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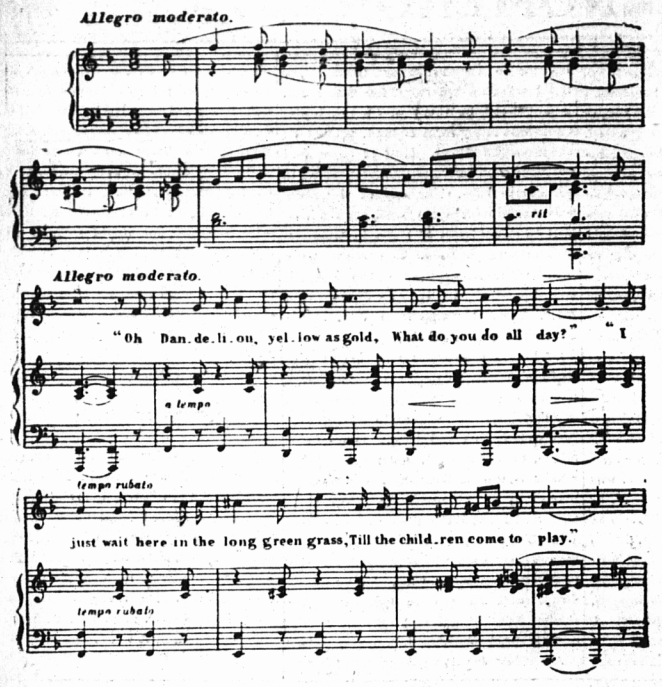

