

QUESTION

By ARTHUR S. BOURINOT

What is this spirit, urge that men call life?
That animates the Amoeba's single cell
And sends the sap resurgent in the spring?
Whence came the pull that lifted man from mire
And busies him still scraping off the mud
That dries and cakes and clings tenaciously?
Did God's huge hand first strike the spark of life
To burst a blinding flash upon the ooze
Instill some clod with stirrings still unknown
And quicken it to movement which till then
Had known no motion save the slime's slow fall
And rise and procreation by division
And earth was pulsing to the drum of life?
Or did some cosmic ray, galactic light
Torn from its path, turned sideways in its flight
By cataclysmic conflict, strike the earth
And so begin by chance on this our world
The first lethargic stirrings men call Life?
The mind of man still probes the world, seeks truth
In all its beauty, terror, all its filth,
And wisdom from the stars, builds high his towers
His mighty telescopes to drag the universe
Down to his antling eyes to catalogue
But one star more among the myriad many.
And so by slow degrees man's knowledge grows,
The pages of his catalogue seem numberless:
New theories come are added to and built
Upon the ruins of the crumbling past.
As were the cities in the ancient East
That man still delves for, finding tier on tier
The remnants of old Empire dust on dust.
Comes the new theorist with the Jericho trump
And blasts the new built walls that tottering fall
And on the remnants rise new towers and spires
That hold men's imagination till they too
Are dust in the evolution of his mind.
And yet with all his knowledge man still cries
"Who struck the spark that fired the urge called life?"
His theories may explain the rise of man
The call of sex, the ways of flowers and bees
And calculate the courses of the stars

But still unfound remains the ages quest.—
And the universe turns a stern inscrutable face
To all man's questioning, but from the stars
And planets, roving spheres, rolls a great cry,
"What matters it to you the source of Life?
Find Truth and Beauty, Wisdom, learn to live
As brother unto brother, let the nations
Follow the steps of those who walked in peace
And poverty be banished from the earth
And greed and lust and filth and hideous crime
No more appear, be shamed to raise their heads.
What matters it to you the source of life
Whose brain engages all its intricate cells
Inventing war's machines whose only use
Destruction of the life whose fount you search.
Who seeks the source of life to trample it
Will grope and stumble in a blind man's night.
To him the eternal verities are lost
And inarticulate the universe.
