

What is Life ?

By Jean Delaire.

Life, the creative Breath moving through infinite space, follows a vast rhythm, of which we perceive but a fragment and call it evolution.

This divine Breath, which in its denser or outermost aspect manifests as Energy, after myriads of transformations becomes Matter as we know it. After myriad more transformations Matter re-becomes Energy, and as Energy returns to the divine Breath whence it came.

And after that ? Only one moment of eternity has passed. Another swing of the pendulum, another world-period, another universe, another "day" and another "night" of Brahmā.....

If we can make a mental image of this stupendous, yet at heart simple, process; if we can picture it as the dual movement of the heart, whether the human heart or the Heart of the world; conceive it as absolutely universal—man and all that exists, from the atom to the star, repeating this vital rhythm, from God back to God, from God as diffuse life, back to God as self-conscious Sons

of God—if we can but do this, we shall begin to understand a little of the Great Plan, begin to know a little of the wonderful world of which we are a part.

As the blood pulsates through our body, building every cell, vivifying every tissue, so the divine life, mystically known as the Blood of the Lord, pulsates through that greater body we call the universe. It builds, destroys, rebuilds. It creates the universe: It *IS* the universe, all that we know of it, all that we do not know, all that perhaps we never shall know.

As both the Science and Philosophy of to-day, with Religion following somewhat lamely in their wake, are looking to life itself for the secret of the evolutionary urge, recognising ever more clearly that this life is eternally and fundamentally one, the next step must be the recognition that consciousness also is, and must be, one. If we extend the word 'consciousness' to mean both the sub-conscious and the super-conscious, then we may well say that

even as there is no consciousness without life, so there is no life without consciousness.

In that long evolutionary process which embraces consciousness as well as life, there are no gaps between the simple sentiency of the vegetable kingdom, the consciousness of the animal kingdom, the self-consciousness of the human kingdom. The one evolves naturally, harmoniously, from the other. Yet neither the Philosophy nor the Science of our modern world—and certainly not its Religion—seems aware that this logically implies an absolute continuity of consciousness; that there is not one consciousness,—*simple sentiency*,—which begins and ends with the vegetable world; and another,—*rudimentary consciousness*,—that begins and ends with the animal world; and still another,—*self-consciousness*,—that begins and ends with man. To believe this, tacitly to assume it in all our scientific research and philosophic enquiries, even as it is taken for granted by religion, has completely side-tracked modern thought in its quest for truth. It has made possible a religion divorced from knowledge, and a knowledge divorced from all reverence in its outlook upon life. It has cut off modern man from the realization of his own nature, his place in the universe, his origin and ultimate destiny.

The old barriers between the so-called living and non-living have been swept away, albeit their influence still remains; yet no up-to-date man of science, no broad-minded philosopher, can to-day speak of life as divided into three rigid sections, vegetable, animal, human, or refuse to include the mineral in the evolutionary series. Vegetable

and animal kingdoms, both resting on the basis of that mineral kingdom of which their bodies are entirely composed, are seen to have evolved by imperceptible but sure degrees upward into the human kingdom; but still, although we realize the absolute oneness of this life, and talk glibly of it as universal, as one in all its myriad manifestations, we fail to see that the consciousness inseparably associated with it must also be one and indivisible.

If there is continuity of life; if evolution, conceived as an almost infinite progressive series of beings, is the universal law, then it means that *the same life* passes in turn through every kingdom of Nature, animating in turn every form of life, from the lowest to the highest, in the ascending spiral of evolution. It means that the same life which now animates the human kingdom some ten or twenty or a hundred million years ago animated the animal kingdom, and farther still the vegetable kingdom. It means that there is no break in the vast chain of life, no "missing links" anywhere; and also, ethically envisaged, no miscarriage of justice or lack of Wisdom in any part of the Great Plan.

It means that Evolution is a dual process: it is the evolution of the forms, the myriad forms, assumed by the One Life, and it is also the evolution of Life and Consciousness in and through those ever-changing forms: it is Life in its aspect of Energy becoming Life in its aspect of matter, then slowly, through untold ages, rebecoming Energy; yet not moving in a closed circle but in an ascending spiral, ever reaching out to an unattainable divine perfection.