

# IDEALS OF LIFE

AN ADDRESS

BY

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*"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."*

JESUS CHRIST.

*"In every respect Jesus stands in the first line of those who have developed the ideal of humanity" and "by embodying it in his own person has given it the most living warmth."*

STRAUSS.

*"Religion cannot be said to have made a bad choice in pitching upon this man as the ideal representative of humanity; nor even now would it be easy even for an unbeliever to find a better translation from the abstract to the concrete, than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve our life."*

JOHN STUART MILL.

# IDEALS OF LIFE

## I. PRACTICAL IMPORTANCE OF IDEALS.

**SOME** may incline to regard my subject - Ideals of Life - as too intellectual and too far removed from the real world of our daily experience. They may expect my paper to resemble one of those balloon races engaged in from time to time, which only demonstrate the inability of the voyagers to master the air-currents, and seem to be without any worthy result. They fear I am inviting them into an atmosphere of speculations which, besides being hard for the mind to understand, are of no practical value.

It is true that the word ideal is from the purely mental word - idea. Just as that which is born of the Spirit is spirit, so that which is derived from idea has the very nature of idea. Indeed the word, etymologically considered, is made up of idea and the adjective termination al, idea-al; and so an ideal is that which has the quality or character of an idea. Thus the word owns the mind as its native land, and breathes the atmosphere of thought as its native air. In a sense, all ideals remind us of the apostle's words in reference to his own idea, "Not that I have already attained." It is true also that our word is sometimes used to mean something unattainable. We hear of a mere ideal - by which is meant an idea that can never become a reality.

But there is another side to this. There are ideals and ideals: there are false ideals, but there are also true; there are senseless ideals, but there are also useful. If there are low and degrading ideals, there are also those high and elevating; and if there are unattainable ideals there are also those that are possible of being realized. And so, while the word is sometimes employed to denote what can never be anything but a thought, merely quixotic and utopian, yet, as a rule, possibility of attainment is regarded as an essential part of the meaning. Hence the principle definition given by the Standard dictionary is: "IDEAL, that which is conceived or taken as a standard of excellence or ultimate object of attainment."

Now in this sense of the word ideal, there is a very general agreement that to have good, true and high ideals of life is a possession the importance of which can hardly be exaggerated. This high service of an

aim in life has become inseparably connected in my mind with a somewhat curious illustration. In my boyhood I knew an old workman who was that unhappy slave of drink, a periodical drinker. When he was walking along the street we could tell by his head being thrown back and his eyes fixed on something well ahead, that he had been indulging. He had a conviction, which even in his cups he remembered, that if he fixed his eye on a distant object in the direction he wished to go, he could, his unsteady legs notwithstanding, walk fairly steadily to his destination. And as a fact he could. From the drunkard learn his lesson. Life's journey will be best made if our moral weakness be overcome by a fixed gaze upon, and an earnest endeavor to reach, some distant ideal.

Our ideals of life resemble the plans of the builder, or the model of the sculptor. If the builder would construct an admirable house he must secure admirable plans. If the sculptor would carve an immortal statue he must fashion first a worthy model. Someone has well said, "Ideals are engines drawing us to higher levels." Hence the counsel:-

"Live for something, having a purpose,  
And that purpose keep in view;  
Drifting like a helmless vessel,  
Thou can'st ne'er to life be true.  
Half the wrecks that strew life's ocean,  
If some star had been their guide,  
Might today be riding safely -  
But they drifted with the tide."

## II. ABUNDANCE OF IDEALS.

**ENOUGH**, it is hoped, has now been said to convince the doubter that ideals of life are the inspiration and guide of our very best activities, and that therefore our theme is in the highest sense practical.

Let us dwell now upon the number and variety of ideals in use in our daily experience. If what we have already advanced is true; if a life without some aim or other is like a helmless vessel, one may expect that almost everybody will have an aim, an ideal of some kind. And so it is and has been. If we read the biographies of men of former generations, which are a record of what was; or if we look at the living link of the great chain of history, at what really is in the veritable world of today, we shall find that, without any need to soar into the air, we have a great field of facts before us - the existence and influence of ideals in the lives of ourselves and of our fellow men.

You can easily find them. Thus in today's Daily News, I note among the "THOUGHTS FOR THE DAY" the following: "Just to be good, to keep life pure from degrading elements, to make it constantly helpful in little ways to those who are touched by it, to keep one's spirit always sweet and avoid all manner of petty anger and irritability - that is an ideal as noble as it is difficult."

