

**THE THEOLOGICAL
LIBRARY. LIFE: IS IT
WORTH LIVING?**

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The theological Library. Life: is it worth living? by John Marshall Lang

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JOHN MARSHALL LANG

**THE THEOLOGICAL
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The Theological Library.

LIFE: IS IT WORTH LIVING?

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SUBJECTS.	AUTHORS.
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LIFE: IS IT WORTH LIVING?

BY THE REV.

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London:

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PREFACE.

THIS volume deals with a question as old as the time when "men began to multiply on the face of the earth." It is a question forced on the mind by the contrast between that which is suggested by human nature and that which is attained by individuals, between "the promise and potency" of life and the results of living as realised within the brief space of earthly existence. Poet and moralist have, in every period, dwelt on this contrast, and, according to the mood of the genius or the spirit of the philosophy, have interpreted the problem as to the place and being of man. But, in our day, the inquiry and the discussion are not limited to poet and moralist: they have entered into the region of ordinary conversation; in current literature and current speech we are constantly reminded that persons of the most various shades of feeling are keenly interested in the subject, and are seeking for some clearer light and some surer hope in regard to it. This is

a feature not to be disregarded. And, in the pages which follow, the attempt is made to meet what is believed to be a widely prevalent phase of thought and desire. How far the attempt is successful the reader must be left to judge.

The book is partly critical and partly expository. It is written, confessedly, from a Christian point of view, and may, therefore, fail to win the attention of those to whom, in words recently used, "Christianity in all its forms seems as ridiculous as any religion professed by barbarians." For persons in this "unreasonable state of mind" the author has not proposed to write. But it is hoped that the work may be a means of confirming the faith of those who believe, and may be of use to many who, though wishing to believe, are conscious of difficulties—first, by inviting reflection on the issue, whether any theory on the value of life can be satisfactory which ignores or denies the Supernatural; and secondly, by exhibiting the essential elements of the Christian conception of life, and asking whether, having regard to these elements, this conception is not consistent and trustworthy?

The criticism is necessarily brief. It is far from exhaustive. It does not, for example, discuss, although it does not avoid reference to, the position of some Scientists as to the physical basis of life. Nor does it traverse many parts of the field opened up in the modern science of Sociology. It selects only the more marked of the many schools or types of thought, and, in respect of these, it rather indicates the lines along which an

examination of their tenets may proceed, than it presents in detail the objections which might be urged. To do more, within the limits allowed, would have been scarcely possible; if it shall be conceded that so much has been done, the author will be satisfied.

It is not pretended that the review of the several opinions noticed has been conducted without prejudice or bias. One who believes in Jesus Christ as the Son of God cannot, with colourless mind, engage in the investigation of views which set His authority aside. But the aim has always been fairly to state such views, and, whilst maintaining Christian ground, to recognize "whatsoever things are lovely and of good report" in them, and to be candid and charitable in all judgments. It will be matter of deep regret if, at any point, it shall be proved that this aim has not been fulfilled.

After the sheets of this book had been finally revised, an extract from a letter of the author of "Ecco Homo," bearing on his treatise entitled "Natural Religion," appeared in the columns of the *Spectator*.* It was too late, therefore, to notice the contents of this extract in connection with the chapter devoted to Natural Religion. But after careful consideration of the explanatory statement, it is not deemed necessary to modify what is said in this volume on the substance and tendency of the treatise referred to. Certainly, it is gratifying to be assured that this treatise

* *Spectator*, June 16th, 1883.

does not contain any confession of faith or expression of personal belief, and to be left to infer that the author himself accepts Christianity. The only remark to be made relative to the faith confessed to in the letter is, that it seems to come far short of that which is to be expected from earnest and intelligent conviction. It is said, for instance, "my opinion in general about a future life is that we ought to believe in it, and then think as little about it as possible." But can any one think little about a future life if he really believes in it? Surely, it is not possible to put such a belief in some cabinet of the mind, and keep it there locked carefully away, so that it may have no influence on the conduct of life. It is against this, as the evidence of practical unbelief, that Christian teaching ever protests; it is this which it stamps as worldliness. Further, is there not a misconception of the hope of immortality presented in the New Testament in a sentence which follows the one just quoted?—"I am so full of the bearings of religion on life, society, and politics, that I find it hard to do justice to what treats of death, not life." If the argument of the eighth chapter of this work is a sound one, especially when read in connection with the twelfth chapter, the thought of a future life has most direct "bearings on life, society, and politics,"—on all that man can find to do,—and he only fully realises his existence in this world who knows "the powers of the world to come."

This must be urged, whilst, at the same time, it is