

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

PayPal

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_expositor-series-1.php

VICARIOUS HEREDITY :

A READING OF THE CHILD MASSACRE IN BETHLEHEM.

MASSACRES have not been uncommon in the tragedies of our world. Human life has been cheap, and hundreds of hearts and brains have stopped work at the bidding of the caprice or selfishness of the strong, cruel man. Massacres are cyclones, indicated by moral depressions, and the reading of the moral meteorology is a clue to their meanings. They often make epochs; they often mark the return to the normal barometer. This destruction of child life in Bethlehem is a ghastliness leading on to the revolution of that age. It is a lurid frontispiece to the crucifixion murder which follows, which is the centre of the revolution. The massacre is underlaid by several of the same meanings as the murder of Jesus.

The guilt of Herod's crime is on the surface, but the royal barbarity does not exhaust the subject. Out of the crimson glare of blood the problem starts up, What place has God in it? what purpose do these tragedies serve in a moral government? of what larger plan are they the parts? The spirits of the babes, loosed from their spilt blood, and departing in a nerve-shriek from the polluted scenes, leave the problem to us, Why are we so used up? The Creator has a serious responsibility in the order of this world, specially in the management of weak infant life. We are, as we should be, timid and reverent, and we would save God the responsibility of these events; but a bold book long ago piously said, "Shall there be evil in the city, and the Lord hath not done it?" It is plain, atrocities like this cannot happen every week; the line of limit is somewhere drawn; victims are not always to be had. Herod could have had no power over these babes except it had been given him from above, except some laws had permitted him.

The crucifixion of Christ was a crime committed by an ecclesiastical municipality, thinly veiled under forms of law, and a scheme of religion is in it. Look below the surface of these scenes of blood, and we see occult, obscure, but strong dynamic forces of moral government. The victims are not crushed, they rise again; the evil, in the moment of its seeming victory, is foiled.

The doom of these children is an inheritance which has come upon them from the history of their country and the degeneration of their parents, a state of society diseased for generations. The tragic action of the law of heredity is made visible to us: And it will be my aim to show that this doom is human sacrifice offered in the service of God and man, bad heredity glorified by service, a transformation of bad transmissions.

No event is solitary, it belongs to a succession; the present is linked to inexorable priorities.

These babes have not had time to create causes for their own destruction; they are involved with causes outside of them; their own career is too short and resultless. They die under the law of federation. The federal headship, the covenant of works, the imputation of a primal sin, are phrases after Hebrew modes of thought, which express the corporate liabilities which involve human life. They have done good service as working hypotheses, human conceptions of great facts, just conceptions from the poetic and metaphysical sides. The law of heredity gives the exacter, scientific expression to these conceptions, and shews aspects of the world more after our western and modern modes of thought. Truths which have influenced the education and directed the evolution of humanity may change their form, but the substance remains.

A massacre is the acute stage of a crisis which has its causes in the past of the land. Nero was perhaps the most debased man that ever held imperial power; that he was

tolerated for a month is symptomatic; he represents the times. His infamies and assassinations did not even weaken his hold on the loyalty of Rome, because he was at once the creation and the avenger of society. That period of Rome is suffering not from the crimes of Nero so much as from itself, from not breaking with the past, disinheriting itself and creating a new inheritance. Nero is the vermin which is attracted to dying life, which feeds on decomposition and hastens disintegrations, out of which reconstructions come. Herod, as the master of the Bethlehem shambles, is the creation of the decaying social and religious life. When you hear the wail of the mothers of Bethlehem, and see the wave of pain pass from town to hamlet, along valley and across hills, you may read a century of crimes and shame. A heartless condition of society has arrived, which makes it possible for a man like Herod to rule it with his cruel impulses. Society, country, generations are involved in this wanton waste and defiant sacrilege of life.

Two principles preside over our affairs. The one is, that every man is an individual, divided from every one else, solely responsible, living in an unshared solitude of right and wrong. The other is, that we are children of antecedents, and cannot be separated from the lineage of our sires and the succession of our heirs, from the facts of the past and the shapes of the future. We are parts of a system, identified with our parents behind us and with a progeny before us, interlaced with ancestors whom we do not know, and with an offspring whom we shall never see, implicated with our country in the history that has been and a history that will be. We are islands in an ocean of being, and the islands are configured by the ocean. The sense of detachment and the sense of derivation draw us different ways, make the two sides of a rectangle, and we have to direct ourselves by, even as we are drawn into, the diagonal of the two forces.