Mr. Crockett, in one of his pieces, tells of the Minister of Education taking a holiday on foot in a thinly populated part of Scotland. He comes to a shepherd's cot and condoles with the shepherd's wife upon the lack of a school for the children. She invites him to test the children,. He finds them remarkably well up. At last he is asked to test them on the catechism. He puts the first question: What is the chief end of man? And one of the boys shoots out the answer as if it was one word: Man's-chief-end-is-to-glorify-God-and-to-enjoy-Him-forever. **MAN'S CHIEF END IS TO GLORIFY GOD, AND TO ENJOY HIM FOREVER!** True, it may be that, though the boy had the words so pat, he had little idea of the great truth they stand for. And many have learned from the catechism, or direct from the Bible, that man's chief end is to glorify God, whose lives, alas! have not glorified God. Yet it is a fact that generations of children have been taught that high ideal, and doubtless many have been impressed thereby, and influenced for good.

In a recent issue of the Bible Advocate was the obituary notice of an esteemed member of one of the Churches of Christ in Glasgow. He was a man of affairs. We were told that in his office-desk was found a verse of poetry which seems to have been his ideal. The poem is attributed to Whittier, but is not in my copy. Whoever wrote it, the poem, the last verse of which was found in this good man's desk, is well-known; and, I have no doubt, has guided and stimulated many. The whole is a kind of Ideal of Life:

### *WHAT I LIVE FOR.*

I live for those who love, for those I know are true,  
For the heaven that shines above me, and waits my spirit too;  
For the human ties that bind me,  
For the task that God assigned me,  
For the bright hopes left behind me,  
And the good that I can do.

I live to trace their story, who've suffered for my sake,  
To emulate their glory and follow in their wake:  
Bards, patriots, martyrs, sages,  
The noble of all ages,  
Whose deeds fill history's pages,  
And time's great volume make.

I live to hold communion with all that is Divine,  
To feel there is a union, twixt nature's heart and mine;  
To profit by affliction,  
Reap truths from fields of fiction,  
Grow wiser by conviction,  
And fulfill each grand design.

I live to hail the season by gifted bard foretold,  
When man shall live by reason and not alone for gold;  
When man to man united,  
And every wrong thing righted,  
The whole world shall be lighted,  
As Eden was of old.

I live for those who love me, for those who knew me true,  
For the heaven that shines above me, and waits my coming too;

For the cause that lacks assistance,  
For the wrong that needs resistance,  
For the future in the distance,  
And the good that I can do.

The verses are no doubt unequal in value, and the last one is the best. Yet there is a completeness in the whole; and the lines-

"For the human ties that bind me,  
For the task that God assigned me,"  
are noble in thought and easy in expression.  
"When man to man united,  
And every wrong thing righted,"

as an ideal for the whole race of mankind, while it seems to border on the unattainable, is yet felt to be a consummation devoutly to be wished, and earnestly to be labored for.

One notices, too, that the first and last verses seem design to complete each other. Thus the first says, "For those I know are true": the last, "For those who know me true." The first says, "For the bright hopes left behind me," the last, "For the future in the distance." Did the writer intend to suggest, what we know to be true in fact, that ideals held in early life, but deemed impracticable or unworthy later, are at the end realized in another and higher form?

There is also full recognition that a perfect ideal will not be self-centered. As Scott has it -

"The wretch centered all in self,  
Living shall forfeit fair renown,  
And doubly dying shall go down,  
Into the vile dust from whence he sprung,  
Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung."

One must live to fulfill the task set by God: to help others: to take a place in the age-long strife between right and wrong; to aid the good cause, however weak, and resist the evil, however strong that evil cause may be. Take, for example, Luther, when his dear friend sent to him to bid him not to enter Worms. Fixing his eyes on the messenger, Luther

replied: "Go and tell your master that even should there be as many devils in Worms as tiles on the housetops, still I will enter it."

Such formulas, expressive of what are deemed true aims and purposes in life, are not only plentiful but varied. Some are comprehensive, like that just dealt with; others are applicable to some special aspect of life, such as our relation to home or country; or some period, such as youth or age.

Perhaps some of our younger sisters cherish Kingsley's words:-

"Be good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever,  
Do noble deeds, not dream them, all day long;  
And so make life, death, and the great forever,  
One grand sweet song."

Young men are especially provided with ideals by our dramatist. For instance:-

"This above all, to thine own self be true;  
And it must follow as the night the day,  
Thou canst not then be false to any man."

