

**THE BEST LIFE:  
AN ADDRESS**

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The Best Life: An Address by Charles Franklin Thwing

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# THE BEST LIFE

An Address

BY

CHARLES FRANKLIN THWING, D.D., LL.D.

PRESIDENT OF WESTERN RESERVE UNIVERSITY,  
CLEVELAND

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*The Author*

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## THE BEST LIFE.

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THE best life. What is it?

My first answer is: It is the life of truth, the life that is spent in searching for, in holding, and in expressing, the truth. To inquire, to know, to tell: these are three phases or functions of our relation to what we call truth. The first command of the Bible is, "Let there be light;" and the first commendation of the Bible is, "And God saw the light, that it was good." Among the last declarations of the Apocalypse is that of the blessing that "And there shall be no night there," "for the Lord God giveth them light." Man's first appetite is for light, and there is no surer sign of dying than the coming of the twilight.

The mind of man is fitted for truth, and truth is fitted for the mind of man. The truth — I mean knowledge of things as they

are; I mean all things—things that appeal to the sense, things that we touch, things that we see, things whose voices we hear. The truth,—I mean the chemist's knowledge, whether it be of the laboratory or the kitchen. The truth,—I mean the physicist's knowledge, whether it be of the laboratory or of the machine-shop. The truth,—I mean the biologist's knowledge, whether of the laboratory or of the garden. Sensual truth, I mean; but I also mean supersensual truth. Truth,—the vision which the architect sees before sod is turned; his structure poised in mid-air, calm, self-contained, serving its purpose. Truth,—the picture which the artist sees with eyes shut, and which transfers itself to canvas. Truth,—the sweet and saintly, the mighty and majestic face, which the sculptor knows is buried up in the marble, and which he must release from its stony prison. Truth,—the song which the ear of the composer hears, beating its notes of harmony and of melody, memories as of some life lived long ago, and in some



other clime, and which must write themselves out in the score. Truth,—the poem which is singing itself in the brain and heart, soft and low, tumultuous as the epic or sobbing as the threnody, which for the hour makes the poet inspired. Truth,—the vision of the past, the noble army of martyrs, the procession of the ages, the widening of man's thoughts, the glories and the shames, the exultations and the pangs; the historian's truth, making one master of all that man has achieved or aspired after. Truth must be an element of the best life. It is not without significance that God is called Omniscience, and the devil the father of lies. Bishop Butler once said that he proposed to make the pursuit of truth his business. This same pursuit must be the business of any life that proposes unto itself to be the best. Truth is fundamental.

In the best life is also love,—love given and love received. Tucked away in the life of Dean Burgon is a letter of Bishop Hobbhouse, who tells a story that was told to him

about that unique personality who goes into history as Dean Burgon. The narrator says :

“One day I looked up at yonder hill, and I saw Mr. B. at the top of it, with his hands over his head, a-waving his hat. He then spread out his arms as if he were clasping something to his breast. He ran down the hill, and began visiting from door to door. When he came to my house, I asked him, ‘What were you doing on the hill, waving your hands, spreading out your arms, and hugging them to your heart?’—‘Oh, I was just embracing you all, glad to find myself among you. I love you so much.’”<sup>1</sup>

That is an emblem of the best life,—the man of truth on the hill-top, against the sky, between earth and heaven, embracing the people whom he loves and who love him. Love is spiritual gravitation. As material gravitation acts the stronger on larger and through larger bodies, so spiritual gravitation loves that which is more the more, and that which is most the

<sup>1</sup> “Life of Dean Burgon,” abridged, vol. i., p. 166.

most. But, unlike material gravitation, it recognizes no distances. It is love outpouring, outgiving, spending, sacrificing, just loving. For, as Emerson says, "The superiority that has no superior, the redeemer and instructor of souls, as it is their primal essence, is love."<sup>1</sup> And as Mrs. Browning, voicing the same thought in the closing lines of a sonnet, sings:—

"For life in perfect whole  
And aim consummated is Love in sooth,  
As nature's magnet-heat rounds pole with pole."

That love is God and that God is love we are coming to understand better and better. Philosophy has for more than two thousand years been searching for its god. Plato found it in his supreme ideal or idea. This century has been searching for it as never before has any age searched for a god. Fichte found his god in the "ego." Schelling found his god in his system of correspondence. Hegel found his god in pure being. Schopenhauer found his god in the absolute will. Von Hartmann found

<sup>1</sup> "Essays," II. 431.