In the Hebrew and classical ages the dominant idea was the social and the patrimonial. In the campaign of Joshua for the conquest of Canaan, he put women and children to death. A great military commander is never inhuman, and a war of extermination looks inhuman. But women and children in the perspective of the age were very partially individuals. They are mainly social, ruled by the law of heredity, and must go with the society to which they belong. The apparent cruelty even proceeds from a conception of justice. Achan is convicted of theft and greed, and the sentence upon him is that he and his sons and daughters be burnt. The reason for this species of justice is in the structure of human nature. The children of Achan have inherited the taint of the ruling passion, and the object of justice would be half gained by the death of Achan only. The nation must be purged of that taint in the blood. The Persian conception of society is the same. Ahasuerus, the Persian king, outside Judaism, slays not only Haman, who had planned the massacre of the Jews, but also his ten sons. In our jurisprudence there still lingers the idea of "corruption of blood." Felony and treason, according to our law, disqualify a man from transmitting land to his children on the ground that he had not in him "inheritable blood." It has been recently urged in our courts whether even a pardon can wash the stain, and make a heritable man of a felon. The law denies to such a man what is technically called personal identity. Ancient ideas made this denial equivalent to death, and summed up in death all the disabilities of heredity and penalties of social justice.

This conception was also the property of the Greek race. In the ideal state, pictured by Plato in his *Republic*, the individual has no individuality; his freedom lay in the suppression of it. The youth and the maiden were trained by the State. When they were to marry, what they were to eat, were statutes. The affection between parent and

child is supplanted by the affection between the child and society. In this modern world of ours, we can scarcely conceive the strength of the idea of corporate unity which ruled antiquity. The idea of a rigid bee life, with its queen, neuters, and drones, dominated both Hebraism and Hellenism. Ethics was politics, and politics was ethics, according to Plato. Moses, in constructing the Hebrew nationality, was ruled by principles identical with those of Plato. We can easily give to Hebrew ideas a Greek form, and we understand Hebrew ideas better when we give them a Greek translation, for we see the common humanness which belongs to both. Plato defined the philosopher as the lover of God, the spectator of all time, the man who lives in the ideal good. And this was Moses and the Hebrew prophet. When Moses was giving laws to Israel, his genius perceived the social constitution of corporate liabilities, and he gave the supreme reason of heredity for obedience to law and consent to the Divine convention: "For I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation." The Divine jealousy is a paraphrase for the principle of law in the universe.

This organic unity is a fact which we have almost lost in this dispensation of individualism. Lately we have been recalled to it by the new science of biology, which has installed it into one of the large factors in the progress of life, and has touched us with the time sense and ancient derivations. Moses and Plato had perceived this unity, and the ancient world had adopted ideas of justice and punishment from it. The logic of goodness was enforced by its premises. The private property we have in ourselves was secondary to the public property in the race. This sentiment ruled the ancient world. And just when the ancient world is being reconstructed, and corporate liability and personal responsibility, communism and indi-

vidualism are being wedded into a large complexity, the old governing idea receives the fierce illumination of blood.

A bloodshed like this in Bethlehem reveals the serious import of our family derivation. We are not allowed to elect our parents; we are forced into a chain of causes over which we have no control; our organization is chosen for us in nerve and thought; we have to accept the blood in our veins and the temper in our temperament. There is an ancient fibre in our build; the spray of generations is infused through us. The Iberian was a short, dark race, which occupied Europe ten thousand years before the tall, fair, blue-eyed Celt; and the brunette of the Iberian may still be seen alongside of the blonde of the Celt, such is the persistence of descent. But go only four degrees back into the pedigree of any man, and each one has thirty-two progenitors, who have contributed each his fragment to his being, of good and evil. We are a mosaic of ancestral contributions, and into this mosaic there comes a personality, which arranges the pattern, the *Ego*, a Myself, which is neither father nor grandfather, which is the mystery of a new creation, as if fresh made. To this *Ego*, this Self, is committed the mass of inheritances, good and bad, partially balanced, often delicately hung, to be commanded by will, and to be empowered by the Divine Spirit. To each man is given the personality to match good inheritances against bad, and to work the primal law by which we win in the strife, that we open correspondences with the environment over us, the Holy Spirit of the moral universe, lyrically pictured for us in the primeval hymn, "Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither flee from Thy presence? for Thou hast possessed my reins: I am fearfully and wonderfully made." There is a grief and glory in our being, and the religious spirit is the mediation; the fertilized life that brings us into union with God reconciles the contradictions. By it we cleanse hereditary evil,