In the town of Barrow, one of the most striking objects is the statue to the late Lord Frederick Cavendish, the epithet on which is an ideal of life also taken from Shakespeare, and intended especially for men occupying exalted stations. It is very appropriate to the murdered statesman, but also suits all who may be the victims of misunderstanding or jealousy while seeking to do their duty:-

"Love thyself last; cherish those hearts that hate thee;  
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace  
To silence envious tongues. But just and fear not;  
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,  
Thy God's and truth's; then, if thou fall'st,  
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr."

There is a very high ideal for young men, a truly British one, incorporated in the rules which King Arthur required his knights to swear to keep:-



"To speak no slander; no, nor listen to it,  
To honor their own word, as if their God's;  
To love one maiden only, cleave to her,  
And worship her by years of noble deeds.  
Until they won her: For indeed I knew  
Of no more subtle Master under heaven  
Than is the maiden passion for a maid,  
Not only to keep down the base in man,  
But teach high thoughts and amiable words,  
And courtliness, and the desire of fame,  
And love of truth, and all that makes a man."

One remark may be ventured as to the influence of "the maiden passion for a man," namely: Not a little depend upon the maid. Perhaps the best line here is the second: "To honor his own word as if his God's." Clearly such a one is sure to be esteemed as reliable by his fellows. But the more important result is the strengthening of the character of the man himself. On the other hand, he who does not honor his own word, who promises and is careless of fulfillment, will find his moral nature weakened in consequence.

Henry Van Dyke, an American, a minister of religion and a poet, has written a few lines which seem to contain a very worthy, if homely, description of much that we should aim at:-

"Four things a man must learn to do,  
If he would make his record true:  
To think without confusion, clearly;  
To love his fellow-men sincerely;  
To act from honest motives purely;  
To trust in God and heaven securely."

1. To think without confusion, clearly. Considering that in our conscious moments our brains are always at work, that we are always thinking in some fashion, it is surprising how little attention is given to secure that our thinking shall be without confusion. Southey was telling a Quaker lady how fully his time was occupied, how he studied Portuguese grammar while he was shaving, how he read Spanish an hour before breakfast, how the forenoon was spent in reading and writing, in short how every moment of the day was taken up in reading,

writing and conversing, eating, exercising and sleeping, when she interrupted him, asking "And, friend, when does thou think?" Meditation is said to be a lost art; yet how certain it is that right thinking is essential to right living. Let us seek "to think without confusion, clearly."

2. "To love his fellow-men, sincerely." It will be seen that in all ideals worthy of the name, the thought of our relationship and duty to others is included. There may be those whose rule of practice is the old saying: "Every man for himself, and the devil take the hindmost," but they would not care to acknowledge that to be their ideal of life. Indeed, even selfishness itself would require some attention to others, for we all need the help of others at times, and if we would receive that help, we must give that we may receive. "I care for nobody" ends in "nobody cares for me." But love for others, properly so-called, cannot be thus traced back to love of self. It will help without regard to reward. The good Samaritan is the portraiture of him who has learned "to love his fellow-men sincerely."

3. To act from honest motives purely. The motives of right action are here emphasized. Someone has played a little with this word honest and produced the motto: "Get on, get honor, get honest," which sounds like a true ascent from the positive on, to the comparative honor, and then to the superlative honest. As if the first and essential thing was to get on, and then get honor, after which it would be time enough to get honest. But "he who would have his record true" must reverse this; he must resolve first to get honest, and to keep honest, whether or not he ever gets on or gets honor. All our actions should be based on principles of right, and in doing this we must not count the cost. A spiritual song that is itself not a bad ideal comes to mind:-

"Perish policy and cunning,  
Perish all that fears the light,  
Whether losing, whether winning,  
Trust in God and do the right.  
Simple rule and safest guiding,  
Inward grace and inward might;  
Star upon thy path abiding,  
Trust in God and do the right."

And this embodies our last line as well:

4. To trust in God and heaven securely. It is fit to be classed with the best is this simple little rhyme, which you may like me to repeat:

"To think without confusion clearly;  
To love his fellow-men sincerely;  
To act from honest motives purely;  
To trust in God and heaven securely."

### III. THE BIBLE AND IDEALS.

LET us now enter another field in pursuit of our subject, where facts equally indisputable can be pointed out: that is The unique service rendered by the Bible and Christianity in relation to ideals of life. The Bible has done most in four directions - to supply, to define, to authorize, and to realize, the highest ideals.

You will have noticed that most of the ideals we have examined are derived in their essence from the Bible. "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever," claims to be a summary of the Bible teaching.

