the Son hath not Life."*

Now it is this great Law which finally distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. It places the religion of Christ upon a footing altogether unique. There is no analogy between the Christian religion, and, say, Buddhism or the Mohammedan religion. There is no true sense in which a man can say, *He that hath Buddha hath Life*. Buddha has nothing to do with Life. He may have something to do with morality. He may stimulate, impress, teach, guide, but there is no distinct new thing added to the souls of those who profess Buddhism. These religions may be developments of the natural, mental, or mortal man. But Christianity professes to be more. It is the mental or moral man plus something else or Some One else. It is the infusion into the Spiritual man of a New Life, of a quality unlike anything else in Nature. This constitutes the separate Kingdom of Christ, and gives to Christianity of all the religions of mankind the strange mark of Divinity.

Still we next inquire more precisely what is this something extra which constitutes Spiritual Life? What is this strange and new endowment in its nature and vital essence? And the answer is brief — it is Christ. *He that hath the Son hath Life.*

Are we forsaking the lines of Science in saying so? Yes and no. Science has drawn for us the distinction. It has no voice as to the nature of the distinction except this — that the new endowment is a something different from anything else with which it deals. It is not ordinary Vitality, it is not intellectual, it is not moral, but something beyond. And revelation steps in and names what it is — it is Christ. Out of the multitude of sentences where this announcement is made, these few may be selected:

"Know ye not your own selves how that Jesus Christ is in you?" (II Cor. xii.5).

"Your bodies are the members of Christ." (I Cor. vi. 15).

"At that day ye shall know that I am in the Father, and ye in Me, and I in you."
(John xiv. 10).

"We will come unto him and make our abode with him." (John xiv. 21-23).

"I am the vine, ye are the branches." (John xv. 4).

"I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."
(Gal. ii. 20).

Three things are clear from these statements. First, they are not mere figures of rhetoric. They are explicit declarations. If Language means anything, these words announce a literal fact. In some of Christ's own statements the literalism is if possible still more impressive. For instance, *"Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is meat indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood dwelleth in Me and I in him."*

In the second place, Spiritual Life is not something outside of ourselves. The idea is not that Christ is in heaven and that we can stretch out some mysterious faculty and deal with Him there. This is the vague form in which many conceive the truth, but it is contrary to Christ's teaching and to the analogy of nature. Vegetable Life is not contained in a reservoir somewhere in the skies, and measured out spasmodically at certain seasons. The Life is in every plant and tree, inside its own substance and tissues, and continues there until it dies.

This localization of Life in the individual is precisely the point where Vitality differs from the other forces of nature, such as magnetism and electricity. Vitality has much in common with such forces as magnetism and electricity, but there is one inviolable distinction between them — that Life is permanently fixed and rooted in the organism. The doctrines of conservation and transformation of energy, that is to say, do not hold for Vitality. The electrician can demagnetize a bar of iron, that is, he can transform its energy of magnetism into something else — heat, or motion, or light — and then re-form these back into magnetism. For magnetism has no root, no individuality, no fixed indwelling. But the biologist cannot devitalize a plant or an animal and revivify it again.

Footnote: One must not be misled by popular statements in this connection, such as this of professor Owen's: *"There are organisms which we can devitalize and revitalize — devive and revive — many times."* (*Monthly Microscopical Journal*, May, 1869, p. 294.) The reference is, of course, to the extraordinary capacity for resuscitation possessed by many of the Protozoa and other low forms of life.

Life is not one of the homeless forces which promiscuously inhabit space, or which can be gathered like electricity from the clouds and dissipated back again into space. Life is not a visit from a force, but a resident tenant in the soul.

There is, however, to formulate the statement of the third point, that Spiritual Life is not an ordinary form of energy or force. The analogy from Nature endorses this, but here Nature stops. It cannot say what Spiritual Life is. Indeed what Natural Life is remains unknown, and the word *Life* still wanders through Science without a definition. Nature is silent, therefore, and must be as to Spiritual Life. But in the absence of natural light, we fall back upon that complementary revelation which always shines when truth is necessary and where Nature fails. We ask with Paul when this Life first visited him on the Damascus road, What is this? *"Who art Thou, Lord?"* And we hear, *"I am Jesus."* (Acts ix. 5).