we preserve hereditary good, we originate good hereditations.

Professor Jowett has said, "What we have received from our ancestors is a mere fraction of what we are or become. In the matter of our birth, as in our nature generally, there are previous circumstances which affect us. But upon this platform of necessity, or within this wall of circumstances, we have still the power of creating a life for ourselves by the informing energy of the human will."¹ As a philosopher, he minimises the ancestral inheritance; the scientist maximises it; the truth lies in the medial line. The race of which we have come, the long past which is our pride, and the common liability which is made by ancestor and antiquity, are a reason for righteousness. The transmitted organization, the original personality, the necessity and the free will, enlarge our responsibility; and whatever enlarges responsibility enlarges our being. He is a poor soul, struck with fatuity, who makes the fathers an excuse for evil. It is our aristocracy to get a sense of antiquity in us. It was a degenerate generation who said, "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge."² The message which every true soul undertakes for God and man is to originate good and rich inheritances. To arrest bad derivations, to be the author of derivations of goodness, is a work entrusted to us, marked by strong accents by the tragedies of history.

The future gets its derivations from us. We are creations of the past; we are creators of the future. We are sponsors for the men and women who are to follow us. Crimes will be laid to our charge after we are gone, because we left the seeds of them behind in the family and in society. The man who likes evil will transmit to his children a liking for evil. To be impure is to be the father

¹ Introduction to "Republic," Jowett's *Plato*, vol. iii., p. 166.

² *Ezek.* xviii. 2; the whole chapter is an address on heredity

of impure children ; to be drunkards is to be fathers and grandfathers of drunkards ; to indulge the irritable temper is to propagate fiery passions to the third and fourth generation, and in the course of them to produce a murderer ; to be covetous is to transmit a subtle taint of avarice, and in the descents of time the refined gentleman, for the sake of money, will poison a relative, a patient, or a client. A hundred years before this barbarity there were men living selfish lives, who had infected generation after generation with that cruel selfishness, which in the fourth degree had so paralysed the moral perceptions that Herod found the way to this crime made easy, without a protest raised against it. His crime is the sequel to evils accumulated in the age.

An arrangement of numbers is known as the geometrical series. Begin your line with the number two, take four as the ratio or the number to multiply with. The second number in the series becomes eight. By simply multiplying each succeeding figure by four, you come only in the tenth place in the series to the number 500,000. A feeling, a thought, a habit, a taste,—by repetition in days, or multiplication through years, by passage into other minds around, time providing a ratio,—and you will arrive at the feeling or habit intensified and expanded, when it becomes a crime or a tragedy. A bad word, a leer of the eye, a sneer of the voice, a suggested but unspoken profanity, an improper story told, a frivolous book, will destroy faith in goodness and turn the scale of a man's choice and change the order of a man's life. It will enter into the family and be transmitted to a susceptible child, and it will pass into such complex combinations, that no one can extract it out of the life of a parish or the tissues of the generation. The iniquity of the fathers festers into the third and fourth generation :

“And in the fatal sequence of this world
An evil thought may soil thy children’s blood.”

TENNYSON, *Ancient Sage*.

In a condition of social decay small evils will grow into huge dimensions. If a moral corruption were beginning at this period, and a hundred years after a massacre of infants took place, there are men now living, who have originated evils and infected souls, who will be implicated in that crime, as those who contributed to that lapse of character in which alone such cruelties are possible.