Although the Bible ideals are not communicated in formulas, but embodied in its general teaching and revelation, yet we may quote a few of its more comprehensive descriptions of the true aim in life; their truth and nobility seem evident, though dependent, of course, upon the truth of the Bible revelation of God. In the Old Testament, at the close of Ecclesiastes, we read: *"This is the end of the matter; all hath been heard: Fear God and keep His commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."*

This seems a deliberate statement of an ideal of man's life. It seems still more so if it is noted that the word duty is in italics. There is nothing answering to duty in the original. The simple statement is -This is the whole of man. It is his highest good, his ideal of life.

Similar is **Micah 6:8**: *"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?"*

The context had raised the question whether God would be pleased with the offering of thousands of rams, of ten thousand rivers of oil, or even of the first-born child; the answer in effect is, "Do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God, and God will be pleased, having what He required and has shown us to be good."

We cannot find space for the many ideals given in the Book of Psalms, but they are all summed up in so living as to secure the smile, the

approval, and help of God. This is embodied in the lines of the fourth Psalm:-

"Many there be that will say, Who will show me any good?  
Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us."

This is the same as to say, THE LIGHT OF GOD'S COUNTENANCE,  
- that is our proper GOOD.

We may give as a sample of the details of the ideal given in the Psalms the portion quoted by Peter:-

"What man is it that desireth life,  
And loveth many days that he may see good?  
Keep thy tongue from evil,  
And thy lips from speaking guile.  
Depart from evil and do good,  
Seek peace and pursue it."

Turning to the New Testament there can be no doubt that the whole of the Sermon on the Mount is a description of the Righteousness of the Kingdom, and is from the beginning to end neither more nor less than Christ's ideal of life. No wonder if it contains many sentences which present a comprehensive purpose of desired consummation of life; as, for example:-

*"Thy will be done in heaven as on earth." "... Seek ye first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness." "... Ye shall be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." "... Lay not up treasures upon earth, but lay up treasures in heaven." "... Ye cannot serve God and mammon"* (implying that man's sole business is the service of God).

A specially Christian ideal is contained in the words, *"It is enough for the disciple that he be as his lord."* This Christian proverb, applied to the disciple of Christ, makes Christ, His character and glory, to be the Christian's highest aim and aspiration for this life and the next. This thought is expressed in a variety of forms and from many points of view in the New Testament.

One of these embodiments, as rendered in the Revised Version, is in the very shape of an aim in life. Paul says in II. Cor. v. 9: "Wherefore also we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto him." That is our aim, to be well-pleasing unto the Lord, or as the margin has it, following the Greek literally: "*We are ambitious ... to be well-pleasing unto him.*"

To be true and good, and to make progress, is the sum of what many of the ideals I have quoted from modern writers amounts to, and passages of the New Testament are similar. Paul says: "*Whatsoever things are true ... honorable ... just ... pure ... lovely ... of good report ... whatever has virtue and praise, think on these things.*"

Peter says: "*Supply in your faith virtue, ... knowledge, ... temperance, ... patience, ... godliness, ... love of the brethren, ... love in general ... for thus shall be richly supplied unto you the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of your Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*"

Thus in general, but there is a wonderful completeness in detail in the New Testament. It gives directions for every relationship we sustain in our present life, and it cheers and encourages us by the hope that thus we shall please and glorify God here, and shall hereafter see His face, and serve Him in a new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness. In a word, the great ideal which God has for us, that we should be "conformed to the image of His Son" in moral character, in body, and in glory, will be gradually and perfectly fulfilled.

Here emerge two other particulars already named, that the Bible defines and authorizes its ideals.

Have you ever thought where we should be on this subject of ideals of life if the Bible could be entirely withdrawn and its entire contents forgotten? Most of the favorites I have quoted are, of course, largely indebted to Christianity. They use the words and in the Bible sense. But even the best of them when examined are not found to contain much real direction. They contain little more of guidance than to keep on progressing in good. Shorn of the glory of poetic fervor and imagery, there is not much more in them than in the doggerel you have heard from me before:-

Good, better, best,  
Give yourself no rest,  
Till your good is better,  
And your better best.

It is the same with ideals not yet mentioned and which are better known and more admired than those mentioned. Take Longfellow's "Psalm of Life." It needs no praise. It is most felicitous in words, and full of genuine fervor. But it contains no more than this: There is hope beyond the grave; and for the present -

"Not enjoyment, and not sorrow,  
Is our destined end or way,  
But to act that each tomorrow,  
Finds us further than today."