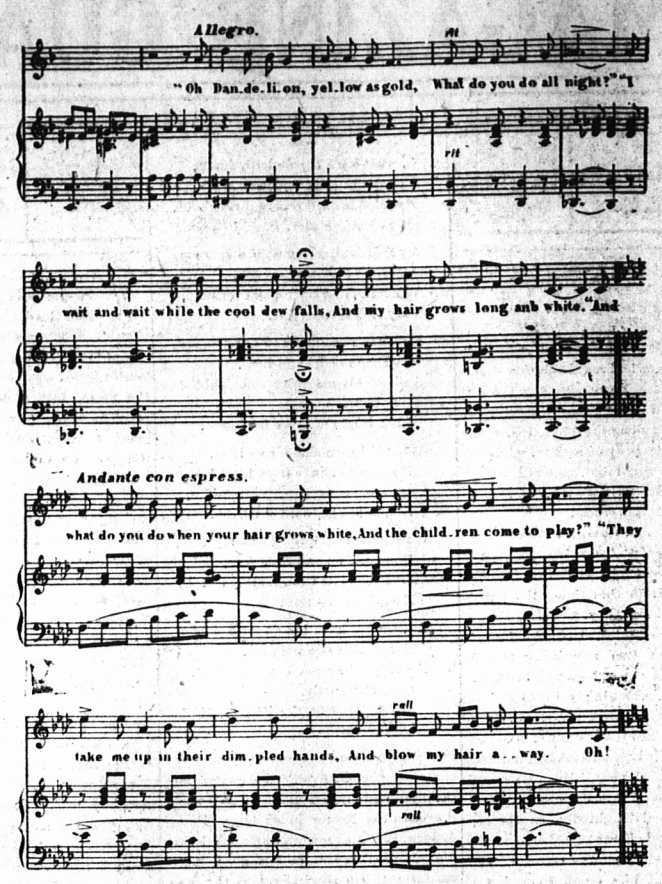

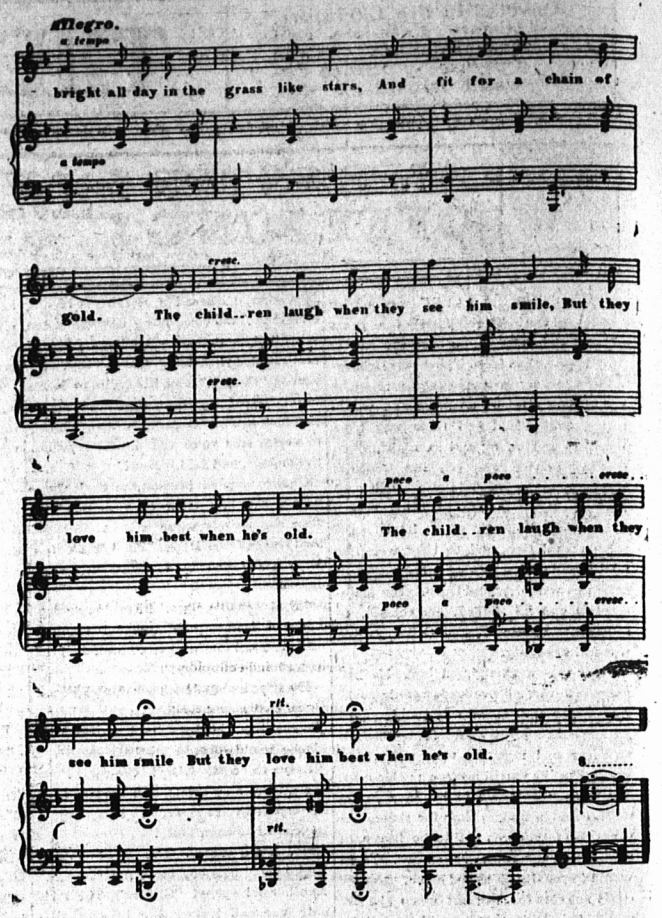

REAL LIFE IS THE INDWELLING SPIRIT

Sermon by the Rev. Wm. Dobson, Pastor of the First Methodist Church, Charlottetown.

The Essential Element of Christianity—The Divine Life in the Human Soul—This is Christ's Conception—He that Hath the Son Hath Life.

(Reported by The Guardian Stenographer.)

Text:—He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.—I John. V. 12.

I want to talk with you, to-night, about Christianity pure and simple, so that we may have some clear conception of what it is. The negative side, or what it is not, can be easily stated. It is not a cult, a philosophy, a theology, not even a creed. We may have a Christian cult without Christianity, a creed, and yet not understand Christianity itself. Christ's conception of Christianity was, and is, that it is a divine life in the human soul. It was this conception that the apostles received, and which they preached everywhere. It is this conception that distinguishes Christianity from all other religions. The philosophy of Christianity you can compare with other religions, and by such a comparison I do not know that some of the ancient religions will suffer much. There is a beauty and subtlety in Buddhism and Brahmanism which charm and fascinate the intellect, but they lack the essential element of Christianity,—the divine life in the human soul. This life seems to be nothing more or less than the real in-dwelling whatever else a man may be, he is certainly not a Christian. So John tells us in the text that "he that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The same truth is emphasised in the third chapter of St. John's gospel, where it is said, "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life, and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him." The life spoken of in these texts is that which the New Testament everywhere calls eternal life, and which can only be maintained in the soul by an act of faith in Son of God. "I", said the Apostle Paul, "am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." While I know we are right on the border of the discussion as to natural or conditional immortality, let us pass that by for to night, and simply state that the eternal life spoken of in the text is the life which brings us into harmony with God, enables us to have fellowship with Him, and guarantees us an immortality of glory throughout Eternity. So you see then to be a Christian is to have Christ dwelling in the heart, dominating every power of our being. Without Christ dwelling in the hear, we are not only not Christian, but the wrath of God, whatever that may mean, is abiding in us. Ah, further than that, "he that believeth not on God, hath made him a liar, because he believeth not the record that God gave of His Son." While not to be a Christian forfeits eternal life, it also places us in the fearful position of declaring by our life, it also places us in the fearful position of declaring by our life every day, that Almighty God is a liar, thus bringing us under the wrath of God. So we are clear this far, that Christianity in the last analysis is Christ in us the hope of glory a divine life in the human soul.