We must expect to find this denied. Besides a proof from revelation, this is an argument from experience. And yet we shall still be told that this Spiritual Life is a force. But let it be remembered what this means in Science, it means the heresy of confounding Force with Vitality. We must also expect to be told that this Spiritual Life is simply a development of ordinary Life — just as Dr. Bastian, tells us that natural Life is formed according to the same laws which determine the more simple chemical combinations. But remember what this means in Science. It is the heresy of Spontaneous Generation, a heresy so thoroughly discredited now that scarcely an authority in Europe will lend his name to it. *"Who art Thou, Lord?"* Unless we are to be allowed to hold Spontaneous Generation there is no alternative: Life can only come from Life: *"I am Jesus."*

A hundred other questions now rush into the mind about this Life: How does it come? Why does it come? How is it manifested? What faculty does it employ? Where does it reside? Is it communicable? What are its conditions? One or two of the questions may be vaguely answered, the rest bring us face-to-face with mystery. Let it not be thought that the scientific treatment of a Spiritual subject has reduced religion to a problem of physics, or demonstrated God by the laws of biology. A religion without mystery is an absurdity. Even Science has its mysteries, none more inscrutable than around this Science of Life. It taught us sooner or later to expect mystery, and now we enter its domain. Let it be carefully marked, however, that the cloud does not fall and cover us till we have ascertained the most momentous truth of Religion—that Christ is in the Christian.

Not that there is anything new in this. The Churches have always held that Christ was the source of Life. No spiritual man ever claims that his spirituality is his own. *"I live,"* he will tell you; *"nevertheless it is not I, but Christ liveth in me."* Christ our Life has indeed been the only doctrine in the Christian Church from Paul to Augustine, from Calvin to Newman. Yet, when the Spiritual man is cross-examined upon this confession, it is astonishing to find what uncertain hold it has upon his mind. Doctrinally, he states it adequately and holds it unhesitatingly. But when pressed with the literal question he shrinks from the answer. We do not really believe that the Living Christ has touched us, that He make His abode in us.

Spiritual Life is not as real to us as Natural Life. And we cover our retreat into unbelieving vagueness with a plea of reverence, justified, as we think, by the *"thus far and no farther"* of ancient Scriptures. There is often a great deal of intellectual sin concealed under this old aphorism. When men do not really wish to go farther they find it an honorable convenience sometimes to sit down on the outermost edge of the Holy Ground on the pretext of taking off their shoes. Yet we must be certain that, making a virtue of reverence, we are not merely excusing ignorance, or under the plea of mystery, evading a truth which has been stated in the New Testament a hundred times, in the most literal form, and with all but monotonous repetition. The greatest truths are always the most loosely held. And not the least of the advantages of taking up this question from the present standpoint is that we may see how a confused doctrine can really bear the luminous definition of Science and force itself upon us with all the weight of Natural Law.

What is mystery to many men, what feeds their worship, and at the same time spoils it, is that area around all great truth which is really capable of illumination, and into which every earnest mind is permitted and commanded to go with a light. We cry mystery long before the region of mystery comes. True mystery casts no shadows around. It is a sudden and awful gulf yawning across the field of knowledge; its form is irregular but its lips are clean cut and sharp, and the mind can go to the very verge and look down the precipice into the dim abyss, —

*"Where writhing clouds unroll,
Striving to utter themselves in shapes."*

We have gone with a light to the very verge of this truth. We have seen that the Spiritual Life is an endowment from the Spiritual World, and that the living Spirit of Christ dwells in the Christian. But now the gulf yawns black before us. What more does Science know of Life? Nothing. It knows nothing further about its origin in detail. It knows nothing about its ultimate nature. It cannot even define it. There is a helplessness in scientific books here, and a continual confession of it which to thoughtful minds is almost touching. Science, therefore, has not eliminated the true mysteries from our faith, but only the false. And it has done more. It has made true mystery scientific. Religion in having mystery is in analogy with all around it. Where there is exceptional mystery in the Spiritual World it will generally be found that there is a corresponding mystery in the natural world. And, as Origen centuries ago insisted, the difficulties of religion are simply the difficulties of Nature.

One question more we may look at for a moment. What can be gathered on the surface as to the process of Regeneration in the individual soul? From the analogies of Biology we should expect three things. First, that the New Life should dawn suddenly; Second, that it should come *"without observation,"* Third, that it should develop gradually. On two of these points there can be little controversy. The gradualness of growth is a characteristic which strikes the simplest observer. Long before the word Evolution was coined Christ applied it in this very connection—*"First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear."* It is well known also to those who study the parables of Nature that there is an ascending scale of slowness as we rise in the scale of Life. Growth is most gradual in the highest forms. Man attains his maturity after a score of years; the monad completes its humble cycle in a day. What wonder if development be tardy in the Creature of Eternity? A Christian's sun has sometimes set, and a critical world has seen as yet no corn in the ear. As yet? *"As yet,"* in this long Life, has not begun. Grant him the year proportionate to his place in the scale of Life. *"The time of harvest is not yet."*

