

THE WAY OF LIFE

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649731626

The Way of Life by George S. Merriam

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GEORGE S. MERRIAM

**THE WAY
OF LIFE**



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BY
GEORGE S. MERRIAM.

*Strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which
leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.*

*Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her
paths are peace.*

Received

BOSTON:
GEO. H. ELLIS, 141 FRANKLIN STREET.
1887.

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THE word unto the prophet spoken
Was writ on tables yet unbroken ;
The word by seers or sibyls told,
In groves of oak or fanes of gold,
Still floats upon the morning wind,
Still whispers to the willing mind.
One accent of the Holy Ghost
The heedless world hath never lost.

EMERSON.

I.

INTRODUCTION.

THIS little book consists of two parts, which were written at an interval of three years. The first part is the chapter on the character of Jesus, and the second is the Letters which make up the rest of the book. The former was the outcome of a study of the New Testament, in which had culminated a long course of inquiry—such as so many thoughtful men are constrained to make in these days—as to what elements of Christianity are to be held as true and permanent, and what must be regarded as transitory and for us no longer serviceable. The conclusion I reached was, in substance, that the vital legacy which we receive from the Christianity of the past is embodied in the character of Christianity's founder. That character I described as it presented itself to me. I looked upon Jesus as a man only, with no superhuman nature or miraculous powers, but having in himself the elements of character which give to life its value and its true significance. I found myself of course at variance with the great body

of the Christian Church, in discarding the elements of incarnation and miracle. But I also was (and am) still further from sympathy with another class, who not only reduce Jesus to the level of man, but interpret his goodness as having validity and substance only in the circle of purely human relations, and treat as visionary and unreal his communion with infinite deity. To us, it seems to me, the "first and great commandment"—the soul's allegiance to a spiritual power, its source, its God, its home—remains still the first law, the deepest necessity, of human nature. Jesus is still to us the son of God,—the first-born, though not the only begotten. As revealing to us that we also are sons of God, and showing us how to fulfil that high destiny, his life has still its chief significance.

So again as to the resurrection. The impression came to me irresistibly, as I read and pondered the accounts of it, that these physical appearances were the birth of a Jewish imagination. But there comes also this impression,—that the bodily resurrection, like the miraculous conception, is to us as a parable, under which lies an immortal truth. The human son of Joseph and Mary was truly a son of God. So, not less truly, the holy soul

passes through what we call death to a higher estate. And now, as in old days, the most vivid token of that higher life is the revelation which comes to those who, beside the empty sepulcher of a friend, receive the heart-filling revelation, "He is risen, he is not here,—he hath ascended unto his Father and your Father, unto his God and your God."

This paper, then, on the character of Jesus, was written, laid aside, and three years later was published in the Springfield Republican. It occurred to me then to follow it with a series of letters, in the same paper, not in support or justification of the article, nor with any discussion of historical or theological questions, but dealing in the simplest and directest way with the question *how to live*, as it comes to men and women to-day,—how to live successfully and victoriously. These letters in themselves need little preface or explanation. They tell their own story.

But as I now put them together with the previous article into the more permanent form of a book, I feel that a farther word is due, as to the relation which I believe that the person and character of Jesus bear to the practical business of living as it presents itself to us to-day. In a word, I take it that the "way of