In the history of Israel there is a melancholy repetition of a sentence, in which the historian traces the grave responsibility of an evil to one source. It is said of kings with the idolatrous impulse that they walked in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin. He propagates the taint in the royal line; a good king occasionally loses or remits the taint, and thus a generation is preserved, but the infection breaks out again, and for near two centuries the transmission is unbroken, and ends in the destruction of the national life. When society is dissolved in captivity, the mournful refrain with Jeroboam’s name in it is repeated in the dirge of the last ruin. “For the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they departed not from them; until the Lord removed Israel out of His sight.”¹

The passion for pardon is one of the strong lyrical emotions of the Hebrew, a devotional feeling which breathes through the psalmists; and I think one reason for this acute passion of forgiveness is the clear perception in the Hebrew age of corporate responsibility and embarrassing inheritances. The penitent’s psalm concludes, “Do good in Thy good pleasure unto Zion,” because the transgressor has done so much harm to it; “build Thou the walls of Jerusalem,”

¹ 2 Kings xvii. 22, 23.

because he had been pulling them down. Pardon is God's answer to the perplexed human soul for an almighty administration of his affairs. It is no more. Pardon has no other virtue; it only assures us by our mood towards God that He has taken charge of an intricate business. Plainly in a world so constructed that every human soul acts upon another, that the bad action is a transmissible potency, that the transmission must pass out of our hands and is irreversible, responsibility becomes unmanageable by us, and some other management is imperative. There is no scene in the whole Bible in which Christ looks so much the Saviour, to whom we can entrust any desperate situation, and which touches profound deeps in our being, as when the woman, mortally wounded in her own nature, and who sees society mortally corrupted by her, weeps in His presence, and is assured, "Thy sins are forgiven thee; thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."¹

The scientific expression of the law of heredity is, that those structures and functions are transmitted which fit a creature for the pressures of existence. It is a beneficent law acting beneficially. When a structure is of no use, it shrinks in transmission into a rudiment; when a function is of no use it is aborted. When the organization of a creature gets out of harmony with its environment, then the abnormal action of structure and function ends the creature, and will end the species to which the creature belonged, and the law of heredity helps on the consummation. Whole species of plants and animals have died out from the beginning: the trilobites, or lobster family of the Silurian age; the winged fish, the pterichthys of the old red sandstone; the sculptured sigillarian vegetation of the coal measures; the huge reptile forms of the chalk, and the cattle and horse life of the tertiary age. The kindness of this law is seen in refusing to prolong the torment of life

¹ Luke vii. 48-50.

by the persistent transmission of useless structures and injurious functions.

Good is the health of man; evil is the disease. Good is always propagated; it is the useful property, beneficial in the struggle appointed to man, responsive to the universal good in God.

Abraham began his career in a dim, remote age. His one distinction was faith, a clear vision of God, the Invisible One, which put him into an active correspondence with the heavens. He so felt this speciality, that he wished to entail its wealth as an heritable estate to his family. A variation which appears in an organism is swamped by the crossing which takes place; it is diffused, and loses its specificity, and disappears. It requires some special circumstance to preserve it. In oceanic islands, where crossing is necessarily limited, a variation soon intensifies, and by correlations will carry a creature into a new species. With a seer's foresight, anticipating, as genius does, the knowledge of the latest century, Abraham restricted the family circle into which Isaac was to marry by a special injunction, and left this restriction as an heirloom, and thus preserved the variation which had appeared in him. The emigration of Abraham was prompted by the perception of the rare character of the moral conceptions he has acquired, and the condition by which alone it could be preserved. This is the meaning of that antique idea of the covenant, which, translated into our western vernacular, means the acceptance of the law and terms by which a new life is preserved, and which can be translated into scientific language, as the method of preserving species. The ceremony of circumcision made vivid the laws of transmission, and helped to purify the sources of transmission. Abraham succeeded by working the law of heredity, and all antiquity was strong in that law. He created a nationality, in which was diffused the special spiritual property, which was specialized in its finer spirits, the most

fruitful nationality our world has seen. Paul saw in the Christian Church the succession to this spiritual property, and he quotes the antique words given to Abraham, and by them puts the new age into line with the Abrahamic propagation: "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed."¹ Along the whole range and sweep of the human federation good is to be victorious, and the seers of the ancient world saw the victory in the law of heredity, and accepted the promise which lay entangled in it, and taught the hope of it to depressed spirits: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel,"—was the primeval hope.