Again in addition to being slow, the phenomena of growth are secret. Life is invisible. When the New Life manifests itself it is a surprise. *Thou canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth.* When the plant lives whence has the Life come? When it dies whither has it gone? *Thou canst not tell . . . so is every one that is born of the Spirit. For the kingdom of God cometh without observation.*

Yet once more, —and this is a point of strange and frivolous dispute, —this Life comes suddenly. This is the only way in which Life can come. Life cannot come gradually—health can, structure can, but not Life. A new theology has laughed at the Doctrine of Conversion. Sudden Conversion, especially, has been ridiculed as untrue to philosophy and impossible to human nature. We may not be concerned in buttressing any theology because it is old. But we find that this old theology is scientific. There may be cases—they are probably in the majority—where the moment of contact with the Living Spirit though sudden has been obscure. But the real moment and the conscious moment are two different things. Science pronounces nothing as to the conscious moment. If it did it would probably say that that was seldom the real moment—just as in the natural Life the conscious moment is not the real moment.

The moment of birth in the natural world is not a conscious moment—we do not know we are born till long afterward. Yet there are men to whom the Origin of the New Life in time has been no difficulty. To Paul, for instance, Christ seems to have come at a definite period of time, the exact moment and second of which could have been known. And this is certainly, in theory at least, the normal Origin of Life, according to the principles of Biology. The Line between the living and the dead is a sharp line. When the dead atoms of Carbon, Hydrogen, Oxygen, Nitrogen, are seized upon by Life, the organism at first is very lowly. It possesses few functions. It has little beauty. Growth is the work of time. But Life is not. That comes in a moment. At one moment it was dead; the next it lived. This is conversion, the *"passing,"* as the Bible calls it, *"from Death unto Life."* Those who have stood by another's side at the solemn

hour of this dread possession have been conscious sometimes of an experience which words are not allowed to utter—a something like the sudden snapping of a chain, the waking from a dream.

**INTRODUCTION BY J. Y. SIMPSON
TO THE BOOK:
THE GREATEST THING IN THE WORLD...AND OTHER ADDRESSES
by Henry Drummond**

HENRY DRUMMOND was born at Stirling on the 17th of August, 1851; he died at Tunbridge Wells on March 11th, 1897. Consequently his life, in the maturity of its powers, was lived through a most distinctive period—the last quarter of last century—when the full impact of the truth that was in Darwin was rapidly being felt far beyond the narrow scientific area of its first dominance, under the sledge-hammer blows of a Huxley or the more overwhelming torrent of the Spencerian philosophy. The noble if placid orthodoxy of the greater Victorian poets notwithstanding, a ferment was at work in the minds of many of the younger generation, which in some cases resolved itself into a struggle between loyalty to an old theology or to a new science that were felt to be incompatible with one another.

Realising the basal correspondences and unity of the truth which could be reached along the various highways of Revelation, Henry Drummond, with an inherited love for, and broadly-developed interest in) Natural Science, strove to convey to others those glimpses of a wider Outlook and flashes from a Penetrative insight that had cheered and illumined his own too solitary path. To what extent he had Met a need Of, his generation may be gathered from the fact that the British sales of one of his larger works—*Natural Law in the Spiritual World*—reached something like 130,000 copies, whilst of the addresses here published, that one which gives title to the volume had in his lifetime a circulation of 350,000 in booklet form. His writings provoked criticism in many undiscerning quarters, but it is noteworthy that one of the most distinguished of his critics, long years after, made public avowal of how completely he had failed to gauge the need for, or estimate the value of, the kind of work, viz., that on the relations of scientific and religious thought, done by Drummond. It is a need that has only become more clamant with the passage of the years.

Under the moulding influence of an ideal home life, Henry Drummond passed by way of Edinburgh University, which he entered at the age of fifteen, into New College, Edinburgh, although with no very clear idea as to how the call to religious service which had led him thither might eventually be responded to in his particular case. At no time, apparently, had he ever thought of the active ministry, and his interest in his scientific studies had never slackened. The natural bent of his mind towards preoccupation with the relations of scientific and religious thought was seen in the subjects that were selected by him for class or Debating Society essays during his student days, as e.g. the “Six Days of Creation”; “Was the Deluge Partial?”; “The Doctrine of Creation.”