Take, also the Chambered Nautilus. You remember how its author (Oliver Wendell Holmes) tells of the legends regarding the Nautilus; of its wonderful spiral many-chambered shell; and how, while living in one cell, the fish produced another and larger one, and then came out of the old cell into the new one and closed up the old one behind it. Then comes the application:-

"Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,  
As the swift seasons roll!  
Leave thy low-vaulted past!  
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,  
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,  
Till thou at length art free,  
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea."

A "gleaning" at hand says: "The discovery of what is true, and the practice of what is good, are the most important objects of life." That, too, is well put. But all alike assume a knowledge of what it is to be good, true and right. Where then are we to go to learn the "truth," and even to know what is "good"?

My reading has not been great in philosophy and in the religious writings and the history of the non-Christian world, nor even in the writings of agnostics; but it has been sufficient to convince me that

without the definition of what is true and right and good, given and exemplified in the Bible, and without the authority which the Bible gives to its defined ideals, we should be in a perfect moral quagmire of uncertainty. Paul has the pathetic phrase: "Without God and without hope." And this is true. Deny God and there can be no hope for a future life; at least for the individual. But even for this life could there be any real agreement as to what righteousness is, and our duty to live righteously, if the Bible teaching and authority was unknown?

If we went into detail it would not be difficult to show that a paper on ideals of life, written by a mere moral philosopher, a well-taught Buddhist, or an agnostic would lack alike clearness of contents and solidity of foundation. It would resemble that aerial voyage in the clouds to which I referred, and be without perceptible influence upon the lives of men to overcome their natural inclination to evil. Note, however, that -

(1) By the law given through Moses;

(2) By the life and character of Jesus Christ as an example;

(3) By the light thrown on the future kingdom of God in the New Testament; and

(4) By the authority given to all this by its supernatural proofs, including its self-radiance, the Bible, and especially Christianity has given definite meaning to its ideals; and has supplied a hope that is an anchor to the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast.

Now we come to our last and best point - Christianity realizes its Ideals!

It has become proverbial that man is less in need of teaching what to do than of POWER to do what he perceives to be right. The heathen confessed, "I see and approve the good, but I follow the worse." So weak is man that even those who had, as Paul expresses it, in the law the form of knowledge and of the truth, came far short. The apostle in the extraordinary searching scrutiny of the workings of the inner man, in Romans vii., concludes: "I see then the law that to me who would do good evil is present. ... O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me



from the body of this death?" Then, he exclaims, "I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

It is here, in what comes to us through revelation, imparting and sustaining high motive, and through the gift of the Spirit, that Christianity enables those who believe in it and make use of its provisions to gradually realize the high ideals it presents.

Paul claimed that the law of the Spirit of Life in Christ Jesus had made him free from the law of sin and death. Christians were freed from sin; were able to progress in holiness; could love one another with a true heart fervently. The golden rule: all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: "yes, even in measure at least, the command to love their enemies, could be obeyed! This was the unmistakable fact, that the corrupt world which heathen religions had made more corrupt, which philosophy and even the law itself could not purify, was lifted by Christ from its degradation. This was done by the new tenderness and love of God revealed by Christ; by the power of gratitude working in the heart to prompt to the new life which Christ's example set forth; by the help of the Spirit of God bestowed on those who accepted Christ; and, finally, by the power of the hope: He that had the hope of seeing Christ and being made like him purified himself even as Christ was pure.

In closing, while confessing that the progress of the world towards the Christian ideals has been slow, I believe that this fact proves no more than that the faith of the Gospel has been very partially accepted. It is as much as we are entitled to expect that realization shall follow full acceptance. "To everyone that believeth" is the limit. But we do claim that the facts prove that "to everyone that believeth" the gospel is the power of God unto salvation; to everyone that believeth, Christ is the end of the law unto righteousness. So said the great apostle in the first century, and in the twentieth we still hold, that Christ is the hope alike of the individual and of the race.

The ideal of the race, when the nations shall learn war no more, the vision originally of an Old Testament prophet, clothed afresh by a poet of our own, when he sang of the time when -

"The war-drum throbbed no longer;

And the battle-flags were furled,  
In the Parliament of man,  
The Federation of the world."

is more familiar to mankind today than ever before; and in spite of dreadful wars waged in the very presence of such an ideal, we believe the conditions are more favorable to its realization than ever before. But only Christ, believed and obeyed, can slay the demon of selfishness which is the real obstacle in the way of universal peace and brotherhood.

So, for all mankind as for the individual, the right view is in those words of Paul's before alluded to, in which he states his own relation to the Christian ideal:-

*Brethren, I count not myself yet to have apprehended: but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind, and stretching forward to the things which are before, I press on towards the goal unto the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*

THE END