Julius Cæsar landed with a Roman army in Britain about the year 55 B.C. He fought a battle with a British chief Cassivellanus, who ruled in the valley of the Thames. In his narrative of the battle he tells us, in a book familiar to us from our schoolboy days, that he admired the steadiness of the barbarian infantry. "Peditum stabilitatem in præliis præstant,"² are his words. Later, Tacitus, speaking of the Britons says, "Their strength is in infantry."³ Writing of the Teutons, who form the stronger layer in British character, he says, "On the whole, we would say that their chief strength is in their infantry."⁴ 1,870 years after the battle with Cassivellanus Waterloo was fought, and Napoleon said that it was the steadiness of the British infantry that won Waterloo. The same moral and military quality appears after twenty centuries. In the fifth century, Sidonius Apollinaris, a Roman proconsul in Britain, gives advice to a Roman naval officer, who was sent to watch Saxon pirates in the English Channel. These so-called pirates, even our Norse ancestors, the Vikings, the baysmen who

¹ Gal. iii. 8.

² *Cæsar's Commentaries*, book iv. 33.

³ *Agricola*, 12.

⁴ *Germania* 6.

occupied the bays or wicks of the coastland, are thus described by him in his directions to his subordinate :

“To these men a shipwreck is a school of seamanship, rather than a matter of dread. They know the dangers of the deep, like men who are every day in contact with them. For since a storm turns those whom they wish to attack off their guard, while it hinders their own coming onset from being seen from afar, they gladly risk themselves in the midst of wrecks and sea-beaten rocks in the hope of making profit out of the very tempest.”¹

This seamanship, transmitted through centuries, is the secret of England's shipbuilding yards, carrying trade, and naval supremacy. Drake, Cook, Nelson, and the brave commander of the passenger ship *London*, which went down in the Bay of Biscay not many years ago, are the product of this beneficial and perpetuating energy.

Physical disease is not heritable as disease, but as entangled with life. The transmitted disease may be worked out into death in the individual of the first generation, when probably, in the process of the physical washing out, the soul is ennobled by bearing the pain; or the law of heredity in another generation will rally the forces of life to overcome bodily disease. Moral evil is transmitted, not as evil, but as implicated with good in a moral being. Heredity indirectly, as it were, is forced to propagate moral evil, for the sake of the good. When moral evil has infected masses of men, and has been transmitted through two or three generations, heredity in mercy brings it to a crisis and catastrophe, in which it is worn out. When Christ said, “Ye are the children of them who kill the prophets,” we read His awful emphasis on the law of descending evil. When He added, “Fill ye up the measure of your fathers,” we do not read the rhetoric of sarcasm. It is the imperative of the truth that they will do with a momentum what their

¹ Green's *Making of England*, p. 17.

fathers before them have done, and that the exaggerations will exhaust the evil. History all through the centuries shows us exhausting epochs, when heredity restores the disturbed equilibrium. It puts a stern limit to the perpetuation of decay. It also dilutes a collecting evil, swamping accumulations by the cross of two sexes, calling up reserves of good hidden in three or more progenitors.

We thus reach the sublime transfiguration of bad transmissions, by which heredity avenges itself for its enforced relations to moral evil. The law of sacrifice takes its hand, and leads it on to the high altars of service. Bad transmissions are transfigured into service. Passive sufferers are made active in work, and pain is transmuted into energy. The dire pressure of the law of evil inheritance upon children and the innocent shows us that suffering is a work we have to do, of large issues. Laws are servants to a plan, and belong to a system; and we see heredity working into a large scheme.