Then, in the third winter of his theological studies, he was swept into the current of the great Mission conducted by Messrs. Moody and Sankey in Great Britain during 1873-1875. It was an experience in which he found himself, and in which men began to realise his extraordinary powers of expression and appeal. “There’s nobody in the world like Drummond for interesting young men,” Mr. Moody had said; “set him to talk to a lot of ‘em, and he’ll just crop ‘em in in five minutes.” The Mission ended, he returned after two years’ absence to the classroom benches, and quietly resumed his student place as if nothing had happened. Yet very much had happened, for while in the midst of the Mission he could say that “underlying my scientific studies and everything else, there has been this one settled conviction all these years—that the only life which to me would seem at all worth living would be a life of evangelistic work,” a fuller experience had shown him that “the great thing is to live rather than to work,” and that the immediate business for him now was in quietness and confidence to prepare himself spiritually for what he had no doubt would be made clear as God’s purpose in life for him.

Very soon his way became clear before him. In the autumn of 1877 he applied for the vacant lectureship on Natural Science in the Free Church College, Glasgow, and helped largely by a very commendatory testimonial from Sir Archibald Geikie, whom he later accompanied on a geological expedition to the Rocky Mountains, was elected to the post. Yet even with this definite demanding work in hand, he could not neglect the gift of evangelism that was in him. “I want a quiet mission somewhere,” he wrote, “entry immediate and self contained.” It was his artisan audiences in Possilpark, Glasgow, who first heard the addresses that were afterwards collected and published as *Natural Law in the Spiritual World*. When, as the result of his work, the mission at Possilpark was made into a full charge, Henry Drummond retired from that post, and an ordained minister was appointed in his place. On his return from Africa in the spring of 1884 his lectureship, to which he had been reappointed year by year, was raised to the status of a Chair through the vision and generosity of Mr. James Stevenson of Hailie, and he, unruffled by the rapidly mounting sales of his now famous book and the growing requests of those who sought spiritual counsel from him, was unanimously elected to the post by the General Assembly of his Church. His inaugural lecture on “The Contribution of Science to Christianity,” when published later, added greatly to his reputation.

The year 1885 is still remembered by an older generation as the commencement of the long and happy association of Henry Drummond with the student life of Edinburgh University. In the autumn of 1884 the student world of Great Britain was stirred by the news that Stanley Smith and C. T. Studd, two brilliant Cambridge athletes, had resolved, along with five of their college friends, to devote themselves to mission work in China. Previous to their departure, the two leaders paid a series of farewell visits to various other Universities, and made such a deep impression in Edinburgh that they were invited to return if possible, which they did, within

two months' time. The results were so profoundly moving that the local leaders felt that the work must be continued. Now it happened that in between the two visits of the Cambridge volunteers, Professor Drummond had delivered the annual lecture to the Christian Medical Association of Edinburgh University, taking as his subject "The Contribution of Science to Christianity."

After that evening, when over four hundred men were captured by his presentation of old truth in a new light, it was not difficult to know who should be invited to carry on the work. Most fortunately he accepted the invitation, and for ten years, until he was stricken by the illness which proved fatal, he addressed meetings of Edinburgh University students in the Oddfellows' Hall for from four to six Sundays every spring. Of those who assisted him most, probably least will ever be known. The earlier years were particularly the memorable, for small deputations of the men, headed by a professor or lecturer, visited the other Scottish Universities in turn, where, at meetings recognised but he local teaching staff, Christian Associations were formed, and the religious life of the University quickened.

The resulting Holiday Mission, carefully organised under Drummond's immediate supervision, took groups of students to other towns and villages, and it is noteworthy that he made it a rule on all these occasions that the student members of the deputations should, so far as they went beyond describing the Edinburgh work confine themselves merely to testifying to some truth that they had made their own by personal experience. In time news of the work reached far beyond Great Britain. As a result, on two occasions in the United States, in Australia, and on the Continent, Henry Drummond went by invitation from University to University and College to College, sometimes accompanied by a representative deputation of Edinburgh professors or students, proclaiming the truth as he had come to see it. There are those who still remember the thrill with which they first heard the outlines of the address on Love at a Northfield Conference, U.S.A., in summer of 1887, although it had certainly been given some four years earl at a mission station service in Central Africa.