Now the next thing that seems of vital importance to you and me is: How can we as individuals obtain this divine life? That this may be clear to our minds, let us fix our attention upon another thought for a moment. The Apostle tells us in the Corinthians" ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price." Put the emphasis upon the fact that we are God's property. In that wonderful scheme of redemption, Christ became the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but for the sins of the whole world; that is to say the eternal righteousness which lies at the heart of things and which the human race had defied, struck the Christ rather than us. and because it struck him instead of us, the human race exists to-day. If it were not for His death, Adam must have died the day he sinned, but because of Christ's death, God has dealth in mercy with the race, dealt in mercy with you and me. If it were not for that death, you and I would never sin the second time. Because of it, we have been treated as if we had not sinned; we have been preserved, and fed and clothed till the present moment because Christ died. Because He died the Holy Spirit has been sent into the world to convict it of sin, of righteousness and of judgment. Thus we have been redeemed, not with corruptible things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Jesus Christ. Because we have thus become God's property, there is resting upon each one of us to-day, fearful obligations. "Ye are not your own, ye are bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your bodies and in your spirits which are God's". This obligation is resting with equal weight upon each one of us to-day, whether we are Christians or not Christians. Because of Christ's death, we can never get out from under this obligation; it rests upon us in the saloon, in the ball-room and at the card-table, it must be discharge at the peril of our souls. Do we, to-high, fully realize that we are God's property, that we belong to Him by right of redemption. Read again the fifteenth chapter of the Gospel according to St. Luke, begin at the fourth verse, "What man of you having an hundred sheep if he lose one of them." Whose sheep was lost? Why certainly the man's who owned it, whose property it was, who was interested in it, who left, the ninety and-nine in the wilderness, and went after that which was lost. Read on, "Either what woman having ten pieces of silver if she lose one piece." Whose silver was it? Certainly the woman's who possessed it. No matter how she obtained it it was certainly here, and because it was hers, she lighted a candle and and swept the house, and sought diligently for it. Or again read on, "A certain man had two sons, and the younger of them said to his father. Father give me the portion of goods that falleth to me." He got his goods and not many days after the younger son gathered all to-gether and took his journey into a far country and there wasted his life with riotous living. Whose son was he when he did this? certainly his father's Such he was when he gathered the goods together, when he wasted them with riotous living, when he found himself perishing with hunger as a swine-herd. All this the father acknowledges on the boy's return, "For this my son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found." Ah, he acknowledges more than this, for he said to the elder son, "This thy brother was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." It is because we belong to God, that He is represented as being intensely interested in our salvation. Think of the man following his lost sheep into the wilderness, around pit falls and through devious paths in sunshine and in storm, at mid-day and at noon of night, and we have some idea of God's intense interest in us, we get some hint of his desire for our salvation. So important is your salvation and mine in the thought of God and angels that there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth.