The seers of antiquity had perceived this structure of our world. Jeremiah wished to escape from the shame and sorrow of his country, but he is forced into its service in sheer pity. To his weeping sympathy is revealed the constitution of pain. In a Babylonish invasion of the land, some children of Bethlehem were torn from their parents and taken into slavery, and others killed, by the conquerors. The wail of childhood became a family grief, and touched profoundly the motherhood of the land. Jeremiah hurries to give comfort, and he pictures Rachel rising from her tomb outside the town, and weeping with the mothers; and the prophet reads a message to the ideal mother. He says that this suffering is a work given to the children to do, and a work of fruitful issue: "Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land

of the enemy.”¹ It will work that specialized renovation in Israel, when men will take the laws of God as their own laws, and find them written all over in their own affections and faculties.² Matthew, with the insight he shows in his history, sees in the Herodian massacre a likeness to the Babylonian captivity: that was rudimentary, this perfect in the Divine idea. The fulfilment of the one by the other is the Hebrew way of saying that the same Divine idea underlies the two events, that they have served the same purpose in the Divine government.

Three ideas rule the literature of the Greek tragedies, in which the profounder elements of human nature are perceived and made vivid for the education of the people. These are, first, the sorrows of guiltless fate, of innocent suffering, for reasons which lie in the solidarity of the race; next, the sorrows of the inevitable penalty which waits on moral evil, punitive sequels which overtake the breakers of law from anger of the gods; and third, the sorrow of the human sacrifice of the best, which the higher interests of the moral world demand. In the legend of *Œdipus*, of the fated house of Labdakos, Sophocles has painted the mystery of causeless suffering, which inheres in social transmissions. The innocent *Œdipus*, bewildered with disaster, can only give the hereditary principle as a last sad account of the fatalities which have overwhelmed him:

“For thus it pleased the gods, incensed perhaps
 Against my father’s house for guilt of old.
 For as regards my life, thou couldst not find
 One spot of guilt, in recompense for which
 I sinned those sins against myself and mine.”³

In the legend of the beautiful *Antigone*, the brave daughter of the hapless *Œdipus*, Sophocles paints the tragic conception that human sacrifices have to be offered in the

¹ Jer. xxxi. 16.

² Jer. xxxi. 33.

³ Plumptre’s *Sophocles*, p. 96; *Œdipus*, 965.

interests of the finer affections and higher duties. She is doomed to death by the ruler of Thebes because she has placed in a decent grave the remains of a brother obnoxious to the ruler, and she is engaged to be married to the son of this very ruler :

“ What law of heaven have I transgressed against ?
What use for me, ill-starred one, still to look
To any god for succour, or to call
On any friend for aid ? For holiest deed
I bear this charge of rank unholiness.”¹

In the children of Bethlehem taken captive to Babylon Jéremiah perceives a service which innocent suffering gives to a nation ; and Matthew, in the Herodian slaughter on the same scene, perceives a fulfilment of the same Divine ideas. Herod incorporates the infections lodged in the age ; he chiefs them. The forces of social evil, perpetuated by the law of heredity, entangled in the moral life that still remains, culminate in an atrocity. And here the law forced into a foreign service is graciously met by the law of sacrifice, and transformed into a service, and the sufferers glorified. Transmitted suffering, having its causes in the law of consanguinity, and not in the individual, is transfigured into sacrifice, and is a healing of the evil.

Vicarious heredity emerges into a clear truth from this aspect of our subject. Vicariousness is a service or obligation due by one man and paid by another. It contains the idea of altruism. It is also suffering falling on innocence which should have fallen on the guilty. It contains the idea of sacrifice. The principle is seen in wide application in the moral government of the world. This massacre of children is a notable illustration. From them a service is extracted which should have been performed by others. To them a suffering is allotted which should have been allocated

¹ Plumptre's *Sophocles*, p. 161 ; *Antigone*, 921.

to others. We are material to be used up in the service of the universe, and vicarious service is the highest. Boy choristers are essential to the finest music; in the freshness of childhood the voice carries murmurs of the far off and the farthest. The scream of these murdered children, sinking by alto and tenor notes into the minor moan of death, will be an eerie echo heard in the families of the land. Their blood is a sacrament of family purification. When decay enters into the heart of a nation, the family first suffers, the gangrene gets there; and these babes give their blood as a sacramental service of surgery.