To few men of science is it given to write with clarity and distinction. From an early period Henry Drummond had practised writing and in his later years became almost fastidious about phrasing and expression. In particular he would insist on the careful selection of adjectives, a part of speech which he considered to be especially determinative of the care that a writer put into his work. So it is not surprising to learn that the original Introduction to -The Ascent of Man, his greatest book, was, after being set up in type, entirely rewritten and reduced in length as the result of a friendly criticism, or that he had a large first edition of one of his booklets suppressed just before publication, because he discovered a faulty paragraph in it at the last moment,—“a knot in the porridge,” as he put it. Some may recall his mot, “A Nineteenth Century article should be written at least three times, once in simplicity, once in profundity, and once to make the profundity appear simplicity.” Even more strongly he wrote to a young friend in 1895, “For your humility read Frederick Harrison's article in 15 the October number of The Nineteenth Century on Ruskin as a Master of English Prose.

After reading it you will wonder, as I did, however any of us have the face to print a line.” Concerning his message, the addresses speak for themselves. They are as vital and constraining today as when he first delivered them. They gripped men; they changed lives, not for a day but for all time. “I continually meet men from the Edinburgh meetings, holding like limpets,” he wrote in 1890, during his tour in Australia. And his influence abides. Enter the private office of the Chief Magistrate of the capital city of Scotland, and the first thing that catches your eye is an enlarged photograph of Henry Drummond, and it would not be difficult to name man after man at the top of his profession to-day who would admit that one of the greatest influences for good in his life under God was Henry Drummond. This man, with something of the cavalier about him—the students most closely associated with him in his work invariably spoke of him as “The Prince”—with his wonderful power of literary expression, fine distinction of mind, and above all that selfless redemptive note about his life which was its key-note, eludes all efforts at portrayal. But that which he was, which he had at heart, and which was continuously exemplified—in his life may be glimpsed anew and savingly realised by another generation through his words.

J. Y. SIMPSON

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**Letter by Joe Kerr
January 28, 1956**

Dear _____:

Many thanks for the newspaper* that you sent. How did that man [NOTE: probably Doug Parker] get hold of all that information? He is not altogether accurate in some things but has a lot that is. It is almost criminal all that they are doing & then denying that their origin is deceitful. He has nothing right about South Africa. If you ever write to him, tell him that William Irvine was never working in South Africa—he only passed through, so I did not share in any divisions, — and that I cut my association with them 40 years ago. He states that I was the instigator of “The Living Witness” doctrine, and that I scooped up what was of William Irvine's kingdom in South Africa.

What they preach today about “The Living Witness” was not what I preached. I then taught the importance of preaching as follows:

1. That Christ said go ye therefore, and teach all nations — Matthew 28-19.
2. That it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them — 1 Cor. 1-21.
3. That God hath in due times manifested His Word through preaching — Titus 1-3.
4. That people could not hear without a preacher — Romans 10-14.

5. That it is woe unto me if I preach not the Gospel. — 1 Corinthians 9-16.
6. That they went everywhere preaching the Word — Acts 8-4.
7. That Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ — Acts 8-5.

I gave instances such as that found in Acts 8-35, how the Lord sent Philip to preach to the eunuch but while I emphasized the need of a preacher, it did not mean that the preacher had to be one of us. The idea that the preacher had to be William Irvine or one of his disciples was added to their doctrine after I had delivered my part.

The mistake I made in my ignorance was that I failed to take into account the sovereignty of God, — God who could speak from heaven and save one, as He saved Paul, Acts 9. He could save Timothy through reading of the Scriptures, 2 Timothy 3-15. I forgot that the greatest preacher that the Lord had was the firmament of heaven, and that there was no place in the universe where the voice of that preacher cannot be heard, Psalms 19-1 to 4. That is the preacher to whom Paul was referring in Romans 10-14 when he asked, "How could they hear without a preacher?" For he immediately quotes from that Psalm; Romans 10-18. When I saw the mistake I made, I tried to correct it, but it was too late! It was something new for people who had not been in the habit of thinking for themselves, and so off they set with it to the ends of the earth! Then it grew until they had it that the preacher had to be one testimony, and one who had either professed through William Irvine, or one of his direct descent.

I could not have preached that, for I believe I was saved before I met the "Testimony" and I know that William Irvine had professed through the Rev. John McNeil. So that theory could no more hold water than the one that says the Pope was a direct descendent of Peter.

In the book, Broadbent's "Pilgrim Church," a book that is well worth reading, we learn that there have been people all down through the ages who have sought to walk as near to the truth of Scripture as they could. They were given different names and were badly persecuted. I just had another letter from one of the deceived the A.M., asking for information regarding the truth. I met this man 7 years ago and told him a few things, which are just now beginning to filter into his mind. Now lots of love in Christ to you and your wife,

Your brother in Christ,

J. Kerr

**Newspaper is most likely the 4-page newspaper titled Spiritual Fraud by Douglas Parker.*

Letter by Ed Cooney, May, 1930