Now what is your part and mine in this great drama of individual salvation? It seems to me as simple as that two and two make four; It is the acknowledgement with the full consent of the will of God's ownership in us, turning away from what we know to be sinful and displeasing to God, turning to Christ for salvation and acknowledging His lordship over us, and believing in Him as a Saviour from sin. It is ceasing to do evil, and learning to do well. This is the human side of salvation; you and I can do no more. We cannot pardon one sin, we cannot regenerate the soul, we cannot create ourselves anew in Christ Jesus. This all belongs to God and not to us. The moment that we cease rebellion, come to Christ and acknowledge Him as our Lord and teacher, surrendering our wills to Him to be guided by Him and saved by Him, that moment He begins His gracious work for us. This seems to have been the crisis in the Apostle's life when on his way to Damascus and unhorsed, he felt for the first time in his life that he belonged to God, and looking up into the face of Christ, he said, Lord what wilt Thou have me do?" From his side the battle was over. He had surrendered himself, hence forth he would take Christ as his Lord, and submit his will to God's. This being our part of it, God's part is to do all his gracious offices in our souls. He comes into our life by His Spirit's power, not only forgiving our past sins, but cleansing our inward nature from all unrighteousness, taking up His abode within us, until it becomes a truth in our experience that we have eternal life. The first thing the in-dwelling of the Spirit does for us is to reveal the true character and nature of the Christ. This is part of the Spirit's office, to take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us, and by thus revealing Him, he glorifies Christ to us. Christ is no longer to us an intellectual conception, a theoretic Lord and Saviour, but a reality in our individual experience. "To them that believe, He is precious." But the in-dwelling Spirit does more than this. He illuminates and interprets to our hearts as well as to our intellects the promises of God's word. The promises thus illuminated become at once to us the channels through which we become more and more partakers of the divine nature. Again, the in-dwelling Christ reveals to us more and more the will of the Father, and enables us to discern clearly God's will concerning us in all the little things of life. Through these revelations of the in-dwelling Christ, new obligations confront us and our success or failure as Christians will depend on our loyalty to the truths made plain. "If we walk in the light (that is of these illuminated truths) as He is the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son, cleanseth us from all sin." Obedience to God is the Christian's part; and "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." In the passage just quoted from John, the blood means the life—that life dwelling in us is the power that refines our natures, cleanses us from the stains of sin, strengthens us against temptations and enables us to overcome every form of temptation that would lead us to disobedience. It is here we get our knowledge of God that enables us in some degree to fulfil the first and greatest commandment, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart." It is the in-dwelling Christ that shows us His love, His pity, and tender compassion. By the in-dwelling Christ we learn His holiness, His righteousness, Christ becomes more and more to us, we understand more fully what Calvary means, the love that prompted Him to give Himself for us, and as we gaze upon this stupendous love, we are enabled to say with John "Herein is love, not that we loved God but that He loved us and sent His Son to be a propitiation for our sins."

Once more: it is this submission to the will of God that enables us to understand God's will concerning us. The moment you and I submit our wills, that moment the Holy Spirit is ready to interpret for us the written word. "If any man wills to do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." You and I can make headway in our study of philosophy. As Emerson once said, we can somehow nestle into the mind of Plato, and from his point of view see what he saw and think his thoughts; but this is not true of the divine Word. The Holy Spirit must take of the things of Christ and reveal them unto us. He must glorify Christ and show us things to come. So the in-dwelling Christ becomes our teacher in the things of God, so that you and I may know God and Jesus Christ whom He has sent, whom to know is life eternal.

Now, I think we are clear thus far. Let us pause and ask ourselves in the presence of God, why, as God's property, as redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, do we persist in denying God's ownership in us? Why do we persist in refusing to accept Christ as our Lord and Saviour? Why do we persist in disobedience, though we know that all authority has been given unto Him in heaven and in earth, though we know that He is the propitiation for our sins? In asking these questions let us be honest with ourselves, let us face them in the light of all that Christianity may mean to us here, and of all that it may mean for us at the Judgment. I am sure it is not because we think irrational Christianity is the sanest thing in this world and no man can compromise his intellect by accepting it. If it were but a cult or a philosophy I would not say this, but it is not, it is Christ in you the hope of glory. Though many of us are not Christians, none of us profess to cling to the whole catalogue of sins. It may be some little sin, some bosom sin, some sin that easily besets us, for which we are forfeiting eternal life. In fact it may be possible that the thing we cling to is not in itself a sin at all, but a simple unwillingness to be conditioned by the will of God. But I leave it with you, beseeching you for Christ's sake not to forfeit eternal life for some simple gratification that must surely cease when death takes your hand in his, puts his toe to your toe and you hear the hollow whisper "Come with me through the darkness of the tomb."

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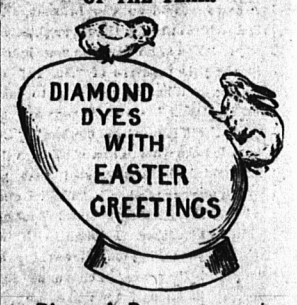

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