There is another service of strange import in this vicariousness. It saves the Saviour. They are killed in the room of Christ. His presence, royal birth, the rumour of His name, the theophany in Him, are the occasion of this sacrifice. They are the earliest martyrs, unconscious martyrs of the new age. Their blood is substituted for His blood, and there dawns upon us an incisive form of vicarious sacrifice. It is human sacrifice of purest blood, offered in the service of God and man by God Himself as the officiating priest. The cradle of Jesus floats in blood of human babes, and is saved by it. It is an index hand pointing to that august blood which shall be shed on Calvary.

Vicarious heredity is a large factor in the death of Christ and a decisive aspect of the atonement. Christ is the Heir: made of a woman, made under the law, the law natural, moral, spiritual. The heirship is not modified in the speciality of His birth, for parthenogenesis is a natural law. Christ is Heir to the good and Heir to the evil in the organic sympathy of the human federation. And He is the Flower of human goodness. Goodness is always vicarious in its operations. It is essentially altruistic. He is the good Vicar of humanity, who does duty for them who cannot do their duty; who suffers for them

who cannot suffer for themselves. By the law of heredity He is involved in the evil ; by the law of sacrifice He puts away the evil. By sacrificial heredity He is the author of a new generation. He originates a good transmission, which is the Christian succession, which has continued unbroken for twenty centuries. Heredity makes Christ confederate with us in liabilities, and He is confederate for us in salvation. Christ feels Himself in the succession which began with Abel. He calls upon that generation to complete the hereditary action, with the audacious imperative, "Fill ye up then the measure of your fathers, that upon you may come all the righteous blood shed upon the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel." His blood is in this succession. In His death, as the death of the hereditary Son of Man, the Lord our righteousness, will be the exhaustion of the past bad inheritances, and the origination of the Christian speciality, closing the chapters of the past, opening the chapters of a future.

The master idea of service emerges from the entanglements of heredity. We are under a law of conscription. These babes—what can they be doing, in their unconsciousness, but giving to God an involuntary service, forced into it and glorified by it? Happiness is a by-product and constructive. If ever any creatures had a claim on happiness, it was these innocent children ; and they are denied it, with some emphasis on the denial. Their smiles are changed into shudders, and the eternal freshness in them into the staleness of death. Have a care for facts, and we find that we are in business other than our own ; and when we discern this altruism and ulteriorism, we begin to see our own business and its significances. Often when we have lost happiness we take up the business which is before and better than happiness, and which has brought us here. When you are travelling on business, you will meet with bluebells on the roadside, the yellow

sunshine of an August afternoon will turn the purple of the hillside heather into a charming violet; but you do not stop over this beauty. You pass on to business. Happiness is an incident of the wayside; service is dominant.

We have more to do than to serve. We have also to suffer, and suffering is severe work. Sacrifice is a severer form of service. In every family circle there is a chronic sufferer from ancestral causes. There are sufferers from consumption, who have come into the world wholly on the embassy of pain. We have seen the dear consumptive in our own family; the most beautiful face in it, exquisitely carved features, tinted with hues of an engaging sadness; blue eyes, bright with thought, as if looking far away into sapphire skies; hair, golden with an autumn yellowness: and you have seen the promise of mind and blossom of matter fading away, the mind light up with its last affections, and the lingering sunset flash out in an afterglow of word and sentence, never to be forgotten, and a halo collect round death itself, which has never left it since, and the family sanctified by this sacrifice offered by the law of heredity. There are 80,000 persons in our asylums, and insanity is commonly an inheritance. There are 50,000 blind and deaf and dumb, who are here to show us the principle of sacrifice in heredity. American slavery was a hereditary social sore, a gigantic evil. Half a million of soldiers perished in the war which rooted it out of the soil of the country. The way of God here manifested is the law of heredity and sacrifice, the service of God and man, into which disabilities and blood are summoned.

If you will look at the leaf of the bramble in autumn, you will find an ugly black spot on the underside. It is a fungus preying on the decline of life.¹ On the upper side this dingy colour becomes a crimson or a bright claret shade,

¹ This fungus is known to cryptogamists as *phragmidium erolaceum*.

and makes the leaf gay and conspicuous. In midsummer, upon a spot where the whortleberry is growing, you will find a plant here and there with leaves of vermilion, quite charming.¹ On the underside of the leaf a fungus is in possession, which has retained the red rays. Cowper was subject to fits of insanity. One authority states that while passing into an eclipse of his faculties, another while emerging from it, he wrote that hymn which will never fall out of the hymnology of the Church, "God moves in a mysterious way." The fungus of insanity brightens the faculties, and gives colour to thought. Lyte was starting for the continent to spend the winter, when gone in consumption. He wished to follow the swallows. In great weakness he bade farewell to his flock, with great difficulty he reached the vicarage, then shut himself up in his room, and in the evening shewed some friends, "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide." The fungus of consumption gives a lyric blaze to the poesy in him.

This is the service which is pressed from bad inheritances and organic entanglements; in this way the abnormal action of heredity is glorified. This is one reading of our world's sorrows.

The system of death is intricate, but with the punctuation of this massacre we can get a construction of much meaning. Death is a Divine service, human sacrifice offered in the service of God and man. Death is a part of the same system as life. The quality of this last service is determined by the quality of the service in life. If we have chosen God as our Master, if we have been voluntary servants, death will become more or less of a liberty to us. It will always be a gloom and a pressure, because of the greatness of the business. Consecrated spirits can endure the burden when they have learnt to regard it as

¹ The whortleberry is known in Scotland as blaeberry, and the fungus is the *exobasidium vaccinii*.

a work given them to do, and a work in which there is a reward, as the Hebrew seer instructed the mothers of Jerusalem.

When the taper of the body burns on into old age, and the flickering light of gradual decay goes out, death looks like a natural process of extinction. But when child life, in its freshness and bloom, is quenched in blood, we are startled into new meanings of death. The vision of the prophets is kindled by it. It is a service; it is a sacrifice; it is a work; it shall be rewarded. We die to take the high idea of us which is with God, and we have glimpses of this idea when service is our answer to the awfulness of death. Death is the sacrament which initiates us into more service and other sacrifice. And as we move into the sapphire infinities starred with glowing worlds, as we once moved on the meadow starred with white daisies, and the moor with yellow asphodels, we shall be instructed into that work which is joy for evermore. Death is a theme which lends itself to paradox. Plato quotes a paradox from a lost book of Euripides, "Who knows if life be not death, and death life?"¹ And our Lord has said, "He that loveth his life shall lose it, and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal."² So life is embraced in death, and death in life. And it will be so seen when we have inspired ourselves with the idea of service and sacrifice.

The law of reproduction for all living is, that growth stops when the flowering activity begins. The branch is arrested in its growth, that the flower may bloom on it. Growth is increase of life, and life is arrested when reproduction begins. Many plants die after they flower and seed. Many animals die when the next generation is born. Death is for multiplication. "From first to last, reproduction is

¹ "*Gorgias*": Jowett's *Plato*, vol. ii., p. 368.

² John xii. 25.

linked to death.”¹ “The flowering of phanerogams is often at once the climax of the life and the glory of death.”² Death is a transformation of energy. This is the vision which Nature gives us. The growth of the children in Bethlehem is arrested, that they may be morally reproductive by death. They have bloomed as things of beauty and joy. They die, and become a sanctifying memory and vision; they become the parents of moral forces. They seed the land with sadness and wisdom. Therefore, cheap as massacres make human life, “precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.”³ “Except a corn of wheat shall fall to the ground, and die, it abideth alone; but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit,” is the large physiological law, which rises up from Nature to man, and from man to the Son of Man. Reproduction contains the rudimentary idea of sacrifice and of joy in sacrifice, the sweet-smelling savour of the flower of reproduction.

W. W. PEXTON.

THE HOMELAND OF JESUS.

IT is impossible to point out with certainty any spot on which our blessed LORD stood; and it is well, the tendency to degrade sacred places with mean superstitions being so human. We can, however, mark in broad outline the boundaries of His earthly wanderings, and fill in with ample details the hamlets and hills and glens among which He lived His lowly life.

“Come see the place where the LORD lay” are the words by which the angel restored the faith of the women who hovered in fear and sorrow by the rocky grave of their dead Friend. And they saw the empty tomb and the grave

¹ *Evolution of S. x.* By Professor Patrick Geddes and I. Arthur Thomson, p. 238.

² *Ibid.*, p. 234.

³ Ps. cxvi. 15.